

BIRDS GULLY

Down the hill behind the spot where South Sydney Junior Leagues grew into the finest club in the land from its modest beginnings in the late 1950s, there once ran a fast-flowing stream. Birds Gully was (and is) its name — a creek which flowed down from marshes that existed on the Struggletown side of where the Prince of Wales Hospital and the Royal Hospital for Women stand on the high ground at Randwick today. Birds Gully is still there somewhere today, gurgling underground as it makes its way beneath Rainbow Street, traverses Anzac Parade and bends back towards the Nine Ways, close to the club. The creek, a significant feature of the Aboriginal and early European landscape, is hard to picture in the mind's eye now — and so too the rough track that once passed out front of where the club now stands so imposingly on the wide, divided boulevard of Anzac Parade (named in 1917).

From the early years of the century trams passed that way — steam first, then electric — carrying excursioners to La Perouse or visitors to the hospital at Little Bay. From 1909 a specially constructed bogie car, No 948, featuring six cells off a side corridor, travelled from Darlinghurst siding, carrying prisoners bound for Long Bay Gaol. Gradually the track alongside the tram rails widened over the years — and became a road. As the La Perouse line in its early years passed through a relatively isolated area a post box was carried by some trams for the benefit of local residents. And due to the lack of good road access to the Little Bay area in those earlier days, trams provided a limited parcel service too. It was not unusual for a consignment of fish or a can of milk to be bundled aboard at Circular Quay for the La Perouse run. The total journey time was 56 minutes.

Until 1936 the area in which Souths Juniors now stands was just 'South Kensington'. Then, in August that year the Postal department announced that from October 1, 1936 South Kensington's new name would be 'Kingsford' in the Municipality of Randwick (proclaimed February 22, 1859). The name was selected by the members of the South Kensington Chamber of Commerce to honour the late aviator and national hero, Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith. The *South Kensington News*, which promptly changed its name to the *Kingsford News* commented: 'We who live in Kingsford have a shopping centre with a future. We are as a large family. Cut off from the city we make our own destiny, our own suburban progress is in our own hands. Let us eliminate bias and prejudices and move forward with a new resolution that is born of the new name of Kingsford.'

The district has always had its sense of local pride. There was great excitement in the 1930s when South Kensington's 'white way' opened along Anzac Parade. It was a time when the Sydney County Council encouraged shopping areas to set up 'white ways' — roads with street lights installed. Along the length of the shopping area large white pendant lamps were hung. In hard, Depression times residents were urged to 'shop locally'. A local paper wrote disapprovingly of 'the unhappy spectacle of tram loads of shoppers going to Oxford Street'.

The Daceyville Junction was christened the Nine Ways in 1932 — and the complicated crossroads long proved a problem for all — 'a menace of forest and poles' — until the construction of the relieving (and pres-

ent) roundabout in the 1980s. Over the years Kingsford has seen a large migration of Italian and Greek communities — the most high profile being the Castellorizians, who migrated from the 1940s. In the late 1980s the President of the Randwick and District Historical Society, Frank Doyle, observed of Kingsford: 'The suburb is not old enough to have developed an identifiable character, as much of it was built from the 1920s on. The boundaries of Kingsford are a little blurry. The rule of thumb is that if you have a shop you say Kingsford, but if you have a home you say you are in Kensington.'

The focus now switches just south of the 'Nine Ways' to the wedge of a building once known as 'Bell's Ballroom'. The plaque set into the wall down near the 'sharp end' of the club today, gives more than a hint of its beginnings. It is the foundation stone of the 'Kingsford Club', opened on the spot in 1927. A later newspaper reference when the ballroom had been established in the building, suggests it was, for a time, a centre of the fistic arts too. An excerpt from a local paper reads: 'on the other side of South Kensington 'Bulldog' Bill Bray taught boxing at Bell's gymnasium.'

Significantly, all of the uses of the old building in its original, then growing forms, have had to do with the gathering of people for relaxation, health and fitness ... or just enjoyment. And so it is today, 70 years on. Just as Birds Gully gurgles away deep down, so the spirit of the building at 556A Anzac Parade, lives on.



ABOVE: A busy Sunday afternoon, with the trams in full swing. The old tram tracks which used to run in front of where Souths Juniors now stands.

BELOW: Sydney trams ran past Bell's Ballroom when George Wintle and his team moved in to begin the extraordinary saga of the Juniors, in 1959.

