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Illawarra Historical Society
(Affiliated with the Royal Australian Historical Society)

The Monthly Meeting of Members will be held at The Margaret Wakehurst Girls’ Club, 65 Smith Street, Wollongong, on THURSDAY, JUNE 5th, 1947, at 7.45 p.m.


SUBJECT: "THE EARLY CHURCH AND ITS CONNECTION WITH ILLAWARRA."

THE FOLLOWING HAS BEEN EXTRACTED FROM THE "PICTURESQUE ATLAS OF AUSTRALIA" Edited by ANDREW GARRAN, M.A., LL.D., PUBLISHED IN 1888 and we trust that our Members will find it of interest:

"Illawarra, the rugged strip of coast-land through which the cedar-cutters of half a century back had to cleave their way—then a dense jungle, but now known as the garden of N.S.W.—extends from Coalcliff on the north to Broughton Creek on the south. Its principal town is Wollongong, and there are, besides the smaller centres, Bulli, Clifton, Woonona, Figtree and Dapto. The last mentioned is close to the Illawarra Lake, on the shores of which the present champion sculler of the world, William Beach, has his home.

There is no southern road from Sydney which keeps close to the sea, because the great estuaries of Botany Bay and Port Macquarie prevent it. But a road was laid out in early days which crossed the George's River by a punt, about 5 miles from its mouth, and followed the Bottle Forest ridge that lies between the valley of Hacking Creek and the Woronora. This route fell into disuse, but is now opened up again by the railway, which for a considerable distance follows the old track. The more usual journey by road has been from Campbelltown to Appin, on the ridge that lies to the east of the Nepean, and along it till the descent to the coast is made by the Bulli Pass. The point at which the road emerges from the bush, and where the ocean bursts first upon the view, is one of the most magnificent sights near Sydney. Webber's look-out—a platform fixed on the edge of the Bulli Mountain fully 1,000 feet above the waves which lash the rugged rocks beneath—is a spot which tourists who look upon the view for the first time are loth to quit. For after an 8 mile drive through stunted and gnarled box forest and bittern-haunted morass the road comes out suddenly, close to the crest of
the coastal range, and the traveller finds himself near the gate of
the Bulli Pass. From the platform, which is on the outermost edge
of a tall precipice, a varied and extended view is obtained of many
miles of southern coastline, and of rich and fertile farms as far
south as Kiama. The white sandy bays guarded by bold headlands
appear as a fringe to emerald clad ridges and rich grassy flats,
adown which silver-glistening streams glide onward to the sea. The
jetties, run out for shipping coal, look like slender frameworks
stretching into the ocean, and, dwarfed by distance, along them move
what seem to be toy freight trains, bearing miniature loads to model
vessels. This magnificent distant view is made more impressive by
the sudden change in the forest foliage. From a dreary Australian
waste, the traveller passes almost with a stride into the dense and
varied verdure of a semi-tropical jungle. Great white-trunked figs,
bear aloft their broad-leaved, lustrous crowns above the myrtles,
ptittosporums, and lillipillies which overhang the ferns and mosses of
every little ravine. The cabbage-tree palms shoot up straight from
matted vines and blossoming creepers, their crowns showing plume-
like against the sky. All is rich, luxurious, odorous—a growth proper
for a region nearer to the Equator. The reason for this luxuriance,
however, is not hard to discover. In olden days a molten trap-rock
was forced up from below in long walls or dykes, and spreading over
the surface, its decomposition has furnished a rich deep soil. The
sloping coastal range, too, is sheltered from the cutting westerly
gales, and open to the warm, moist breezes of the sea, thus a climate
is secured in which all plants of temperate and semi-tropical zones
grow to perfection.

Close to the Bulli Pass is the Bulli coal mine, where from a
tunnel 400 feet above sea-level is drawn an annual output of 200,000
tons of valuable coal, and north and south similar mines are at
work. Far along the shore extends a range of habitations, and 7
miles southward and 64 (?) miles from Sydney lies Wollongong, with
a trade mainly seaward, equal to 60,000 tons yearly. The town is
built upon a gently seaward, the point of which forms the
southern side of a small harbour. Near the sea, by the side of a
large lagoon, the agricultural society's ground and the racecourse
are situated, and at the back of the mountain ridges are hundreds
of small dairy farms. The rails, are already laid for a line, which
will soon be opened, to connect Illawarra with the metropolis.
Wollongong will then take an active share in Sydney's milk trade. Its
yearly export of butter is now about 700 tons, though the generally
fortunate farmers are not wholly exempt from the droughts which
afflict other parts of the Colony.

7 Miles distant is Dapto, with its old flour mill and handsome
church, at the head of the Illawarra Lake, and a few miles farther
south where the mountains recede, thus leaving a greater breadth of
rich pasture land, lies the little centre of Albion Park, which has
its own small port (Shellharbour). At this point the lower carboni-
ferous and sub-carboniferous strata upon which Wollongong rests is
overlaid by basalt. The peaceful village known as Jamberoo rests
snugly in a valley, on the right, and in front, about 4 score miles
from Sydney, is the coast's famed gem, Kiama, noted for its beauty,
its butter, its bluestone and its blow-hole. This choice spot has been
likened to a precious emerald placed in a very rough setting, being
most unlike all other parts of the coast. Its basaltic bluffs, which
overhang the ocean bearing rich herbage to their extreme edges. The soil is wonderfully rich, and liberally supports its tillers, who for the greater part are independent freeholders. A block of 40 acres here is worth to the farmer more than a square mile of ordinary country, and a railway runs almost on its boundary. The trade in its bluestone, immense quantities of which are required for Sydney's streets, has been to it a great support. Its dairy cattle are the best on the coast, supplying 2 butter factories; indeed it was Kiama that started the first. Coal is found in the district, but the seams, which crop out of the hills some miles inland are at present unworked. The harbour is very small and when easterly gales set in, dangerous. An excellent coach road leads from Kiama up the mountain to Moss Vale, passing through the village of Robertson and skirting the Wingecarribee Swamp.

The drive from Kiama southward to Broughton Creek, a 109 miles distant from the metropolis, is one of the greatest treats the hospitable residents can place on a traveller's programme. Several small bays, each worthy of a sketching party's efforts are passed, and every mile of the way is pleasantly diversified until the pretty village of Gerringong is reached. Here, too, there is dairy farming, and a small port from which in fair weather produce can be sent. At this point ends for a time the freehold system of farming, for here is the boundary of the great estate of the Berry family. Broughton Creek is a village surrounded by fertile soil which yields large crops of maize and considerable quantities of dairy produce. A steamer, put on specially by Mr. Berry for the use of his tenants, plies regularly between the metropolis and the creek, which is entered from the Crookhaven and Shoalhaven Rivers. 10 miles southward the wide, low-lying alluvial flats of the Shoalhaven River contain no fewer than 21 towns or villages, of which, including Broughton Creek, there are about 50,000 acres under crops, Mr. Berry owning nearly 100,000 acres in this locality. The principal product is maize, of which in good seasons very large yields are obtained. The Shoalhaven River is crossed by a bridge extending over 1,000 lineal feet of water. Nowra a thriving business place, is the principal town, and has the chief public offices of the district. A good road runs from Nowra up to Moss Vale on the tableland, the coach covering the distance in about 6 hours. This road is not a uniform ascent to the plateau, for after rising some distance it descends into the lovely Kangaroo Valley, once evidently the bed of a lake, and now a singularly rich flat, sheltered on all sides, except, where the creek winds its rugged way down to the Shoalhaven River.