

Hurstville's History

A story about people

The history of Hurstville is primarily a study of its people, both past and present — what they did, what they brought to the district, how they reacted to local conditions, both natural and man-made . . .

People are the real interest of history, whether it be finding out how our forbears lived, or how decisions were made which still affect our daily lives, such as the location of parks, roads, railway lines, and many other things.

Hurstville today has become a thriving Municipality covering over 2,460 hectares (or 9½ square miles) and with a population approaching 70,000.

It is a developed and important part of the Sydney Metropolitan area (one of the world's major cities) and provides pleasant conditions in which to live, work and play.

Less than 200 years ago, the district was virgin country: rugged bushland interspersed with magnificent timber forests and damp mangrove swampland. Its only inhabitants were the local aboriginal tribes who had hunted and fished here for thousands of years, and Australia's native wildlife, such as kangaroos and wallabies.

The discovery of Botany Bay by Captain James Cook, and the decision by the British Government to

establish a penal colony there, were two events that were to eventually change the Hurstville district, and much of Australia, practically beyond recognition.

Between 1804 (the year of the first land grant) and the present day, the centuries-old bushland was to be transformed into an orderly pattern of homes, shops, factories, parks, streets and roads.

This process did not take place overnight. Before the Hurstville district developed into suburbs, the land had been settled, and it had become an area of farms, orchards, woods and creeks. This phase was to last for less than a century.

Continued expansion of the Sydney metropolis made it inevitable that Hurstville would sooner or later become a part of the whole metropolitan area.

This brochure has been produced by Hurstville Council to introduce children of the Municipality to the history of their local area. Because it is a story of people, it is a history in which every present-day resident of the Municipality, whether young or old, will one day become a part.



Forest Road, Hurstville — 1911.

This leaflet has been produced and published by Hurstville Municipal Council for distribution to local school children.

Hannah Laycock

Hannah Laycock came to New South Wales as a free settler in 1791. She was the 32 year-old wife of Quartermaster Thomas Laycock of the New South Wales Corps. However, she was able to make a highly successful career for herself in the new colony.

In 1804, she received a grant of land (500 acres) on the south side of Cook's River, for which she was to pay a rent of 10 shillings a year. She called the property "King's Grove Farm" after Governor King, who made the grant. The grant extended from Stoney Creek Road to William Street and from Kingsgrove Road to Bexley Road.

By 1814, Hannah Laycock was supplying 2000 lb of meat to the Government — a business venture which expanded rapidly.

In 1829, she sold the Kings Grove farm. However she did not live long after the sale, and died in Sydney Hospital on May 12, 1831, at the age of 73 years.

She was buried in the old Devonshire Street Cemetery. After the removal of this cemetery to make way for Central Railway, her remains were transferred to Botany in 1901. The headstone could be seen until a few years ago, but cannot be located now.

The suburb of Kingsgrove includes most of what was once Hannah Laycock's farm. The railway line from Sydney bisects the original grant as it approaches Kingsgrove Station.

The family name survives in the district in Laycock Street, Bexley North, and also in Laycock Road, Penshurst.

Governor Macquarie spoke kindly of Hannah Laycock as "the good old lady". She has left her mark on the country as a pioneer settler and landholder, owner of a considerable number of cattle, and supplier of fresh meat for the early colonists of New South Wales.

Two early pioneers

James Oatley

James Oatley arrived in Sydney Town as a convict on January 27, 1815. Before his sentence, he had been a little-known watch and clockmaker living in Stafford, England.

Upon arrival, he was permitted to set up in business in George Street, on a site opposite the present Town Hall. He was soon commissioned by Governor Macquarie to make the turret clock in the prisoners' barracks, a building now in use as law courts but then being constructed by fellow convict and architect Francis Greenway on the corner of King and Macquarie Streets.

While waiting for land grants offered for this service, he continued his trade and is reputed to have made at least six outstanding grandfather clocks.

In 1831, he settled on 175 acres of land in the Beverly Hills-Kingsgrove district. He subsequently acquired more land in the area, and combined farming with his clock business until he died in 1839. He was buried on his farm, his grave being near the present Ponyara Road — Pallamana Parade intersection.

James Oatley's grave lay forgotten for many years, and his name stirred few memories.

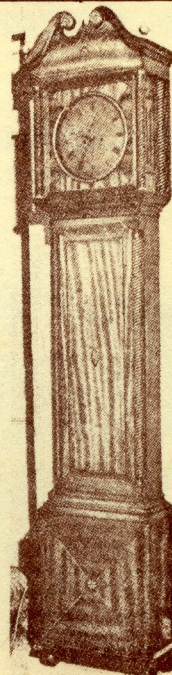
However, in May, 1921, an anonymous report appeared in the "Truth" newspaper.

It read: "While out for a stroll yesterday, I came across an old grave, near what appears to have been a farm many years ago. This farm is situated in the country between Penshurst and Lakemba. On the slab of stone covering the grave is the following inscription: 'Sacred to the memory of James Oatley. Obit. October 8th, 1839. Aetat 70 years.'"

In addition to the headstone (which is now in the Hurstville Historical Museum), and the general name for the suburb, James Oatley is also commemorated in the district by Oatley Bay and Oatley Park.

A clock built by

James Oatley in 1822.



Early history

The Hurstville district was left very much to the aborigines and kangaroos, with occasional visits from escaped convicts or hunters employed by the Government, until around 1808.

Following the grant to Hannah Laycock at Kingsgrove in 1804, the next land grants in the district were to Captain John Townson, and his brother Dr Robert Townson.

The Townson Grants

John Townson was an officer in the NSW Corps from 1790 to 1800. He returned from England in August 1806, on the same ship which carried Governor Bligh, and he had with him a letter stating the intention of the Secretary of State to direct Bligh to grant Townson 2000 acres. Bligh had not received such instructions, but he offered to allow Townson to select, occupy and make use of the land pending authority from London. Townson refused as he felt that it would leave him at the will and pleasure of Bligh.

Perhaps before Governor Bligh was arrested in the Rum Rebellion on 26th January, 1808, or certainly soon after that date, Captain John Townson occupied the land which was covered by the grant dated 9th July, 1808 of 1950 acres described as on the south side of Mrs Hannah Laycock's King's Grove Farm and to be known as Townson's Farm.

This area is bounded by King Georges Road, Stoney Creek Road and a continued line to Preddy's Road, a line along Preddy's Road and continuing to just east of the Railway line between Kogarah and Carlton near Bowns Road, and a line passing along Tanner Avenue back to King Georges Road.

On the same date (9th July, 1808), John Townson was given 50 acres on Kogarah Bay.

In July 1807, Doctor Robert Townson, a classical scholar and scientist, arrived in Sydney with a similar letter. Again Bligh offered to let Robert Townson select suitable land until he received instructions, but this was refused.

On 1st November, 1808, Robert Townson was given a grant of 1925 acres adjoining his brother's grant on its south-west side (King Georges Road). He was given another grant of 75 acres at Blakehurst including Tom Ugly's Point.

On 7th April, 1809, Robert Townson was given a further 480 acres but this and the earlier grant of 1925 acres were cancelled on 1st November, 1809 when Robert Townson settled for 1605 acres in one new grant bounded by King Georges Road, Broadarrow Road, Romilly Street, Bonds road, Boundary Road and a continued line to Hurstville Road, and Hurstville Road to King Georges Road.

On 24th October, 1809, John Townson had been granted a further 250 acres bounded by Kingsgrove Road, Stoney Creek Road, King Georges Road, and a straight line between each end of Morgan Street,

because Townson said that about 300 acres of his main grant (Bexley, Carlton and Allawah) was 'so bad as to be completely useless'.

When Governor Macquarie arrived in Sydney on 31st December, 1809, to replace Bligh and to take control from the Officers of the NSW Corps, he cancelled all land grants made by the rebels. Because John Townson was dangerously ill, and to avoid legal problems which might arise if he died, Macquarie confirmed the original grants to John Townson on 11th April, 1810.

The grants of 1605 acres, the 75 acres at Blakehurst, and 1000 acres at Minto were re-granted to Robert Townson in May 1811, but dated from 1st January, 1810.

Captain John Townson sold his grants to Simeon Lord in 1812 for 800 pounds, which was an excellent profit for land he had obtained free less than 5 years before. Lord's ownership of the grants led to the district being known as Lord's Bush or Lord's Forest. In 1850, Michael Gannon acquired the main grant and the area became known as Gannon's Forest.

In 1830, John Connell acquired the main grant from the estate of Robert Townson, and the locality became known as Connell's Bush.

All that remains of the Brothers are a street name in Kogarah, and the name Townson Bay, which is more commonly known as Kogarah Bay.

Other land grants were made, and land was bought, sold and subdivided into smaller farms. Gradually the area was being converted from dense scrub and timber forest into farmland.

Mitchell's Road

For many years, the only road south from Sydney was via Enfield. So, in 1843, Major Sir Thomas Mitchell, Surveyor General for the Colony, was set the task of connecting Sydney with the Illawarra district.

His road crossed Cook's River at Tempe, then continued southwards to the Georges River at Lugarno and through to Heathcote and Bulli. With a few slight deviations, Mitchell's Road, the "new" Illawarra Road, is the Forest Road of today.

Mitchell's Road was extremely important in opening up the land to the south of Cook's River to new settlers.

Timber Getters

Most of the first settlers were timber getters. To be had were splendid forests of Turpentine, Black-butt, Iron bark, Bloodwood and Red Gum. These pioneers lived in houses made from Turpentine slabs and with a stringy bark roof.

Timber proved to be a major early industry of the Hurstville District. With expansion in wharf construction, and the need for ballast for empty ships returning to England, there was a ready market for all types of wood, particularly the turpentine wood from Peakhurst.

Besides timber and farming, another early occupation was ship-building. A yard at O'Connell's Bay built little coasting boats. One of the vessels built at Oatley Bay was used for the China trade. Locally built luggers were also used to carry the lime produced by burning shells in the vicinity of Lime Kiln Bay to Sydney.

A Boom In Inns!

The early timber getters and charcoal burners were men renowned for their hard work, and great thirst! Bush shanties sold home-made liquor and these sly-grog shops were said to be the curse of the district.

The first publican's licence issued was for the "Man of Kent" in Kingsgrove Road near Stoney Creek Road in 1850. The "Robin Hood and Little John" in Stoney Creek Road near Gloucester Road was licenced in 1854.

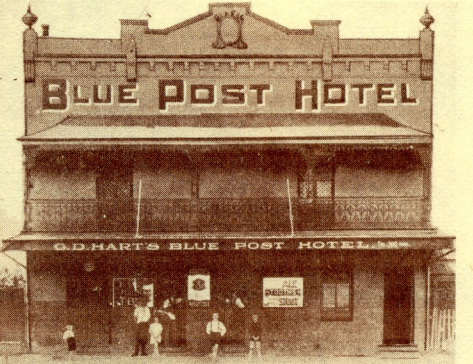
Although it was not licenced until 1857, another inn was said to have been built about 1850. This was the Blue Post Inn, a low weatherboard structure, built by Richard Fulliames. It stood in Forest Road, nearly opposite where the public school now stands. Around the inn, the village of Gannon's Forest developed.

About 1852, the Currency Lass Inn became a rival of the Blue Post. This Inn stood near the present Post Office. It was first licenced in 1855.

Inns and public houses played a very important part in the early social history of Australia. In those days, they took the part now played by Clubs, Town Halls, and other meeting places. At the Inns, local problems and

needs were discussed, and decisions made, by concerned citizens.

The Blue Post Inn was the meeting place of the Forest Road Trust, which maintained the road, the need for the establishment of the public school and of the municipality were discussed there, and it was the polling place for the election of the first aldermen for the Municipal Council in 1887.



Blue Post Hotel.

Coming of the railway

The opening of the railway line to Hurstville in 1884 was of major importance in the history of the district. On October 15 of that year, the leading article in the Sydney "Echo" began with these words:

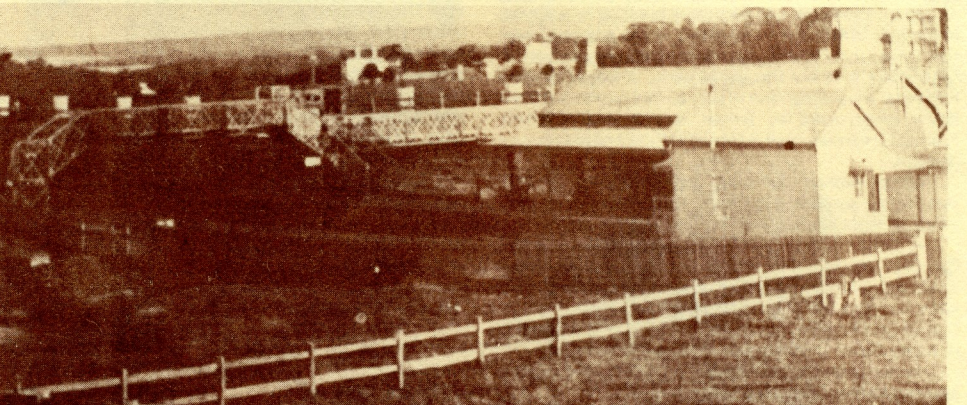
"Was there ever before such a fuss over the opening of nine miles of railway as that which is being made today about the opening of the first portion of the Illawarra line, from Sydney to Hurstville."

Agitation for a railway connection to the Illawarra District on the south coast had started in the 1860's, as the only method of bringing Illawarra coal to Sydney was by ship. This was difficult, due to inability to build wharves around the Wollongong area, and the service was irregular. There were numerous deputations to the Government, but it was not until 1881 that construction commenced.

Although the railway to Hurstville was not built primarily to open up the suburbs but simply as the first section of the Illawarra railway, the line rapidly proved its value to the Hurstville district. Local settlers now

had a rapid and safe means of taking themselves and their produce to Sydney. Land values all along the line skyrocketed. Fortunes were made as land was

subdivided and auctioned off every Saturday. The coming of the railway signalled the birth of what we now know as modern Hurstville.



Hurstville Railway Station — 1893.

Hurstville becomes a municipality

Local government began in New South Wales in 1842 when the City of Sydney was formed. In the following years, numerous district Councils were set up in various parts of the Colony, but it was not until 1867 that Municipalities as they are known today were allowed by law.

The first district in the St. George area to take advantage of the 1867 Municipalities' Act was the district of Rockdale, which became the West Botany Council in 1871.

Several years passed before the citizens of the Hurstville district achieved the same goal. Canterbury Municipality was incorporated in 1879, the Kogarah district became a municipality in 1885, and, in the following year, a petition signed by 635 persons requested the Government to form Hurstville Council. At the time, the population was set down at 1,050 and the area at 8,500 acres.

New Municipality

The municipal district of Hurstville came into being on March 28, 1887, with Alderman Alexander Milsoop as first mayor, and Mr. George Leeder as first Council Clerk.

First elections for aldermen were held at the Blue Post Inn — then located opposite the present Hurstville Public School — and the first meeting place for the new Council was in Treacy's shop, which stood at the corner of Forest Road and Park Road. The first Council Chambers were on the opposite corner — in a building which had been an office of the Bank of Australasia.

Work Begins

Council's operations started with two men and a horse and cart.

Most work was done by contract, and one of the first jobs was the reconditioning of Forest road stretching from Harrow Road to the punt at Lugarno. The government contributed only £50 a mile and more than £2,000 was spent on the road in addition to the government contribution.

Another costly road was Queen Victoria Street, Bexley (now in Rockdale Municipality). Three stone bridges — at a cost of about £1,000 — were required in this street.

In the depression in the 1890's, unemployed men were used to construct Gloucester Road. Half the men's wages were contributed by the government.

First With Library

By 1895, a library had been established — making Hurstville one of the few Councils possessing one at the time. A further reference occurs to the library in July, 1896, when it was proposed to open it on Monday and Wednesday nights from 7 to 9 p.m., and on Saturday afternoons from 2 to 4.30 p.m.

Also, in 1896, Council decided that the Council Clerk should have a bicycle on which he could collect the overdue rates!

In July, 1908, Council was of the opinion that a Police Station should be established at Hurstville. In the same year, a rate of 3d in the pound was set.

Rapid Development

The municipality had now begun to grow so rapidly that, in 1912, nearly 300 new dwellings had been built to house a population increase of 1,000. Development was so fast that it was difficult for Council to keep up with provision of necessary services.

In 1915, the Mayor stated that there were nearly 50 miles of roads in the Municipality as yet unformed, and some 16 miles of formed streets that required reforming.

Development from 1887 until 1945 had meant that the Municipality had become almost entirely residential in character. There were very few industries in the area.

However, new town planning regulations in 1946 set aside large sections of the Municipality for industrial use. As a result, there are some 500 production centres in operation — covering the whole range of light industrial activity.

New Council Chambers

After many different meeting places over the years, Council decided to build the Hurstville Civic Centre which was opened in 1962. Constructed at a cost of \$700,000, the Centre is now the headquarters for Council's business as well as providing facilities (library, halls, etc) to make it a focal point for the whole community.

ST. GEORGE COUNTY COUNCIL

Hurstville Council joined with the Councils of Rockdale, Bexley and Kogarah in 1920 to form the St. George County Council (the Municipality of Bexley later became a part of Rockdale Municipality).

The County Council was formed because local residents were unwilling to wait until the City of Sydney was ready to supply the St. George district with power. Instead, they decided to organise it as quickly as possible themselves.

The original scheme decided upon by the County Council provided for the erection of distributors to serve 2,000 customers in five years. So great was the demand, however, that mains had to be erected to serve over 10,000 customers in the first 12 months.

On March 9, 1923, the current was officially switched on. However, a temporary supply had been provided at Hurstville in October 1922.

The St. George County Council was the first of its kind to be formed in Australia, and provided the cheapest charge for domestic power in Australia when it began operations in 1923.

HURSTVILLE PARK AND OVAL

Development of Hurstville Park and Oval goes back to early this century when Council acquired 7 acres of land in Dora Street through to Patrick Street.

A small band of enthusiastic residents were determined to see that Hurstville possessed a ground with a top quality turf wicket.



Very old photo of Hurstville Oval.

Residents of Hurstville Municipality are justifiably proud of the sporting achievements of the St. George district.

It is of interest to note that the first recreation ground in Hurstville was Chappelow's paddock, which included all of the ground formerly known as the brickworks. The ground was not far from the old Blue Post Inn.

Race meetings were held in the paddock, and, although trees, stumps and holes made the course a very rough one, people came from Liverpool, Blacktown, Parramatta and even from Sydney. The racing lasted all day and was followed by a dance at night.

On the day following the races, a pigeon-shooting contest was usually held!

THE FIRST SCHOOLS

Education in the district began early in the 1850's when the Lord's Forest Church of England School began at present-day Hurstville. It closed in 1875.

Other schools in the district were little more than family affairs

The first public school in the district was Peakhurst Public School. With Mr. Innes Scott as headmaster, it came into existence on August 28, 1871. It replaced a Wesleyan school called "George's River", which had commenced in 1860.

Classes commenced in 1876 at Hurstville Public School for 36 pupils with Mr. M. Lappan as teacher.

Other schools, both public and private, rapidly followed throughout the district.

Later, in 1916, instruction in technical subjects began for the upper classes at Hurstville Public School. Gradually, Hurstville became the centre for technical training for a wide area, and, in 1927, plans were drawn up for a proper junior technical college

This building — at a cost of £32,863 — was completed in the following year.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY

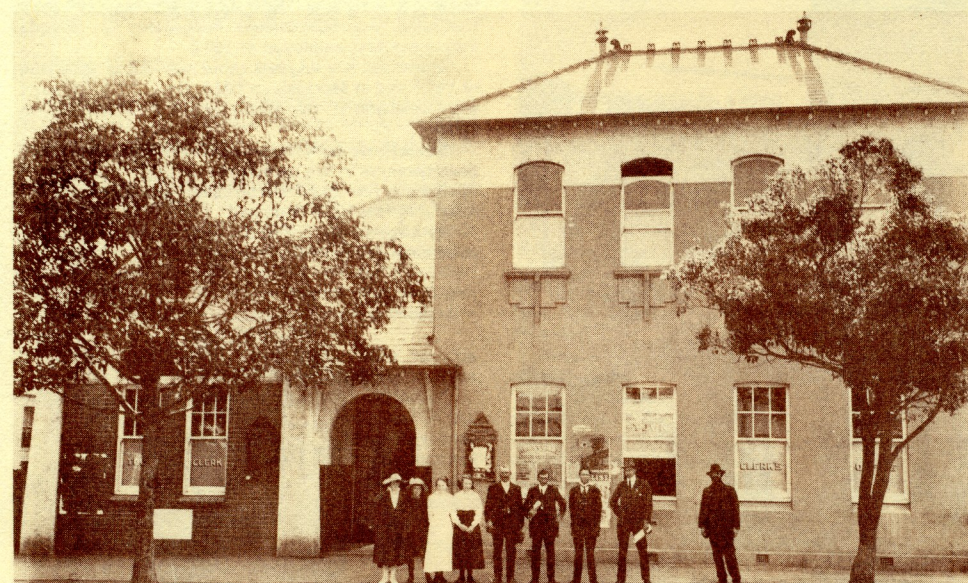
Hurstville has an active Historical Society which is interested in every aspect of the history of Hurstville and district. Lectures are arranged, historical excursions are held and publications are produced on the history of Hurstville.

As well as a Newsletter containing articles on historical matters sent to each member monthly, the Society has published the following:

- ★ The Story of James Oatley
 - ★ Hannah Laycock of King's Grove Farm
 - ★ The Incorporation of Hurstville 1884-1887
 - ★ "Forest to Suburbia" (The History of Hurstville Municipality)
 - ★ The Background to the Townson Grants (St. George district)
 - ★ History of the Suburb of Hurstville, with historical photos, in the Centenary of Hurstville Public School 1876-1976.
- Publications on Penshurst, Mortdale and Oatley, Peakhurst and Kingsgrove are in preparation.

An historical museum is also maintained at the Civic Centre in which all kinds of historical records and exhibits are kept. Open days are held periodically during which members of the public can view its valuable collection of relics from the past.

The Society can be contacted through Hurstville Municipal Council (phone 579-6222).



Council Officers and staff outside second Council Chambers — 1902.

Memories, memories . . .

JUST ASK QUESTIONS

A great amount of interesting local history can be learned — just by talking to the senior citizens in our community.

Many of them have seen at first hand some of the events referred to in this brochure.

Anyone who is now retired has lived through great historical changes. They have seen the world pass from the horse and carriage age to the motor, and now the space and computer age.

They also remember what their own grandparents have told them about the early times — which means that youngsters can still find out, in conversation, not just in books, what Hurstville was like for their great-great grandparents' generation.

Our senior citizens do not talk about the past to the young — usually because no-one asks them! If an interest is shown in their early days, most are more than happy to paint a picture in words of what Hurstville used to be like.

Besides your own relatives, it is possible to meet senior citizens through the senior citizens clubs throughout the Municipality, or in nursing and convalescent homes. However, you are just as likely to be able to strike up a conversation in a park or shopping centre, too!

Don't be afraid to ask questions. It is one of the most important ways in which our links with the past — and our own heritage — can be preserved.

Some local citizens have put pen to paper to describe the earlier Hurstville they knew. Here are some excerpts:

Mr. E.R. Fripp (former Mayor) writing in the 1960's:

"About 90 years ago my uncle, Charles Fripp, started a Bus Service from Hurstville to Newtown, then known as St. Peters, and this formed the only public transport to the city.

"The whole district from Hurstville to Liverpool was then dense forest, broken only here and there by small settlers' homes, mostly market gardeners and timber getters."

Frank Pickering, Hurstville:

"I was born at Peakhurst, along with all my brothers and sisters, on February 13, 1884. I was present in my mother's arms when the first official train steamed into Hurstville in October, 1884. My grandmother was the first white woman to cross Botany Bay. She was rowed across by King Kooman, leader of the Aboriginal Tribe.

"My wife was born at Petersham and brought to Hurstville at an early age. Her mother was the licensee of the old Blue Post Hotel which is now closed. It was situated in Forest Road, almost opposite the Hurstville Public School."

Some historical approaches

Every man-made facility or service in the Hurstville district — whether it be a necessity, such as the water supply, or an amenity, such as a sporting club or a park, has its own history.

Your school, church, street, house and suburb have a history. So do the Water Board, Fire Brigade, Council, sporting clubs, banks, shops. At some point, **someone** has decided to do something, with the result that what was once forest has been turned, first into farmland, then into suburbs of houses and streets.

Here are some further ideas to investigate. In each case, don't be afraid to go out and ask questions. The information you are seeking will exist somewhere. It is up to the local historian to track it down!

When you have found it, send details to the Hurstville Historical Society, care of Hurstville Municipal Library, so that your good work will be available for reference by others in years to come. You will be ensuring that valuable information is preserved, and not forgotten or perhaps lost forever.

Schools

Find out when your school was first opened. Other interesting school history could include: Famous teachers, famous ex-pupils, incidents in the history of the school such as a new extension or a disaster such as a fire, changes in school uniform fashions, changes in the educational syllabus.

Churches

Each Church has its own starting date. Compile a history of the different Churches in your area to see when each began, who the first minister was, how many parishioners there were at different times, noteworthy events in the life of each Church.

Sports

Each sport usually has its own district Club, and each of these Clubs has a history. Investigate the changing rules in different sports, the changes in design of Sports gear and clothing (such as bathing suits, for example!), the development of home grounds.

The Hurstville Press

Use your local library, or the State Library, to compile a history of early newspaper publication in the Hurstville district.

The first newspapers in the St. George area were the "St. George Observer" published in Kogarah, and the "St. George Advocate" at Rockdale, in the 1890's. The "St. George Call" commenced at Kogarah in 1904.

Hurstville's first local paper was produced in 1910 by Mr. A.H. Wennholm, J.P., of Wennholm Bros. He set up a printing press in the Municipality when the

business centre of Hurstville comprised only a few shops, and established the weekly "Propeller".

Another paper, the "Express" was established in 1925.

Today, the only local newspaper still in production is the weekly "St. George and Sutherland Shire Leader".

All old newspapers are now on film and can be viewed and copied at Council's Library.

Hurstville Fire Brigade

Organised fire protection first began in 1895 when Council became a contributor to the Sydney Fire Brigades Board.

Two years later, with the assistance of a Government grant and a donation by the Fire Brigade Board, a new station was erected on a site provided by the Council at the intersection of MacMahon and Dora Streets. The Brigade that was established consisted of 14 volunteer firemen, with one manual engine, one horse, and 700 feet of hose.

In 1907, the site in Mort's Road, Mortdale, was acquired, and a weatherboard building which was formerly the Fire Station at Kogarah was re-erected. A volunteer Fire Brigade was established consisting of eight volunteer firemen, one hand hose reel, and 1,000 feet of hose.

All brigades came under the control of the Board of Fire Commissioners of N.S.W. in January, 1910, and, in 1912, the existing Fire Station in MacMahon Street, Hurstville, was constructed. Permanent fire brigade staff were first employed in 1912.

Motorised fire engines came into use at Hurstville in 1922 and at Mortdale in 1924. Other developments were provision of "recreation rooms" at each station in 1926.

Since those early days, there have been many other developments in fire control techniques. Find out how equipment has been continually updated, and even how uniforms have changed!

Arrange to visit a Fire Station and see for yourself what changes have taken place.



Volunteer fire brigade at the original fire station on the corner of Dora and MacMahon Streets, Hurstville — 1910.

