

## R.D.H.S. - THE FIRST YEARS

by Pat Smyth

The existence of Ryde District Historical Society is owed to Ryde Rotary Club, and especially to its President, Mr. A.W. (Bill) Stacey, whose idea it was to make the foundation of a Historical Society for the area Rotary's project for his presidential year.

A public meeting was held in Ryde Town Hall in Blaxland Road on Thursday, 26 October, 1961 and 72 people attended, including Ald. C. Cutler, Mr. A.W. Stacey and Dr. Colin Roderick. It was moved by Mr. Stacey and seconded by Mr. John Booth that a society be formed. It would be known as Ryde District Historical Society. A committee comprising Messrs. Stacey, K Charlton, T. Moon, P. Henry and Miss L. Taylor. was elected to arrange the proposed society's first meeting.

As a result, the inaugural meeting was held in Ryde Public School library (the original school building) on 5 December, 1961. Officers elected were:

Patron: Dr. Colin Roderick  
President: Mr. A. W. Stacey  
Vice-Presidents: Mr. K. Charlton & Mr. T. Moon  
Secretary: Mr. F. McCulloch  
Treasurer: Mr. P. Henry  
Trustees: Mr. J. Benson & Mr. A. Darvall  
Cmmttee Members: Mr. L. Ashe, Mr. J. Forsyth, Mrs M. Haddon, Mrs B. Lisyak, & Miss L Taylor.

Annual membership was to be 10/- and life membership £5. Meetings were to be held on the second Tuesday of alternate months.

At the next meeting, in February, 1962, sub-committees were formed for research on 1) Buildings, 2) Monuments, 3) Streets, and 4) For arrangement of social functions. In June of that year the meeting place was changed to *The Hermitage*. Being the former home of John Blaxland, this was a popular venue and 134 people attended. A paper was read by M. Houston on John and Gregory Blaxland and this was a very interesting meeting.



*Ryde Town Hall in 1964 (Ryde District Historical Society)*

At the society's first annual meeting on 9 October 1962, the Treasurer reported a credit balance of £55-6-10. During this first year, committee members had been busy with research and programme arrangements and the following year was to be an even busier one for members.

In March, 1963, the first of our exhibitions was held at Ermington Public School to celebrate its 75th anniversary. The display was rather a paltry one, consisting of a small number of photographs, mostly on loan from members and friends, newspaper cuttings and a few historic items that had been collected during the year, but it did create interest.

At the April meeting John Forsyth accepted an appointment to record and classify information, a task that he continued to do with care and competence for many years. There was a request from Ryde Council for ideas for a proposed Coat of Arms, so a committee, comprising Messrs. Stacey, McCulloch, Trevitt and Henry was elected to formulate a suitable design. The efforts of these people were rewarded by the Council's acceptance of their design in August.

In those early years, the Historical Society not only had a good relationship with Ryde Council, but thanks mainly to Bill Stacey, a former school inspector and Frank McCulloch, principal of a primary school in the Ryde area, we also had a close liaison with the local schools. During 1963, it was proposed by the President that should publish *A Basic History of Ryde*, suitable for school children as well as adults and members were asked to consider ideas regarding format.



*Ryde Public School - the 1868 Building (Ryde District Historical Society)*

In December, 1964, it had been decided to change the annual meetings to February, and from that time, meetings would be held monthly. Owing to the ruling that Presidents serve a maximum of three years in office, (unless nobody else was available), Bill Stacey stepped down at the 1964 annual meeting and Roland Trevitt became the second President.

The first edition of *A Basic History of Ryde* edited by A. W. Stacey was published in March, 1965, and proved to be very popular both with schools and members of the community. One of our most memorable tours - to Fort Denison - was held in May of that year and was well attended.

From the formation of R.D.H.S., lack of storage space had been one of our biggest problems. Crockery, donated by Mr. Allport, which was used for supper after meetings, was stored in a box

on top of a cupboard in our meeting room at Ryde School, and other items were scattered in members' homes. Council had been asked for help in this matter, but so far nothing was available.

Our collection of photographs was very small, so with the hope of increasing this collection, a meeting was held with Ryde Camera Club in October, 1988. As a result, a competition was held with prizes donated by the Society for the best black and white photograph and colour slide of historic sites in the local area. This marked the beginning of our photographic collection.

The year 1967 marked the 175th anniversary of the arrival of the first settlers in what is now known as Ryde and celebrations were held during the Australia Day weekend. Descendants were invited to a special service at St. Anne's Church, followed by afternoon tea in the church hall. St. Anne's had also made space available to us in the old Court House on the Sunday and Monday, for a display of maps, church records and photographs, many of which had been supplied by Ryde Camera Club. The response to this celebration was overwhelming! One hundred and eight letters were received by R.D.H.S., many containing valuable information about families. These included one from Miss Fitzhardinge, a descendant of James Devlin. As a result, in April a visit was paid to Miss Fitzhardinge at Burradoo, and she provided detailed information about the Devlin family, the original owners of Willandra.

The first issue of *The Ryde Recorder*, a monthly newsletter edited by John Stewart, was published in March of 1967. Other activities included photographic displays at the Bank of N.S.W., West Ryde, Epping Boys' High School, Ryde East Public School, Ryde Regional Shopping Centre and Macquarie University Library. Welcome donations received during 1967 included display boards from the Bank of N.S.W. and colour slides from Ryde Camera Club.

In 1968, we saw the restructure of *Weemala*, the restoration of *Eastwood House* and also the demolition of St. Anne's Rectory. Our photographic collection was growing, thanks to Ryde Camera Club, who helped us to acquire a further 70 transparencies and 50 black and white photographs at a reasonable cost. A tour of Curzon Hall was a highlight of the year.

At the annual meeting in February, 1969, Gavin Cashman was elected President, and this was to be another busy year, mainly because of planning for Council's centenary celebrations to be held in 1970. A proposal by R.D.H.S. for Ryde Council to erect plaques at historic sites had been accepted and a committee comprising, Bill Stacey, John Stewart and Pat Smyth was formed to compile relevant information to be used on these. Council had commissioned Mr. Philip Geeves to write a history of Ryde, and the Historical Society was assisting him with information.

During this year, representatives of R.D.H.S. attended the opening of the restructured *Weemala* and the opening of *Kirkby Gardens*, the block of units built on the site of St. Anne's Rectory in Church Street. Due to the initiative of Gavin Cashman, plans were made for an Australia Day function to be conducted by Ryde Council and the R.D.H.S. in Ryde Civic Centre in January, 1970. This commemoration, including a naturalisation ceremony became an annual event, but the Historical Society is no longer involved.

In May, 1970, the good news was that Ryde Council offered us temporary accommodation in the basement of the old library building in Devlin St.; it became available later in the year when the new library was opened. This offer was accepted with enthusiasm.



*The old Ryde Library Building in Devlin Street (Ryde District Historical Society 1996)*

Plans were underway for a design for a float for the local government centenary procession to be held in October, and committee members decided that the float would include representations of Bennelong, a Currency Lass, a Marine and a model of Squire's Brewery. Also, a large drawing depicting the period of early settlement at Kissing Point, by local artist, Esme Hopkins would be included. Appropriate costumes were made for those taking part, and in October, a working bee was arranged to decorate the float. Mayor, Mick Lardelli was very helpful to the society at this time. The procession was a great success.

Other activities during 1970 were public lectures in Ryde Public School library, and talks to Torch Bearers of Legacy by Gavin Cashman and to St. Anne's Guild and Hunters Hill View Club by Bill Stacey. Displays were held at Eastwood Building Society, Ryde Bank of N.S.W. and Ryde Wesley Church. An interesting tour of Snapper Island, with Mr. Len Forsyth as our guide, was held in September.

Mr. John Booth proposed that Council should be asked to acquire *Addington* as a permanent home for the society as the building was now for sale as Miss Lilian Benson, R.D.H.S. member and owner of *Addington* had recently been forced to leave her home because of ill health. Representatives of the society were invited to address Ryde Council on the matter and it did appear that *Addington* might become our home but this did not eventuate.

With the new library building completed in November, we were at last able to move into our new premises. Our first meeting there was held on 5 December, 1970. The meeting room was small, storage space and facilities were limited but after 9 years we did have our own headquarters with some off-street parking and we were delighted to be there. We quickly arranged working bees to clear the rooms and arrange our possessions.

A bus tour of Brush Farm and Eastwood House was held on 30 May 1971 and at Eastwood House we were fortunate to have Mr. Trevor Terry, youngest son of Edward Terry as our guide. In 1971, the house was not surrounded by other buildings as it is today, and it was possible to envisage the home as it was when the Terry family lived there. Other excursions during that year were to *Ryedale House* at West Ryde and to Nurse McPhail's Cottage, opposite St. Anne's in Church Street.

Members continued to visit schools and organisations to give addresses on local history; research continued and our museum collection was growing.



*The old Ryde Library Building in Devlin Street (Ryde District Historical Society 1996)*

At the 1972 annual meeting, Mr. Trevor Moon was elected President, and one of his suggestions was that our rooms should be opened to the public one afternoon a week. As our collection of photographs and historic items had increased, the library had provided some shelving and we had invested in a new display stand. It was decided to open every Thursday from 2-4 pm. Seven members offered to do roster duty.

A special Christmas function was held that year. Ryde Council made space available to us at the Civic Centre, the R.D.H.S. members did the catering and 170 people attended. It was a very successful function.

The following year a photographic exhibition, lasting three weeks, was held at the Rural Bank in April / May. A bus tour of historic sites, including *Addington* was also held in May. In July, there was exciting news from Ryde Council. We were informed that the Senior Citizens were to move from the main part of the old library building into new premises and that space would be available to us at the end of August. It was proposed that we would have an official opening day on 18 September. As well as moving our possessions, this meant organising publicity and planning a programme and display format, catering and extra seating. Working bees were arranged for 3 weekends prior to opening day and there were many enthusiastic helpers. Invitations were sent to the Mayor and aldermen, Ryde Rotary Club and to organisations and people who had helped us over the past years. The event was well attended.

Those early years were difficult, with few resources and very little recorded history of the area. However, what we did have was a team of capable, well-organised workers and lots of enthusiasm. We now had our own premises with a large area for meetings and functions, adequate display and storage space in a venue close to Ryde Shopping Centre and public transport, which meant that many visitors called in on our open days. The culmination of our efforts during those years was very rewarding.