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*Lydham Hall, 1855*  
Historical Plaque unveiled in 1971 during the opening Ceremony  
Photograph by Olga Sedneva, 2021  
A noteworthy example of historical inaccuracy, as it will be replaced

## The Lydham Hill Tale

### Introduction

A dedicated Golden Anniversary Edition of *Lydham Hall. Bricks and Mortar*, launched in February 2021, was the first printed publication on Lydham Hall in the 21st Century. This generously illustrated book featured a previously unpublished article by Gifford Eardley *Lydham Hall. A Synopsis of Its History* and comments based on original documents. The print run was limited to fifty numbered and signed copies, which were made available to the public, local libraries and the State Library of NSW.

The study produced in 2021 included an insight into the history of the St George Historical Society Inc and the establishment of the public Museum within Lydham Hall's walls. It analysed its collection and proved that the Museum's establishment was and still is the largest and longest cultural public project run within the area realised by the collective effort of the Council, St George Historical Society Inc and the public.

The story of the property was once more explored at large, challenging some information which had been accepted as factual for decades. This new work brings up to date ongoing research and introduces new interpretations to the long-standing narratives of the Lydham Hill Tale.

The author, 2023

### Disclosure

All materials including photographs, illustrations and unpublished documents in this study are used with the written permission of their author or owner.

Initially, the area on the South bank of the Cooks River was heavily covered by dense forests populated by birds and native animals, a 'heaven' to runaway convicts and 'wandering bands of Aborigines' hunting possums, koalas and kangaroos. The mudflats, mangroves and saltmarsh of the Georges and Cooks Rivers provided food to the Aborigines.<sup>1</sup> According to Philip Geeves, "the great areas of unattended land offered rich picking for food gathered, bark collectors, sawyers and charcoal burners," and was furnishing Sydney with split timber, shingles, firewood and charcoal.

The area was attracting early migrants following the abolition of the land grant system in 1831, and with time, reflected in the area progress and an increase of its population.<sup>2</sup> Before the 1840s, the development of the area was slower due to difficulties of transportation, where the only "artery of the Wollongong or Gannon's Forest Road" to Sydney was "impassible to anyone but a determined horseman." The bridges and private punts "at Mr Thorp's or at Tyrell's farm" were privately owned and located considerably far north from the current Princes Highway also slowing population growth of the area. Comparing the area with the greater Sydney region, where about 12,000 people including men, women and children lived in 1820, the St George Parish, Cumberland County, recorded only 1,619 men and women in 1861, of whom in excess of 800 were born in NSW.<sup>3</sup> The increase of cross-ocean travelling, influenced the growth in assisted and independent migration and the overall population of the colony.

Slow but steady inhabitation of the St George Parish in the 1840s-1890s was influenced by the construction of the dam across Cooks River in 1840, that provided convenient access to the South Coast. Improvement to the roads from the mid-1850s secured further population growth. From 1862, the "New Illawarra Road through Gannon's Forest" was providing access to a number of farms and residences together with a few private punts and bridges.<sup>4</sup> The area largely covered by forests and pastures was becoming home to many migrants, which placed further demands on transportation resulting in the construction of the Railway, which arrived in 1884.

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<sup>1</sup> Tyrrell, Ian, *River Dreams*, UNSW Press, 2018, pages 15-79

<sup>2</sup> Geeves, Philip, *Rockdale. Its Beginning and Development*, page 37

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

Lydham Hill, as it was known initially, was one of just a few early substantial permanent residences within the district. It stands on the parcel of the land which stands on part of the original land grant to James Chandler.

Philip Geeves, an official historian of the then Rockdale Municipal Council in the 1950s,<sup>5</sup> and Lesley Muir, OAM, Fellow of the RAHS, historian,<sup>6</sup> were the first to state the origins of Chandler's land grant and elaborated on the man as a farmer, family man, teacher and a member of the Benevolent Society. Both confirmed James Chandler's (1796–1839) 1820 arrival in Australia,<sup>7</sup> his purchase of a farm from Thomas Sylvester with a house, "outer buildings and planted orchard." The property was initially known as Sylvester's Farm, and after sale to Chandler became known as Bexley Farm. First granted in 1812, the 100 acres were situated in the current suburb of Earlwood, NSW, now marked by the history board on the corner of the current Angus and Homer Streets'.<sup>8</sup>

When a year or so later Chandler decided to settle in Australia, he applied for a land grant,<sup>9</sup> offering 3,000 pounds for the 1,200 acres of land adjoining his newly acquired Sylvester's Farm on the south side of Wolli Creek. Chandler named it Bexley. This land in the Parish of St George in the County of Cumberland was promised to Chandler in 1822 extending his hold to 1,300 acres.<sup>10</sup> His property became the third largest land ownership within the Parish after 1,950 acres known as the Lords Forest owned by J. Townson, and 1,605 acres of the neighbouring Connells Brush owned by Dr R. Thomson. Chandler's land used to include the area currently encompassing Hurstville, Bexley, Kogarah and Rockdale.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "History of the District," in Cultural Activities & Community Services Committees meeting, 24th September 1951, page 1446 . Rockdale Council papers, Bayside Library NSW Local History Collection

<sup>6</sup> Lesley Muir (1945-2012), was a local historian and author. Together with her husband Brian Madden, Dr Muir was an active member of the Canterbury and District Historical Society. <https://www.rahs.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Lesley-Muir-OAM-Obituary.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> MHNSW-StAC: Colonial Secretary Index, 1788-1825, Reel 6053; 4/1756 p.9a. Transcribed by Janette Pelosi

<sup>8</sup> Geeves, Philip, Jervis, James, *Rockdale, Its Beginning and Development*, 1954, The Council of the Municipality of Rockdale; and Muir, Lesley, Madden, Brian J., *Earlwood's Past, A History of Earlwood, Undercliffe and Clemton Park, NSW*, Canterbury Municipal Council, ISBN 0 9590704 3 5 accessed via [https://issuu.com/canterburylib/docs/earlwoods\\_past](https://issuu.com/canterburylib/docs/earlwoods_past)

<sup>9</sup> MHNSW-StAC: Memorial (Fiche 3035; 4/1826 No.20); NRS-899 Memorials to the Governor, 1810-1826 James Chandler [20], transcribed by Janette Pelosi, 15 August 2021

<sup>10</sup> *Abstract to the Title* on 53 pages of handwritten text *Application 5688 to Bring Lands Under the Provisions of the Real Property Act (26 Victoria No 9) No 5688*, October 1882, MHNSW-StAC. Transcribed by Olga Sedneva

<sup>11</sup> Map. *Parish of St George* CD title PMAPMN05 file name 14074301 Sheet 1 Map of County Cumberland Parish St George, Lands and Water Conservation 140743; AO Map No 275, undated



III 2. Left. Extract from the Map of Parish of Saint George County of Cumberland showing the misspelt Bexley as Becley. County of Cumberland [cartographic material]. Maps/0031. State Library of NSW. File ID ojNxxgGO5bLy  
 Right: Extract from Map of the County Cumberland Parish St George Beckley. Saint George [1840?] Maps/0032 State Library of NSW



III 3. The Information Board erected on the corner of Angus and Homer Streets, Earlowood, marking approximate location of Sylvester's Farm, which was named later Bexley Farm by Jame Chandler  
 Photo Olga Sedneva, 2022





Ill 4. Elyard, Samuel, *Bexley Farm. Monday, 23 Sep. 1861.*  
Published in: Elyard, Samuel, *Views of Nowra and Sydney, 1861-1901*  
Reproduced with the kind permission of the State Library of NSW



Ill 5. Elyard, Samuel, *Bexley, looking S[outh], Sa[turday] 6 Oct. [18]60*  
Published in: Elyard, Samuel, *Views of Nowra and Sydney, 1861-1901*  
Reproduced with the kind permission of the State Library of NSW

The Grant was finalised almost a decade later, in 1831. Chandler wrote to the Office of the Colonial Secretary confirming the name of his estate as being Bexley,<sup>12</sup> although the early maps contain the misspellings *Becley* and *Beckley*.<sup>13</sup> It is unclear as to the cause of the name variances, however, the names of people and places were often corrupted during the Colonial period. Whether the property was named after Chandler's birth place or not has still to be confirmed. In 1837, when Chandler offered his land for sale, the 100 acres of the former Sylvester's grant was advertised as Bexley Park, and the land of his 1,200 acres grant as Bexley Farm. The current suburb of Bexley is located solely on the original land grant.

The Grant was given to Chandler under the condition to 'improve' at least 100 acres of that land, which necessitated its fencing, and the employment of a number of convicts. Chandler also tried and failed to lease most of his "27 allotments of 25-100 acres each for 21 years."<sup>14</sup> His experiments in commercial gardening, grazing, wine making and horse sales were also unsuccessful. Consequently, he endeavoured to sell the property as soon as the Grant was finalised in 1831, initially in smaller lots, and subsequently as the whole lot.<sup>15</sup> The sale scheduled for June 20th, 1833, was relying solely on the improvements that were made to Bexley Farm: "a dwelling house having a parlour and bedrooms; ... a store and out offices, a Garden, six acres and a half in extent, containing five hundred choice trees ..., a winery, an excellent stockyard, milking shed, a gardener's cottage and a Dairy and a well of good water."

After 1831, along with his two properties in Bexley, Chandler was also selling his "Cottage on Hawkesbury River. His Bexley property was advertised as "a delightful residence in a respectable neighbourhood" previously known as Sylvester's Farm, and offered as *Bexley Park*; and his *Bexley Estate* of 1,200 acres rich with 'valuable timber,'<sup>16</sup> along with the appeal of the 'improved' land. The property's isolation in such considerable distance from Sydney mitigated against its market appeal.

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<sup>12</sup> MHNSW-StAC: Letter 31/7590, James Chandler to the Colonial Secretary. Transcription by Janette Pelosi

<sup>13</sup> Extract from the Map of Parish of Saint George County of Cumberland showing the misspelt Bexley as Becley. County of Cumberland [cartographic material]. Maps/0031. State Library of NSW. File ID ojNxxgGO5bLy. Right: Extract from Map of the County Cumberland Parish St George Beckley. Saint George [1840?] Maps/0032. Reproduced with the kind permission of the State Library of NSW

<sup>14</sup> *Sydney Herald* (NSW : 1831 - 1842), Thursday 30 May 1833, page 4 (3) viewed via: [nla.news-article12846904.3.pdf](http://nla.news-article12846904.3.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> *The Sydney Herald* (NSW: 1831-1842) Mon 26 Sep 1831 Page 3: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article12843537>

<sup>16</sup> *The Sydney Monitor* (NSW: 1828-1838) Wed 30 Oct 1833 Page 1. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page4245715>

B16/6

**GRANT**  
of  
**1200 ACRES**  
TO  
**JAMES CHADLER**

J. Garsed  
**Bexley Farms**  
(110)

Roberts Survey



III 6. J. Garsed, Bexley Farms, Grant of 1,200 acres to James Chadler by Roberts Survey subdivision map, c 1857-1859, State Library of NSW  
Circled in blue marks location Sylvester's Farm

When the whole lot of 1,300 acres was again offered for sale a few years later, it was referred to as *Bexley*.<sup>17</sup> It is believed that the main house on the former Sylvester's farm was unfortunately burnt down at the beginning of the 20th Century.<sup>18</sup> A detailed and encompassing biography of James Chandler, farmer, educator and a man devoted to God, who played an important role in Australian social history, awaits to be investigated in detail.

In 1837, Charles Tompson of Clydesdale near Windsor, a former convict, purchased the whole 1,200 acres estate for 991.5 pounds. Five years later, he added to it the 100 acres *Sylvester's farm*, then known as *Bexley Park*, for an additional 220 pounds. After experiencing the same problems as Chandler, Tompson advertised the land for sale: "The land is well stocked with all sorts of building timber, is well-watered, and possesses all the advantages of good soil, and other capabilities that can be desirable on such an extensive property. One hundred acres of the Estate, called Sylvester's Grant (situated in the immediate vicinity of Canterbury, Petersham, the Estate of Mr Unwin and others), has been cleared and stumped, and subdivided into convenient paddocks for cultivation soil ... it contains also an orchard and garden of seven acres."<sup>19</sup>

The isolation of the property led to "unauthorised Persons cutting Timber, Firewood, or Grass... cattle depasturing ..." on this unfenced property and the height of the depression in the 1840s, resulted in Tompson deciding to auction it without reserve.<sup>20</sup>

In 1850, Charles James Tindell, the new owner, subdivided the land and sold 800 acres to John Garsed, a Sydney builder, who went bankrupt within a short time afterward, in 1856-1857. In 1859, his part of Bexley was owned by Alexander Wolfen,

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<sup>17</sup> *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* (NSW: 1803-1842) Tue 4 Jul 1837 Page 4. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article2211742>

<sup>18</sup> Madden, Brien J and Muir, Lesley, *Earlwood's Past. A history of Ealwood, Undercliffe and Clemton Park, NSW*. Canterbury Municipal Council, 1989, p 26

<sup>19</sup> *The Australian* (Sydney, NSW : 1824 - 1848), p. 1: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article36851990>

<sup>20</sup> *Change & Challenge. A History of the Municipality of Canterbury, NSW*. Larcombe, F. A., Canterbury Municipal Council, 1979



a Sydney merchant and Consulate representative for Sweden and Norway.<sup>21</sup> In turn, Wolfen further subdivided his holding and offered new land parcels for sale. The conveyance map of Chandler's Grant illustrates the subdivisions marking each parcel in their own colour, where Sylvester's Farm is shown in the top middle part of the sketch.<sup>22</sup> Within the next 10 years, all 1,300 acres were subdivided again and sold. Thus, in 1859, Joseph Davis came into the picture by expressing interest in purchasing a small part of the original Chandler Grant.

### **Joseph Davis' land purchases**

It is not yet known exactly why and when Joseph Davis (c1826-1889), a Master Butcher from Newtown, decided to purchase two lots in the Parish of Saint George County of Cumberland. First he purchased a plot of land surrounded by the current Bonar Street and Martin Avenue, Arncliffe, not far from the current station.<sup>23</sup> Later in the same year in November 1859, he negotiated purchase of the land in Bexley. The Arncliffe land being used as a location for his slaughter house, whereas the one in Bexley was purchased as a pasture to fatten stock, underpin the assumption<sup>24</sup> that this initiative was a means for Davis to extend his existing butchering venture.

The initial measurement of that land parcel was counted as 67 acres,<sup>25</sup> but it is now clear that due to Government roadworks<sup>26</sup> it was reduced to around 50 acres.<sup>27</sup> According to an original *Indenture* dated December 4th, 1859, the contract between

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<sup>21</sup> *Abstract to the Title. Application 5688 to Bring Lands Under the Provisions of the Real Property Act (26 Victoria No 9) No 5688*" lodged by Joseph Davis in 1882. Primary Application - Joseph Davis 50 acres 24 1/4 perches in Bexley Estate Parish Saint George County Cumberland Volume 669 Folio 127, 1863-1883. MHNSW-StAC: NRS-17513-38-125-PA 5688

<sup>22</sup> Please refer to the illustration

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Davis Will, MHNSW-StAC: NRS-13660-3-[17/2286]-Series 3\_17982 | Joseph Davis Date of death 24 January 1889, Granted on 6 March 1889

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> *Indenture*, December 4th 1859, the contract between William Alexander Wolfen, Samuel Henry Jerry (or Terry) and William Thompson, appointed Frederick Michael Stokes. Part of the *Application 5688 to Bring Lands Under the Provisions of the Real Property Act (26 Victoria No 9)*, October 1882, MHNSW-StAC: NRS-17513-38-125-PA 5688

<sup>26</sup> *Abstract. Application 5688 to Bring Lands Under the Provisions of the Real Property Act (26 Victoria No 9)*, October 1882, MHNSW-StAC: NRS-17513-38-125-PA 5688

<sup>27</sup> Certificate of Title Vol 669 Fol 127 issued on the 11th October, 1883, stating Joseph Davis owned 49 acres one rood 36 perches. Viewed via <https://hhrv.nswlrs.com.au>.

William Alexander Wolfen, Samuel Henry Jerry (or Terry) and William Thompson, appointed Frederick Michael Stokes “to exercise, execute, convey and administer the sale of said parcel of the land (Lot 6) and premises” containing by “admeasurement **sixty seven acres more or less** with all premises” was to be sold to Joseph Davis. According to a related document, the conveyancing was completed in November 1859 and signed by the named parties, but not by Joseph Davis.<sup>28</sup> The 1883 *Application 5688 to Bring Lands Under the Provisions of the Real Property Act (26 Victoria No 9)* to the system known as *Torrens Title*, contains the statement with a different size of the said land parcel: “*I, Joseph Davis of Newtown, Butcher do solemnly and sincerely declare, that I am seized for an Estate in fee simple of that Piece of Land situates in the County of Cumberland and Parish of Saint George part of Bexley Estate Containing **Fifty Acres and twenty four and a quarter perches** as delineated in Plan prepared by Mr Surveyor Siricom, which land (including all improvements) is the value of 8000 pounds ... and is part of 1200 acres originally granted to James Chandler by Crown grant, under the hand of the Governor of the Colony, dated the 19 day of October 1831...*” On another page of the Application 5688 Davis declared: “*I was married in the year 1850.*” The document is dated October 1882 and signed by Joseph Davis.

The *Indenture* confirmed the conveyance date as being “*accepted by the Examiners ... 1st November 1859,*” *Application 5688* signed by the Conveyancer F. M. Stokes and the Applicant Joseph Davis, strongly lends credence to the probability that the part of the original Chandler’s grant where Lydham was built, had come into the ownership of Joseph Davis in **1860** and was **sized 50 acres**. The *Certificate of Title*<sup>29</sup> issued on the 11th October, **1883**, confirms that Joseph Davis is the owner of the land parcel sized **forty nine acres one rood and 36 perches**, which approximates 50 acres but poses the logical question as to the disappearance of over 17 acres, as initially mentioned in the document dated 1859-1860. However, part of *Application 5688* contains an additional 54 pages of handwritten notes following the chronology of all transactions and events related to the ownership of the holding from the former Chandler’s holding up until 1860. The notes also explain the ‘missing’ 17 acres.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> *Certificate of Title* Vol 669 Fol127, 11th October, 1883, viewed via <https://hllrv.nswlrs.com.au>

A number of sources related to the roads and railway within the area illustrate that improvement to the transportation of building supplies and produce to Sydney from the South Coast was needed. Discussions concerning an easement to allow for conveyance of future roads and possibly a railway began in the 1850s. With time, private entrepreneurship for construction of the roads and railways was passed into the hands of the Government's Select Committee on Roads and Railways.<sup>30</sup> Page 32 of *Abstract to Davis' Application* clearly states that "17 acres ... be reserved for the New Illawarra Road..." which means that the land was passed to the Government in the 1850-1860s.<sup>31</sup>

At least three recorded conveyancing witnesses' statements also support the fact that Davis owned only 50 acres, not 67 as was claimed for decades in numerous publications. Davis lodged his *Application for the Torrens Title*<sup>32</sup> in order to be able to subdivide his land. As a result of the *Application*, the *Certificate of Title*<sup>33</sup> was issued, the land was subdivided and over 50 individual parcels were registered for sale between 1883 and 1885.

We can now confirm the date of Davis negotiating the Bexley land purchase as 1859<sup>34</sup> and its registration as 1860. Therefore, the claim that Lydham Hall was erected in 1855-1860 is incorrect. We also know that the size of this land was around 50 acres, not 67 as was also claimed for decades. It must be noted here that the aforementioned 1859' *Indenture* is the only document where the presence of the 'premises' on the land sold to Joseph Davis is mentioned. However, as no detailed description of these 'premises' is given in the document, we may presume that these were neither substantial nor residential but probably only of a rudimentary construction.

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<sup>30</sup> Hatton, Joan, Muir, Lesley, *The Triumph of the Speculators*, pp 1-26

<sup>31</sup> Abstract. *Application 5688 to Bring Lands Under the Provisions of the Real Property Act (26 Victoria No 9)*, October 1882, MHNSW-StAC: NRS-17513-38-125-PA 5688

<sup>32</sup> The system was designed by Robert Richard Torrens for the South Australian Land Title Registry when he was appointed Registrar of the state in the 1850s. He based his system on the methods used to insure shipping by Lloyds of London, using a single register for each land holding and updating it with each new transaction: <https://www.nswlrs.com.au/Public-Register/Torrens-Title-Register>

<sup>33</sup> *Certificate of Title* Vol 669 For 127, 11th October 1883, viewed via <https://hlrv.nswlrs.com.au>

<sup>34</sup> As legal requirement, the date of measuring the land is the date when the ownership began.. This Statement needs to be confirmed according to the law of the time

Here we may refer to two watercolours by Samuel Elyard<sup>35</sup> titled *Bexley* and *Bexley Farm* dated 1860 and September 1861 respectively. One landscape appears to depict an existing wooden construction, whilst the other bears little visual resemblance to Lydham Hall or its location. According to the dates of these artworks, we may conclude that Lydham Hall had not been constructed as at September 1861, the latest date of Elyard's watercolours.

Samuel Elyard, a public servant and a renowned Australian artist of British ancestry, was familiar with the whole area on the south bank of the Cooks River. He travelled regularly between Sydney and Nowra on the South Coast for over three decades up until his retirement in 1868.<sup>36</sup> Witnessing the development of the area during this period, it would be most unlikely for him to miss a building as substantial as the extant Lydham Hill.<sup>37</sup>

In order to confirm the date of Lydham's erection, further analysis and investigation are required. It would be helpful to ascertain the name of the presumed builder and prove his acquaintance with Joseph Davis. The date and identify of the composer of the *Lidham Hill Mazurka*, allegedly produced for the Lydham Hill house warming party, would also be helpful.

### **The Builder of *Lydham Hill***

There were a few different individuals named as builders of Lydham Hall by researchers. For example, Ron Rathbone claimed a "Swedish stonemason named Sven Bengston and his son Solomon Peter Benson whose granddaughter is still living at Casula" built *Lydham Hall*. However, it has now been confirmed that neither persons with these names were present nor listed as stonemasons within the area, nor known as having arrived in NSW as at 1860. No records of any works by Sven Bengston, Solomon Peter Benson or James Benson have yet been located, nor persons with such names having entered Australia before 1860. Therefore,

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<sup>35</sup> Elyard, Samuel, *Bexley, looking S[outh], Sa[aturday]* 6 Oct. [18]60; and *Bexley Farm. Monday, 23 Sep. 1861*. Both published in: Elyard, Samuel, *Views of Nowra and Sydney, 1861-1901*. Reproduced with the kind permission of the State Library of NSW

<sup>36</sup> Elyard, Samuel, *Bexley Farm. Monday, 23 Sep. 1861*. From the book Elyard, Samuel, *Views of Nowra and Sydney, 1861-1901*. Reproduced with the kind permission of the State Library of NSW. <sup>36</sup> Samuel Elyard (1817-1910):<https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/elyard-samuel-3890>

<sup>37</sup> Elyard, Samuel, *Views of Nowra and Sydney, 1861-1901*, State Library of NSW



acquaintance with Joseph Davis could not be confirmed. The reason for the lack of records may be attributable to a misspelling or mispronunciation of the name provided to Rathbone by Joseph Davis' descendants. The construction may have occurred at a later date. Exploration of materials pertinent to the later years would be the logical next step.

### **Building design**

According to Australian author and lecturer on Australian architecture, Davina Jackson, hiring a stonemason instead of an architect and the use of stone were common, cheaper and worth the money. The stonemasons saw themselves as architects, and bricks were "far more prestigious" and a dearer material at the time. The use of European tradesmen was also common. "European stonemasons began to migrate to Sydney and Melbourne in significant numbers after the start of the gold rushes in 1851 ... and this trend continued as the Colony became well known in Britain and Europe for the prosperity of businessmen who wanted to build impressive mansions for their families. Skilled stonemasons were in demand," claimed Jackson.<sup>38</sup>

To date, no documents such as sketches and plans have been located to prove the date of Lydham Hill's erection. Therefore, further exploration is required.

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<sup>38</sup> Communication with Davina Jackson via email, March 2022



Ill 7. The stone faces along Wolli Creek Road, Banksia, NSW  
Photo Olga Sedneva, 2023

### ***Lydham Hill sandstone***

The sandstone from which Lydham Hall is built, is also a matter of importance, being as it is characteristic for the 1860s. It has been claimed that Lydham Hill was built of stone quarried locally or at the site located on the current "corner of Villiers and Arlington Streets." It was not possible to confirm or disprove this claim by any documentation, but a few secondary sources such as Herbert Bates's history of Christ Church in Bexley<sup>39</sup> refer to the earlier claim. If Lydham Hill was built later, the use of sandstone would may be considered prestigious.

At a recent discussion on Gardiner Park, Banksia, NSW, the author was provided with a copy of Rockdale Parks Conservation Management Plan: Arncliffe, Gardiner and Bexley Parks, 2013. This publication claimed that at least three quarries were located within a short walking distance from *Lydham Hall*.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the current presence of natural sandstone outcroppings and cliff faces along Wolli Creek Road remain and also support the above claim. This CMP also mentions that a verbal land lease agreement was made between an unconfirmed land owner and a Mr Waltz, a German migrant and benefactor of the St Joseph Catholic Church in Rockdale, a builder and possibly quarryman.<sup>41</sup> So far no documentation has been located to validate this statement. A number of local private homes built of stone also lend credence to this claim, but do not pinpoint the locations of the quarries.

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<sup>39</sup> Bates, E. Herbert, *First Four Score Years, Christ Church Bexley*, 1887, edited 1986

<sup>40</sup> Rockdale Parks Conservation Management Plan: Arncliffe, Gardiner and Bexley Parks, 2013. Chapters 4.2.2-4.2.3, unpaginated extract, Bayside Library, NSW

<sup>41</sup> The Waltz Street in Rockdale is named after this man.



III 8. *Lidham Hill Mazurka* [music]: for the Pianoforte  
Composed by Nellie Marchant, Sydney, undated  
Music manuscript  
<https://nla.gov.au:443/tarkine/nla.obj-168543502>

### ***Lidham Hill Mazurka***

Another possible avenue to confirm the age of *Lydham Hill* pertains to the *Lidham Hill Mazurka* reportedly commissioned by Joseph Davis for the house warming party. For some time the volunteers of the St George Historical Society Inc claimed to have the original manuscript of this piece. The piece composed by Nellie Marchant and published by T. Heming in Sydney was available for sale from ‘all Music Sellers’ at the time.<sup>42</sup>

Notwithstanding the paucity of details, the following is a description of the piece being played during a celebration of St David’s Day in *Sydney’s Temperance Hall*,<sup>43</sup> where “the chair of the Welsh Mr J. Davis, CMG, MLA,” addressed the audience, and “the copy of the *Lidham Hill Mazurka*, composed by Miss Nellie Marchant, has been forwarded to this office. The composition is more in the concert than dancing style, and displays much talent in a musician, who is just 16 years old. Complete originality is scarcely to be expected, but the different movements were well carried out and successfully harmonised. The octave and *arpeggio* are the leading characteristics of the mazurka.”<sup>44</sup> The article is dated March 1882, therefore we may conclude that this *Mazurka* was written before then. Even though Davis was present at the performance, we may not however yet conclude whether Joseph Davis and Nellie Marchant definitely made an acquaintance before the piece was played publicly.

<sup>42</sup> [hp://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-168543502](https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-168543502)

<sup>43</sup> [https://dictionaryofsydney.org/building/pitt\\_street\\_temperance\\_hall](https://dictionaryofsydney.org/building/pitt_street_temperance_hall)

<sup>44</sup> *News of the Day*: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/rendition/nla.news-article13506137.3.pdf?followup=876dd8fecaabec50fa48509c658ac286>. *The Sydney Morning Herald* (NSW), 2 March 1882



Ill 9. Joseph Davis  
Photograph, undated  
Local History Collection  
Bayside Council, NSW

### **Joseph Davis**

Ron Rathbone claimed to have produced “a considerable research on Joseph Davis undertaken in England and Australia,” however no official report of his findings has been published but some information was provided across a number of documents. It was mentioned that “Joseph Davis was born in Brede, a village near Winchelsea in the county of Sussex in 1826. He was one of five sons and five daughters, the son of Joseph Davis, a victualler, and his wife Jane Austen. Very little is known of Davis’ life before his arrival in Australia. It is claimed, he migrated to Australia in 1848, where he married a local girl, Ellen Turner in Scots Church Sydney, on 28th October, 1850. He then established a business in King Street, Newtown - at that time a fashionable suburb - first as a publican, then as a butcher.”<sup>45</sup> The business flourished and soon Davis was buying and fattening his stock on his Bexley property, from whence they were slaughtered elsewhere in his land holdings and then transported to his Newtown butchery.

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<sup>45</sup> *St George*. Activity No. 264. Sunday, 1st September, 1974. Booklet. The National Trust of Australia (NSW) Junior Group. Located in the Good Samaritans Order’s Archives, March 2021



Unfortunately, Davis' birth date and place are still unconfirmed, as is also whether he arrived as an assisted or independent migrant.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, it is not yet possible to conclude whether Davis was a self-made man.

Rathbone brought his learnings as “a matter of importance” to the St George Historical Society's members' attention in the 1980s, and the presumption was accepted as true for decades without any apparent documental proof. Actually, a number of key facts related to the *Lydham Hill* story are still unconfirmed and may remain unknown.

It is clear that it was Joseph Davis who named his property Lydham Hill. It appears as such in his Will and land sales advertisements, but it has not been possible to confirm its connection with the owner's place of birth in England.

In 1917, the property's name became the namesake of the street Lydham Avenue where it stands at the request of one of the residents.<sup>47, 48</sup> Around the same time, the property became known as Lydham Hall. The reason for the change is not clear. The meaning of 'Lydham' is 'the slop' in Welsh.

Earlier publications on Lydham Hall by Ron Rathbone and Gifford Eardley, claimed that the expansion of Joseph Davis' butchering business was the reason for purchasing the land where Lydham Hall stands now. Such a reasonable presumption is well supported by the purchase of land in Arncliffe and Bexley, where Lydham Hill's pastures are logically connected with the slaughter house in Arncliffe, and then to Davis' butchery in Newtown.

It is also reasonable to presume that Davis also decided to slow down his involvement with the business or settle down with family in his 'country' house after an injury he received in circa 1885. The following account provides the description of the accident: “...whilst during slathering he [Joseph Davis-OS] slipped on a carcass of a newly killed steer and the horns penetrated his side and thereafter he dragged his right foot.” In February 1886, the advertisement for hiring a Coachman appeared

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<sup>46</sup> That is where the author must credit Mrs Janette Pelosi for her search wherein she located at least 26 persons called Joseph Davis who arrived in Australia as assisted migrants

<sup>47</sup> *Government Gazette* of the State of New South Wales, Friday, May 25, 1917 [Issue No.78] Page 2755; <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/226215853>.

<sup>48</sup> Valuation Card 1092, Vol 3295 Fol 230, DP 8959, MHNSW-StAC, accessed in 2021

in the papers: “Wanted respectable young Man as Coachman, must be able to milk and make himself useful.”<sup>49</sup> It was stated that this person must be able to drive a “Victoria style carriage being a low light four-wheeled vehicle with seating for two, and a raised driver's seat.”<sup>50</sup> No further confirmation as to Davis’ injury and his commuting around in the *Victoria* was located aside from tales of the Ghost limping around Lydham Hall “whilst looking for his treasure hidden in the house.”<sup>51</sup>

By the mid-1880s, Davis was known as a “retired man, dedicated to his family and devoted to his church” who was “one of the first owners of a permanent residence constructed in Bexley.”<sup>52</sup> The statement may translate that the whole family including his two youngest boys, Herbert aged 10 and Frederick aged 13, had by then definitely made its home in Lydham Hill. The other children, Isabella, John, David and Esther Jones were attending Kogarah Public School at that time. Joseph Davis became heavily involved with local affairs, including the establishment of the local Church of England, local public school and Bexley as a suburb in its own right. He was one of the petitioners arguing for “constituting ... a Municipal district” of West Botany and its annexation from Hurstville Municipality. Davis’ children Charlotte E. Brock (nee Davis), Austen, Joseph Jnr, Herbert and Frederick, all put their signatures in support of the move. The area was later to become Bexley and consequently part of the Rockdale Municipality.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald* (NSW: 1842-1954), Tuesday 23 February 1886, page 13 via <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article13612264>

<sup>50</sup> Bates, E. Herbert, *First Four Score Years, Christ Church Bexley, 1887*. Edited 1986, page 16

<sup>51</sup> Vilmai Long, SGHS Inc Bulletin, September 1970

<sup>52</sup> Bates, E. Herbert, *First Four Score Years, Christ Church Bexley, 1887*. Edited 1986, page 16 page 10

<sup>53</sup> PROPOSED ANNEXATION TO MUNICIPAL DISTRICT OF WEST BOTANY.—COUNTER-PETITION. 1886, May 10. *New South Wales Government Gazette* (Sydney, NSW : 1832 - 1900), p. 3327. Retrieved June 5, 2023, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article221683922>



Christ Church Anglican Bexley  
January, 2023,  
Photo Olga Sedneva

## **Christ Church Anglican Bexley**

In Davis' time those Anglicans living north of Rockdale were attending services in St Peter's Cooks River. Those living south would attend Lord's Forest, later known as St George Anglican Church in Hurstville. As a devoutly religious man, Joseph Davis was one of the donors to purchase land for the building of the church on the corner of Dunmore and Albyn Streets, Bexley, from the *Ocean View Estate*, Bexley, in 1885. Christ Church stands there to this day. Initially, Lydham Hill became a meeting place of the Church Committee. On 24th July, 1886, the foundation stone was laid, which became an inspiration for the subsequent flood of donations.

The Church Trustees formed the Building Committee, to which Joseph Davis lent 500 pounds at a very low percentage (5%) to start the building. The money was not repaid by the time Davis passed in 1889.<sup>54</sup> The dedicated scroll in the church bares the inscription : "Incumbent: Rev W.H. Saunders, Chairman;, Messers Ramson and Hardy, Architects; John Bonner, Builder; Henry Kinsela, George Preddy, Joseph

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<sup>54</sup> Joseph Davis Will, MHNSW-StAC: NRS-13660-3-[17/2286]-Series 3\_17982 | Joseph Davis Date of death 24 January 1889, Granted on 6 March 1889

Davis, Alexander Milsop, Thomas Milsop, C. J. Barney, H.P. Tideswell, Thomas Leider, Fred. T. Gibbons and David White.”<sup>55</sup>

### **Bexley Public School**

Davis also involved himself in the establishment of what we know now as Bexley Public School, starting the *Application for the Establishment of a Public School* in December 1885. Submitted in February 1886 to the Minister of Public Instruction, it was signed by D. L. White, Brick-maker of Bexley, James Glen, Accountant by Dept, John McLeod, Builder, Joseph Davis, Butcher, Esq, of Bexley, and Gardener Thomas Weir.

The neighbouring estates called Ocean View, Alphington Hill, Linton Heights, and Leiddom HM,<sup>56</sup> all located within the former Chandler 1,200 acres land grant, submitted their own *Application* also requesting the establishment of a local school on January, 26th, 1886. The signatories were William Humphry, Thomas Ervin, James Glen and Henry Kinsela. Both Applications were unsuccessful due to the very strong objection from existing schools in Kogarah, Arncliffe and Rockdale. The preparations for a new, now joint application began almost immediately and was lodged with the Department of Instruction in May 1886.<sup>57</sup> This time it was signed by Joseph Davis, James Glen, Henry Kinsela, W Shepherd and John Mc...[illegible], and was successful. Soon the search for a suitable plot of land began and “one rod and 2 and a quarter perches” were acquired by the Ministry of Public Instruction on the 2nd February, 1887.<sup>58</sup>

Curiously, the signature of Salomon P. Benson appears on the *Application* for school and earlier in the Petition for the establishment of the Municipality. He also was one of a few local residents who in May 1886 offered his own plot of land as a school location on the very corner of Harrow Street and Forest Road. His offer of one acre in size “in a central position” was declined due to its “too small size for the

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<sup>55</sup> Bates, E. Herbert, *First Four Score Years, Christ Church Bexley, 1887*. Edited 1986, page 18

<sup>56</sup> Located on the South side of the current Harrow Road, Rockdale, NSW

<sup>57</sup> List of children attending Kogarah Public School, 7 Feb 1886, signed by M. Neirn, Teacher. Petition to the Minister of Public Instruction, 7 February 1886. Bexley, 1886-1912 (Bundle A) in Bexley Public School Archives, NRS-3829-2-[5/14910], Museums of History, NSW Archives

<sup>58</sup> Certificate of Title Vol 824 Fol 103, Public School Archives. Bexley, 1886-1912 (Bundle A) in Bexley Public School Archives, MHNSW-StAC: NRS-3829-2-[5/14910]



school and problem with drainage.”<sup>59</sup> Is it possible that this Benson was somehow connected to the possible builder of Lydham Hall? Was his correct name *Solomon* or *Salomon*? These details remain to be confirmed.

Opened in August 1887, Bexley Public school became the centre of local social life by hosting public meetings, fetes and athletic competitions on its grounds. The first teaching staff consisted of Mr Kendall Hume, Miss J. Landeis, Miss K. Smith and Miss R. Simpson, and Miss Cartwright for a Fancy Sewing Class, employed at the recommendation of Mrs Davis.<sup>60</sup> The first students at Bexley Public were children of the Parkes, the Hindmarch, the Irwins, the Humphries, the Preddys, the Thompsons, the Heys, the Richardsons, the Kinselas and a number of the area’s other early settlers whose names were on the *Application*. Many of their children would later play important roles in the progress of Bexley and Rockdale as Aldermen and businessmen. A number of streets within Bexley and Rockdale were named after the families of these early school pupils.

Amongst the famous former school pupils of the 20th Century achievers were Sumner Locke Elliott, writer, playwright and collaborator with Doris Fitton, in Sydney’s New Theatre, the author of controversial *Rusty Bugles*; Olympian and local artist and sign writer Bruce Sharp; test cricketer Norman O’Neill, tennis player Joyce Fitch; Colonel Hon Sir Hector Joseph Richard Clayton; Dr Rita Harradence (Lady Rita Cornforth), and many others.<sup>61</sup>

One particular story related to Bexley Public School was revived recently. The WWI fundraising flag was re-told in recent years. Initially, it was intended to be wrapped over the Memorial Board that is still on display at the school. One of the names embroidered on the Flag was the Middenways, the family of Mr John S. Middenways, School Principal for over 20 years (1895-1917), who was a strong advocate for mixed gender education and an exemplary gardener.

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<sup>59</sup> Public School Archives. Bexley, 1886-1912 (Bundle A) in Bexley Public School Archives, MHNSW-StAC: NRS-3829-2-[5/14910]

<sup>60</sup> Public School Archives. Bexley, 1886-1912 (Bundle A) in Bexley Public School Archives, MHNSW-StAC: NRS-3829-2-[5/14910]

<sup>61</sup> *Ever Forward. A Centenary History of the Bexley Primary School, 1887-1987*, R. W. Rathbone, 1987



III 11. *Bexley Public School*, 1987, artist unknown, painting, BPS Archives  
 Signed: "Presented to Bexley Public School by the guests of the Centenary Dinner, 22 August 1987"  
 Photo Olga Sedneva, 2022

Recently discovered painting of the original building was located in the school archives. Painted to celebrate the School's Centenary, it was gifted to school by the attendees of the 1987 Centenary Dinner.

III 12. The current Principal of Bexley Public School and The Principal of St. Mary and St. Mina's Coptic Orthodox College currently occupying the original Bexley Public School holding the painting on the 135th year of the Bexley Public School opening  
 Photo Olga Sedneva, 2022



Christina Stead, Bexley Public School pupil and Lydham Hill resident at that time, later gained World recognition as a novelist, and reflected on the school in her short story *The Old School*.<sup>62</sup> She named one of the characters, a shopkeeper who knew all about the “Pollits kids’ failures” at school, in her novel *The Man Who Loved Children* after Mr Middenways.

Stead’s papers and correspondence reveal a number of details on Lydham Hall, including those related to the change of property name from Lydham Hill, the appearance of the property in the beginning of the 20th Century, and to her time in Lydham. This however will be the subject of a separate chapter.

### **St George's Anglican Church, Hurstville**

We know little of the Davis’ involvement with St George's Anglican Church in Hurstville during Joseph’s life. His daughter Charlotte was married there.<sup>63</sup> But most importantly, the church cemetery became a resting place to both Joseph Davis, 63, and his son Frederick, 15, who both died in 1889. Formerly known as the “Bush Church,”<sup>64</sup> it is located in the area formerly known as Lord’s Forrest, derived from the former property owner. The church still stands at the same location but services a different demographic.

The church began from a Denominational School with services initially held in a tent, which was erected to accomodate the church school and services. The current red brick building was completed in 1889. Mrs Davis commemorated Joseph Davis, husband and father, in the stained glass window *Go Do Though Likewise*; and their son, Frederick, in the window *Of Such Is The Kingdom*. Both commissioned pieces remain in situ adorning the church.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Stead, Christina, *An Old School in Ocean of Story. The uncollected stories of Christina Stead*, 1986, Penguin Books, ISBN o 14 010021 0

<sup>63</sup> Pelosi, Janette, MPHA, *Lydham Hall Heritage Listing* , Unpublished Research, June 2023

<sup>64</sup> *Church in the Bush*, Sydney Morning Herald, 31 December 1856

<sup>65</sup> Shaw, Brian, *From Church in the Bush to the Church in the City, 150 years of Gospel Ministry at St George Anglican Church, Hurstville, 1856-2006*



Ill 14. Stained Glass Windows, St George's Church of England, Hurstville, NSW

Left: *Go Do Though Likewise*

[Jesus directed after he finished the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:37 NIV)]

In Memory of Joseph Davis, died January 24th 1889 aged 63 years

Erected by his loving wife and children

Right: [Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for]

*Of Such Is the Kingdom* [Matthew, 19:14]

in Loving Memory of Frederick James Davis, died August 15th 1887 aged 15 years

Erected by his affectionate Mother

Photo Olga Sedneva, 2023



The burial ground was consecrated in 1857. After the introduction of the Cemetery Act in 1961,<sup>66</sup> most of the headstones were simply stored under the new buildings and a few were moved to the fence line where they remain.<sup>67</sup> One hundred and twenty tombs including those of Joseph and Frederick Davis, George Preddy and all from the Kinsela Family Vault were re-buried ‘respectfully in a chosen area’<sup>68</sup> to clear the way for parking. According to the current Administrator of the Church, the exhumed remains of Joseph Davis, Esq., were cremated and subsequently reinterred in Rookwood Cemetery.<sup>69</sup>



Ill 13. Kinsela Family Vault before and after demolition of 1961, St George Church of England, Hurstville  
 Left: Cemetery during demolition, undated  
 Undated photos, Church Archives  
 Reproduced with a kind permission of the Church Administrator

By the time of Joseph Davis’ death, he owned the “allotment of land Lydham Hill Estate Subdivision, Butchery and Bakery in Newtown... 2 acres, 1 rod and 3 perches of land in Arncliffe, 12 acres, 3 rods, and 0 perches land, and residence situated in

<sup>66</sup> *St George Church of England. Cemetery Act, 1961*, R. F. Dillon, Rector, 15/12/1961. Church News, December, 1961

<sup>67</sup> Information from the current Church Administrators

<sup>68</sup> Shaw, Brian, *From Church in the Bush to the Church in the City, 150 years of Gospel Ministry at St George Anglican Church, Hurstville, 1856-2006*

<sup>69</sup> Private interview with the current administration of the Anglican Church, Hurstville, February 2023

Bexley known as Lydham Hill, and also that on which my slaughter house is situated at Arncliffe” - all in total valued over 10, 000 pounds.” This original document challenges many previous interpretations of what happened after January 1889. Joseph Davis’ Will contains clear instructions to his executors, wife Ellen Davis, his brother William Loved Davis and son-in-law George S. Brock. They were instructed that all real estate “to be sold with no delay ... and ... the said executors and executrix to invest ... as they see fit.” All proceeds from rent and sale of the Newtown Butchery with six apartments and Bakery with eight apartments to be passed on to his wife Ellen Davis for her personal use and maintenance and education of my son Herbert Edward until he shall attain the age of twenty one years...”<sup>70</sup>

Following instructions Joseph Davis left in his *Will*, Mrs Ellen Davis finalised subdivision that was started by her husband, and sold Lydham Hill.<sup>71</sup> She moved to Kensington House in Wilson Street, Newtown, where she died on the 10th of April, 1906. Her “real and personal estate” was passed to “her lawful children and grandchildren” composing of 255 King Street: and dwelling containing 6 apartments, 257 King Street: shop and dwelling ... containing 8 apartments” to Amy Ada Dransfield (nee Davis), Jane Anne Hindmarsh (nee Davis), Joseph Davis, Charlotte Ellen Brock (nee Davis), and Herbert Edward Davis.<sup>72</sup> The listing of Mrs Davis’ Estate suggests that she rented Kensington House.

The sale of the then Lydham Hill to Frederick John Gibbins marked the beginning of a new chapter in its story. It was leased out up until 1907. The rent of such a sizeable property was affordable only to individuals of considerable means. A tenant named Mr Hoggan, allegedly with connections to AGL, is mentioned frequently in previous publications on the house.<sup>73</sup> There was an article in the newspapers of Mr Hoggan’s daughter’s marriage in the house, but his relation to AGL has not been confirmed.

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<sup>70</sup> MHNSW-StAC: NRS-13660-Series3\_17982, Joseph Davis Will, 1887, Joseph Davis Probate

<sup>71</sup> Recently the following information on Ellen Turner’s family was confirmed: Ellen’s mother Ann (nee Cawson) married Edward Turner in 1821 (NSW Marriage Index V1821 1087 147B District CB=Church of England Parramatta, St John’s). Ellen Turner was born/baptised in 1833 (NSW Baptism Index V1833 768 25A No district noted). Ellen’s siblings were John (born 1822), Elizabeth E (1828), Alice (born 1831) and Edmund (born 1836). No deaths of her siblings were noted up to 1850 in the NSW Deaths Index. *Lydham Hall Heritage Listing*, Pelosi, Janette, MPHA, unpublished research, June 2023.

<sup>72</sup> *Ellen Davis - late of Kensington House Wilson Street Newtown near Sydney*. MHNSW-StAC: NRS-13340-6-461-[AF00137994]

<sup>73</sup> Bayside Council Local History Collection, Electorate Rolls



In 1907-1917, the family of Australian Naturalist David Stead lived in Lydham Hill. These years were reflected in David's daughter, Australian expat novelist Christina Stead's<sup>74</sup> *The Man Who Loved Children*. She wrote to Thistle Harris, "The book I am writing now, "The Man Who Loved Children" has a plot derived from, although not exactly mirroring, our home in the early days, not the proces-verbal, but the dramatic truth."<sup>75</sup>

Thanks to the original correspondence of Christina Stead, we now have a correct understanding of a few longstanding notions related to the property. It was widely claimed that after David Stead's marriage to Ada Gibbins, the bride's father Frederick J. Gibbins, allowed the newly weds to occupy Lydham Hill for free. Christina Stead opposed such presumption in her letter, "We occupied Lydham Hill for a very small rent and I was simply aware of some restrictions - I.e. not too much digging, alterations."<sup>76</sup>

Another curious detail was confirmed by Stead concerning the change of Lydham's name from Hill to Hall, when she recalled, "... that is how we [the Steads - Author] called it ... LYDHAM HILL - that is the right name. PS My father once when repairing the name on the drive gates, painted in "Lydham Hall" instead of the original "Lydham Hill." My mother [Ada Stead, nee Gibbins - author] objected rightly, it seems to me, saying "It is NOT a hall."<sup>77</sup> The mistake led to the permanent change in the name of the estate.

After Gibbins' death, the land surrounding Lydham Hill was subdivided further changing the landscape around the property. The documents located in his Probate clearly state that his assets well exceed his likely business expenses. He offered his children to select any items of a particular cost, gave extensive instructions for the future of his business, and left the rest of his estate at the discretion of the trustees, and they very instructed on all business affairs in details. The often repeated account

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<sup>74</sup> Christina Stead, Birth Certificate Reg. 25874, Blake, Christina Ellen, Death Certificate, Reg. 7028. In: Stead, Christina Ellen (1902-1983), Certificates, MLMSS 9364 1 (1), State Library of NSW

<sup>75</sup> Letter Christina Stead to Thistle Harris, 7th July 1939, NLA Manuscript Collection, MS 8317, Christina Stead

<sup>76</sup> Letter of Christina Stead to Peter Orlovich, December 19th, 1965, Peter Orlovich, Papers, ca. 1954-ca 1968, State Library of NSW, ML MSS 1926 2(2). Spelling and text format preserved.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid

of him being insolvent proved to be wrong. Therefore, the trustees were acting as they saw fit, and only in 1922, the allotment where the current Lydham Hall building stands was sold to Mr Alfred Oliver in 1922.<sup>78</sup>

Ironically the new owner of Lydham Hall was also a Master Butcher. It is known that Mr Oliver (c 1863-1935) was a native of Macclesfield, England. He used to be a member of the Yamba Woorra Tennis Club.<sup>79</sup> It is also known that Mr Oliver, a shipping provider, arrived in Queensland at the age of 21; then moved to Paddington, Sydney and later to Circular Quay. In 1925 Oliver formed the Binnia Downs Meat Company.<sup>80</sup> Mr Oliver owned a weatherboard cottage in Stoney Creek Road, Hurstville, that was uninsured and ‘completely gutted,’ when burnt on December 15th, 1933.<sup>81</sup> He is remembered as having become a blind man, who sought to preserve the view eastwards from the house and to this end had a covenant placed on the adjacent blocks of land against the erection of any two-storied premises. “He had lost his sight but he never forgot the view.”<sup>82</sup>

In 1935, his children inherited Lydham Hall, subdivided the land and subsequently sold it to Mr & Mrs Long in 1958. By then, the house in a rather dilapidated condition, was under the threat of demolition. The Longs also subdivided the land, but sold the house only when their “slender resources” were exhausted. The sale of Lydham Hall within its existing curtilage to the Rockdale Municipal Council in 1970, “saved Lydham Hall from the dubious boon of redevelopment.”<sup>83</sup>

According to Mrs Long, footsteps were sometimes heard pacing the floors and treading the stairway. One foot drags as though a cripple is walking. The ghost was affectionately called Joseph by Mrs Long. Mrs Long was confident that Joseph is looking for his money, which was never found after his death. “No domestic animal

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<sup>78</sup> Certificate of Title Vol 3295 Fol 234, 24 March 1922, Viewed via <https://hmv.nswlrs.com.au>

<sup>79</sup> *St George Call*, Friday 14 October 1921

<sup>80</sup> *Daily Commercial News and Shipping List*, Obituary, February 13, 1935

<sup>81</sup> *The Propellor*, 15 December 1933, page 4

<sup>82</sup> Mr Oliver initially placed this order. *Building Ban. Historical views protected*. Article. Unsigned. Lydham Hall file, National Trust Archives

<sup>83</sup> Rockdale Municipal Council, Finance Committee 4/6/1970, page 881; Bayside Council Library, Local Studies

will stay in the house when the ghost walked.” A well disposed ghost is a fascinating adjunct to any old house.

Sources at Bexley Public School confirm that Mrs Long used to work as a cleaner at the school and was then acquainted with Ron Rathbone, a teacher at the school, who later became instrumental in the future of Lydham Hall.

Lydham Hall was purchased by the Rockdale Municipal Council during October 1970, to function as a historical museum.<sup>84</sup> It was to commemorate in a practical manner the Centenary of the Municipality. The assistance of the St George Historical Society Inc was sought in the furtherance of the project, and their wholehearted cooperation was gained in the refurbishing of the interior and the arrangement of suitable exhibits. The Council in turn, became responsible for exterior maintenance, both to the building and the grounds. The Museum was officially opened on February, 20th, 1971.<sup>85</sup> A new life was given to the old homestead by the Council, community and the St George Historical Society Inc.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, this study confirmed or refuted some facts and interpretations in the commonly recounted story of Lydham Hall, a summary of which is detailed below. To date, a number of historical and curious details were resurrected or otherwise revealed. A few questions are as yet still unanswered.

## **Historical facts**

- James Chandler initially purchased the so called Thomas Sylvester Farm. The property was sized 100 acres, and was named by the new owner Bexley. It became the namesake of the current suburb;
- Chandler was promised the neighbouring 1,200 acres land grant in 1821 and his ownership for the land was finalised in 1831;
- A well documented timeline was completed which records all individuals ever associated with the land-holding, of which part was to become Lydham Hall;

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<sup>84</sup> Rockdale Municipal Council, Finance Committee 4/6/1970, page 881; Bayside Council Library, Local Studies

<sup>85</sup> Report on Official Opening; Rockdale Municipal Council, Ordinary Meeting of Council 4/3/71, page 285 (72); Bayside Council Library, Local Studies

- It is confirmed that Joseph Davis purchased 50, not 67 acres of the land, which was part of the original 1,200 acres Chandler's grant;
- The importance of Joseph Davis' involvement with the establishment of the suburb of Bexley, of the Anglican Church, Bexley, and of Bexley Public school were rediscovered;
- Memorial windows dedicated to Joseph Davis were located in St George's Anglican Church Hurstville;
- Joseph Davis named the property Lydham Hill, not Lydham Hall;
- Previously overlooked artworks depicting Lydham Hill and surrounding areas were located. Watercolours by Samuel Elyard dated 1860 and 1861 provide a visual documentation of the area at the time, and suggest Lydham Hill was not built until at least October 1861;
- The house currently known as Lydham Hall could not be built before October 1861, unless the claims as to the name of the stonemason and his acquaintance with Joseph Davis are disproved. If this person if this person can be identified and his acquaintance with Joseph Davis confirmed, the date of Lydham Hill construction may be altered;
- The details of the *Lydham Hill Mazurka*' author, Nellie Marchant, also may alter the date of the building's erection;
- It is possible that Lydham Hill has become the Davis' family residence after an accident which limited significantly Joseph's mobility or possible retirement;
- The sale of Lydham Hill by Mrs Davis took place following instructions in Joseph Davis' Will;
- It is now known for a fact when Lydham Hill became Lydham Hall and why;
- It is now known that the Steads did not occupy the property for free, but the small rent agreement was in place;
- Christina Stead's novel *The Man Who Loved Children* is definitely autobiographical by the admission of the novelist herself;
- Frederick Gibbins did not have any debts at the time of his death. The Lydham Hill's estate was subdivided and eventually sold at the discretion of the Trustees;
- The date of the renaming of Joseph Street to Lydham Avenue was 1917, which was the same year as the property's name was officially changed to Lydham Hall.

## **Interpretations**

According to the **previous published research**, the following conclusions were made:

- The establishment of the Museum in Lydham Hall, a NSW Heritage listed building, and its collection have become the longest joint social project of the local Council, the St George Historical Society Inc and local residents;
- The St George Historical Society Inc has been managing Lydham Hall for over 50 years, concurrently with the Council's ownership of the building for essentially the same length of time is the longest chapter in Lydham Hall story;
- The content of the Museum is representative of early migrants who constituted the majority demographic of the Anglo-Celtic population present at the time.

According to **this study**, the following interpretations may be amended:

- The association of the property with an early migrant, Joseph Davis, whose role in the social progress of Bexley (Anglican Church, Bexley, and Bexley Public School), overlooked for some time, illustrates the progress of the area and the story of **migrants of Anglo-Saxon decent** during that period, which increases the significance of the Lydham Hall locally;
- If the name of the Lydham Hill builder is confirmed as a Swedish stonemason, the building becomes an example of **European stonemasonry skills** and of an application of European techniques as to the use of local materials for rural residential building, and adaptation of such aesthetics to the harsh Australian climate;
- Joseph Davis' involvement in the establishment of the Anglican Church in Bexley, Bexley Public School and Municipality of Bexley, dramatically increase the **significance of Mr Davis in the history of Bexley**;
- Christina Stead's novels and short stories deliver an **important description of the area**, particularly Bexley, Lydham Hall and Dappeto, in the beginning of the 20th Century.

**Further investigation is required as to the following**

- Joseph Davis' life before his arrival to Australia might bring clarity as to the name of the property;
- The name of the builder who erected Lydham Hill;
- The date of Lydham Hill's construction must be confirmed;

- The details of the *Lidham Hill Mazurka* composer, Ms Nelly Marchant remains to be investigated.

### Lydham Hall Land Ownership Timeline

Date	Event	Owner	Source
1820	Chandler arrived in Australia		<i>Sydney Gazette</i> , September 16, 1820
1812	Sylvester is granted 100 acres		Geeves, Philip, Jervis, James, <i>Rockdale, Its Beginning and Development</i> , 1954, The Council of the Municipality of Rockdale, Chapter <i>Introducing James Chandler</i> , pp 12-24 & <i>Earwood's Past</i> , Madden, B.J., Muir, Lesley
circa 1820-1821	James Chandler purchased Sylvester's Farm 100 acres		
1821	Chandler writes to His Excellency Governor Macquarie Captain General of His Majesty's forces asking "to expect, my property being worth Three thousand pounds sterling which same I intend employing in agriculture should encouragement be afforded me"		James Chandler of 99 Pitt Street, Sydney, letter dated July 25, 1821  Memorial (Fiche 3035; 4/1826 No. 20); NRS-899 Memorials to the Governor, 1810-1826 James Chandler [20], transcribed by Janette Pelosi, 15 August 2021
27 Aug 1822	The Land Grant of 1,200 acres is promised to Chandler by Governor Thomas Brisbane		NRS-937, Copies of letters sent within the Colony [Colonial Secretary], 01/01/1814-30/01/1827 [4/3506] p.209 [Reel 6009]
Thu, Oct 13th, 1825	NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, THAT TWELVE hundred acres of land, in the district of Botany Bay, having been measured to the undersigned, bounded on the one side by Captain Townsend's, Mr. Laycock's, and Thomas Sylvester's grants, and on the other sides by government grounds; all persons are cautioned to beware of trespassing thereon, by cutting down timber; running their stock, or in any other way detrimental to the interests of the same. James Chandler.		<i>The Australian</i> , Thursday 13 Oct, 1825, page 2 & <i>Earwood's Past</i> , Madden, B.J., Muir, Lesley & <i>The Australian</i> , Thursday, June 8, 1825 Page 2



<p>July 1st, 1829</p>	<p>Original land grant of 1,200 acres to Chandler finalised by 19 October, 1831 according to Joseph Davis application for Torrens Title N=5688 [NRS-13012-3-[6/10091]-PA 5688] for 50 and 24 acres dated October 1882</p>		<p>Colonial Secretary Register of Land Grants and Leases, 1822-1836. Volume 4 County of Cumberland only from 1823. Transcribed by Janette Pelosi, 2021</p>
<p>1831</p>	<p>Chandler's farm sized 1,200 acres of the land named Bexley and its spelling confirmed</p>	<p>Chandler, James (1796–1839)</p>	<p>Chandler, James, AO, writes to the Colonial Secretary regarding: confirming farm of 1200 acres name as Bexley. Letter dated October 18, 1831, 2/7823 (Reel 1109) 31/7590 COLONIAL SECRETARY'S OFFICE, SYDNEY, 29th MAY, 1832. DEEDS OF GRANT. TITLE-DEEDS, dated 19th October, 1831, of the undermentioned GRANTS OF LAND, described in the Government Notices of the 14th, 19th, and 29th September, 1831, have been this day transmitted to the Registrar of the Supreme Court, in order that, when duly enrolled, they may be forwarded, through the Surveyor-General, to the Collector of Internal Revenue, for the purpose of being delivered to the respective parties, upon payment of the Fees prescribed by the Government Notice of 9th January, 1832, and any arrears of Quit-rent which may be due thereon; viz. — ALEXANDRIA. New South Wales Government Gazette (Sydney, NSW: 1832-1900), Mon 31 Dec 1832 [Issue No.INDEX18320101-18321231]</p>

The Grant was finalised in 1829-1831. Chandler wrote to the Colonial Secretary on October 18, 1831 informing that his estate is to be called "Bexley." He also asked the grants of Winifred Flaherty and John Riley to be included in the surveyor's measurement. What is behind such a request we do not now know as they were never owned by Chandler. Source: Letter 31/7590 James Chandler to the Colonial Secretary. Letter 31/8520 T.L. Mitchell Library, SL of NSW

19 Oct 1831	The original subdivision map. 002 - Z/SP/B16/2 - Plan of Portion of the Bexley Estate - New Illawarra Rd, Ston....jpg State Library of NSW		MHNSW-StAC: DP 2451 as part of <i>Application 5688 to Bring Lands Under the Provisions of the Real Property Act (26 Victoria No 9)</i> , October 1882 The Grant became absolute and the total of Cnahdler's land holding was 1300 acres
1832	Chandler attempted to lease his estate by dividing it in 27 allotments 25-100 acres each for 21 years and to sell them on 20th June, 1833. Due to the isolation of the property, the disposing of it proved difficult.	Chandler, James, (1796–1839)	Geeves, Philip, <i>Rockdale, its Beginning and Development</i> , Chapter IV <i>Introducing James Chandler</i> & Larcombe, F. A., <i>Change &amp; Challenge, A History of the Municipality of Canterbury, NSW</i> , pages 84-97
1837	Bexley, sized 1300 acres was sold, but the new owner never resided at Bexley  Bexley is known as the Flower Garden in the Vicinity of the banks of the Cooks River	Charles Thompson of Clydsdale, ex-convict, the father of the Australian poet Thompson Jr.	

1841	<p>COOK'S RIVER. IT is the intention of the Proprietor to bring some allotments of this Estate into the market as soon as the surveys and plan can be completed, of which due notice and further particulars will be given in a future advertisement. The whole Estate comprises 1,300 acres, is known as '<b>Chandler's</b>' and '<b>Silvester's</b>' grants, and is situate six miles from' the boundary stone, or about one mile and three quarters from the dam. The intended great road now in progress to Wollongong, St Vincent's, Ulladulla, and the southern districts of the Colony, passes about a mile through the centre of this property, which must at no distant day enhance the value of Bexley, in a similar degree to that of all other properties so near the metropolis. The land is well stocked with all sorts of building timber, is well-watered, and possesses all the advantages of good soil, and other capabilities that can be desirable on such an extensive property. It joins on the Sydney side the land of the late S. Lord, Esq., called King's Grove, and Townson's grant, known as Lord's Forest, and is in the close neighbourhood of all the beautiful Villas in the district of Newtown, etc. One hundred acres of the Estate, called Silvester's grant (situated in the immediate vicinity of Canterbury, Petersham, the Estate of. Mr Unwin and others), has been cleared and stumped, and subdivided into convenient paddocks for cultivation, the soil of which is not inferior to any in the district, it contains also an orchard and garden of seven acres. The advantages of this property are thus minutely particularised, as the proprietor would have no objection to dispose of the whole together, by private bargain on reasonably liberal terms, (Silvester's grant could be sold separate from Chandler's.) All further Information may be obtained by addressing letters (post-paid), to the Proprietor, Mr C. Thompson, Windsor; or, to Mr P. A. Thompson, Office of Messrs Minithorpe and Gurner, Solicitors, George-street. Source: Advertising (1841, June 19). <i>The Australian (Sydney, NSW : 1824 - 1848)</i>, p. 1. Retrieved January 29, 2023, from <a href="http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article36851990">http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article36851990</a></p>		
1850	Sold as 1,300 acres	Charles James Tindell	MHNSW-StAC: <i>Application 5688 to Bring Lands Under the Provisions of the Real Property Act (26 Victoria No 9)</i> , October 1882,
1857	1300 acres subdivided and 800 acres were sold to John Garsed, a Sydney builder		NRS-17513-38-125-PA 5688, Original Indenture made on the first day of November of the 1859,
1859	John Garsed sold his 800 acres to William Alexander Wolfen, a Sydney merchant and Consular Representative for Sweden and Norway		between Frederick Michael Stokes of Sydney, William Alexander Wolfen, Esq. and Joseph Davis of Newtown, Butcher, where as Indenture dated December 4, 1858, made between Samuel Henry Jerry and William Thompson, to name Frederick Michael Stokes as a power of appointment to exercise, execute, convey and administer the sale of said parcel of the land (Lot 6) and premises containing 67 acres more or less to Joseph Davis.

1859	Further subdivision of Bexley resulting in Davis' acquisition of "50 acres 24 and a quarter perches ... surveyed by Mr Surveyor Siricom..."		MHNSW-StAC: <i>Application 5688 to Bring Lands Under the Provisions of the Real Property Act (26 Victoria No 9)</i> , October 1882, NSW State Archives and Records
C 1875	Construction of the residence. A 9' verandah once extended around all four sides of the house. The original kitchen, stables and servants quarters were detached and stood to the south-east of the house.		Lydham Hall and detached coach house, kitchen, stables, and servants' quarters built. Reputed to have been built by a Swedish stonemason named Sven Bengtson and his son Solomon Peter Benson, but no documentation located to confirm. No references to any mentioned names found in Sands' Sydney Directory as a stonemason, architect or bricklayer during the period 1858-1863.
11 Oct 1883	The Torrens Title Application 5688 lodged in October, 1882, was approved. NRS-17513-38-125-PA 5688. NSW Archives	Joseph Davis (c1825-1889)	Certificate of Title Vol 669 Fol 127 issued on the 11th October, 1883, stating Joseph Davis owned 49 acres one rood 36 perches. Viewed via <a href="https://hrrv.nswlrs.com.au">https://hrrv.nswlrs.com.au</a> .  Citations are from MHNSW-StAC: NRS-13012-3-[6/10091]-PA 5688 Primary Application - Joseph Davis, Parish of Saint George County of Cumberland, 08-11-1882 to 12-10-1883
1883 1884	Subdivision and sales initiated by Davis of all but Lydham Estate		130 - Z/SP/R11/128 - Lydham Hill Estate close to Rockdale station - Gannon's Forest Rd, Harrow Rd, Bay St, Frederick St, Stanley St, Herbert St, 1884 State Library of NSW Source: 059 - Z_SP_R11_56 State Library of NSW Cert of Title Vol 98 For 127 dated 10 November, 1883
1889	Subdivision is finalised and new parcels sold by William Lorel Davis and Ellen Davis	William Lorel Davis & Ellen Davis	068 - Z_SP_R11_66 - Rockdale, Lydham Hill house, garden, orchard - Gannon's Forest Rd, Clarence Rd, Frederick St, Stanley St, Herbert St, Oswell St, 1889 Certificate of Title Vol 942 Fol 50 dated 21 October, 1889 Viewed via <a href="https://hrrv.nswlrs.com.au">https://hrrv.nswlrs.com.au</a>

1890	Lydham Hill sold to F. J. Gibbins		Certificate of Title Vol 970 Fol 139, 2 June 1890, Viewed via <a href="https://hllrv.nswlrs.com.au">https://hllrv.nswlrs.com.au</a>
1908	Further Subdivisions and sales	Frederick John Gibbins (1841-1917)	Promotional Poster, 1908 041 - Z/SP/B16/36 - Bexley 25 building sites - Herbert St, Gannons Forest Rd, Vi...
1917	Further Subdivisions and sales		014 - Z_SP_R11_13 - Bexley-Rockdale, Gibbins Lydham Hall Estate - Forest Rd, Clarence St, Oswell St, Herbert St, Joseph St, 1917
1917	Change from Joseph Street to Lydham Avenue	<i>Government Gazette</i> of the State of New South Wales, Friday, May 25, 1917 [Issue No. 78] Page 2755; <a href="https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/226215853">https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/226215853</a>	
1917	Further subdivisions of Lydham Hill and sales PROPERTY SALES. <i>Richardson and Wrench, in conjunction with Mr. W. Thom, report having offered on Saturday afternoon, by public auction, on behalf of the trustees of the late F. J. Gibbins, the Lydham Hall Estate, Rockdale, comprising the cottage, Lydham Hall, and 12 allotments, fronting Joseph and Oswell streets, all of which were sold. The cottage, Lydham Hall, realised £810, and the allotments from £2 10s to £4 12s 6d per foot frontage. Total amount of sales £2885. There were a large attendance and spirited bidding.</i>	William Thorn and Emma Pattison	<p>Certificate of Title Vol 940 or 970 Fol 139. Viewed via <a href="https://hllrv.nswlrs.com.au">https://hllrv.nswlrs.com.au</a></p> <p>MHNSW-StAC: The Will and Testament of F. J. Gibbins: William Thorn, accountant and Gibbins' son-in-law, and Emma Pattison, Gibbins' daughter, were named as the Will's Executors</p> <p>The article in <i>Sydney Morning Herald</i> (NSW: 1842 - 1954), Monday 2 July 1917, page 9, suggested that sales took place, but no document related to such sale located.</p> <p>The next sale took place in 1922 as recorded further</p> <p>TBC: DP 8959 TBC: by 1913 it was 2 acres 3 rods 12 purchase DP 2451 Valued at 1,600 pounds</p>
1922	Subdivision and sales of parts of Lydham Hill Estate (such name was used in the historical maps)	Alfred Oliver (c 1863-1935), Master Butcher	<p>Certificate of Title Vol 3295 Fol 234, 24 March, 1922 Viewed via <a href="https://hllrv.nswlrs.com.au">https://hllrv.nswlrs.com.au</a></p> <p>William Thorn and Emma Pattison sold Lydham to Alfred Oliver</p>
1924 1925	Valuation Roll 1089 for 18, Lydham Avenue, Rockdale, names Oliver Alfred of 18, Pitt Street, Sydney, as the owner for the above address in December 1, 1922 - September 1, 1925. Source: NSW State Archives: NRS-14465 Valuation rolls, Rockdale Municipality, Lydham Avenue		

1934	Subdivision and sales by Alfred Oliver	Alfred Oliver (c 1863-1935)	Certificate of Title Vol 4664 Fol 187 Viewed via <a href="https://hlrv.nswlrs.com.au">https://hlrv.nswlrs.com.au</a>
1935	Subdivision and sales of parts of Lydham Hall	Alice Ann Emanuel (b. 1895) and William Oliver (b. 1894)	Primary App No 5688 Vol 5313 Fols 44 & 45 Viewed via <a href="https://hlrv.nswlrs.com.au">https://hlrv.nswlrs.com.au</a> on June 19, 2021
1958	Subdivision and sales of parts of Lydham Hall	George James Digby Long and Valmai Winifred Long	Certificate of Title Vol 7492 Fol 109, DP 8959, 9 May 1958 Viewed via <a href="https://hlrv.nswlrs.com.au">https://hlrv.nswlrs.com.au</a>
7 July 1959	Further subdivision and sales of parts of Lydham Hall Estate		
1970	Sold to Rockdale Council	Sold to Rockdale Council	Transfer M54690 to The Rockdale Municipal Council on 30 October 1970 (Certificate of Title Vol 7492 Fol 109 to Computer Folio A/387441)
1986	<b>Permanent Conservation Order No 477</b> in pursuance of section 44 of the Heritage Act 1977, I, the Minister of Planning and Environment, do... and declare that this permanent conservation order apply to the curtilage ... (H.C. 33396) Signed by Bob Carr, 20th August, 1986	Rockdale Municipal Council	Government Gazette of the State of New South Wales, Friday, August 22, 1986. Schedule A for the building known as Lydham Hall, 18 Lydham Avenue, Rockdale. Schedule B on the parcel of land situated at Rockdale, Municipality of Rockdale, Parish of St George, County of Cumberland, being lot AP 387441, as shown edged heavy black on plan catalogued HC 1197 in the office of the Heritage Council of NSW. (2479)
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