NOTES OF MR. BEALE'S LECTURE ON EDMUND B. KENNEDY,
delivered at our meeting 2/6/49.

This explorer has never received his proper due for the work he did and although the story of his death is well known, the personal aspects of his life have been practically unknown. Leaving no descendants, it is through a family of Illawarra that many original documents have been preserved, and through these a great deal of biographical material has been discovered.

Edmund Besley Court Kennedy was born in Guernsey on 5th September, 1818, of a family of aristocratic extraction on the paternal side; his mother was Lady Mayoress of London for a year. He was the sixth child, and was educated at Elizabeth College, Guernsey. When only 20 he emigrated to Australia, not because of any financial worry (the family being quite well-to-do) but probably because he was ambitious and adventurous. He reached Sydney in 1840, and on 27th July of that year was appointed an Asst. Surveyor in the Surveyor General's Department.

Immediately he journeyed overland, as assistant to Mr. Surveyor Tyers, to Portland Bay, the new and thriving settlement of the Henty family in western Victoria. There he had a hard, dull life, doing many surveys of the river systems and roads. He achieved some local notoriety in 1842 by following a conviction for having two unregistered dogs with what was apparently an impish prosecution of the constable for failing in his duty to the extent of not having charged Kennedy himself with having three unregistered dogs, as in fact, he had. This prosecution failed, as well it might, because in part at least it was directed at the local Police Magistrate, who was something of a local tyrant. It was a trivial affair, until the Magistrate sent a long adverse report on Kennedy's conduct to Superintendent Latrobe in Port Phillip, and in due course it reached the Governor, Sir George Gipps. Meanwhile, Kennedy was unfairly reported on further because of an affair he had had (a passing lapse) with a beautiful young Irish emigrant girl of not unsullied character. On this he was vindicated, but Gipps censured him sharply over the Dog Act prosecutions. Finally, the great Sir Thomas Mitchell formed the opinion that Tyers and Kennedy had been loafing, so the latter was recalled in June, 1843, to Sydney—to a certain extent in official disgrace.

In Sydney he re-established his good name. There was a severe depression in these years, and owing to political troubles he and many others in his department had practically nothing to do, which was just as well because he for one was on half pay only—£120 per annum. However, at the end of 1845, his pleasant round of social activities in Sydney ended when he was personally selected by Mitchell to be second-in-command of his proposed expedition across the north-west interior to find, if possible, a route overland to the Gulf of Carpentaria and Port Essington.
Their well-equipped party left in November, and quite early encountered great hardships. The redoubtable Sir Thomas put his young assistant (then 27) through a hard school; it is now apparent from records that the great explorer thought highly of Kennedy. The latter was left in charge of a rear party at St. George's Bridge while Mitchell pushed up the Maranoa, and then again he was left for four months, while his leader probed into the further unknown inland. After being disappointed in a river system (the Burdekin) which did not fulfil its promise of leading to the Gulf, he returned and pushed north-west to find at last a fine river which he called the Victoria, concluding that by following it the long-sought way to the Gulf was open. He said this river could supply the whole world with animal food and was certainly the largest river in Australia.

In February, 1847, the party was back in Sydney and Kennedy was despatched with a light party to follow this great river to the sea. By the following August, Kennedy had returned to Sir Thomas's furthest point west, and there found the river flowing through idyllic country—"clad in gold, so thickly is it covered with butter-cups and other spring flowers," as he wrote. But in a few days he found the course switched perversely south-west instead of north-west, heading, not for the Gulf, but for Central Australia. The river became poorer and poorer, and even though he discovered and named the Thomson, it gradually petered out into a chain of small disconnected waterholes and, still going south-west, finally became lost in utter desert. Kennedy rightly concluded that it was simply the upper reaches of Sturt's Cooper's Creek. In point of fact, the "Victoria" was nothing but the present Baroo River. On the return journey, after being forced to retreat, he followed down the Warrego, once again finding magnificent country in the upper reaches, getting worse as he followed it down, until he had to cut across country to the Culgoa. The distance proved greater than was anticipated, and the country vile, as a result of which he nearly lost several members of the party. Eventually, however, they arrived safely back in Sydney in February, 1848, with the grim anti-climax of their news.

Kennedy had now arrived; his work was greatly appreciated and he was placed in charge of another expedition to find the same route, but working in reverse—that is, by exploring Cape York Peninsula up the east coast and down the west, then investigating certain river systems, connecting up Leichhardt's and Mitchell's last discoveries, and so home. Leaving Sydney in April, 1848, with a very well equipped medium-sized party (13 in all) they landed at Rockingham Bay, and there left their convoy, which included such brilliant men as Captain Owen Stanley, the young T. H. Huxley, and O. W. (later Sir Oswald) Brierly, Marine painter to the Queen. From the very first, the party struck difficulties—swamps, mountains, jungle as bad as any on earth, sickness and never-ending fatigue. The convicts forming the bulk of the party showed their moral weaknesses by stealing stores, the horses died—everything was against them. Their progress was necessarily slow; at Weymouth Bay Kennedy was forced to leave all but five men, and pushed on for help. Less than 50 miles on, one of his companions accidentally shot himself; so leaving a party of three at Shelburne Bay, Kennedy and his native boy, Jackey Jackey, fought on for help. Their hardships were indescribable, but at last they arrived within a few miles of Port Albany, where a ship was waiting with supplies. By now, the blacks, always troublesome, were closing in, and Kennedy was cruelly speared and killed (about 13th December, 1848—aged 30). Jackey escaped, and led the occupants of
the ship to the rescue of the others; the party at Shelburne Bay was never traced, and at Weymouth Bay only two men had survived.

Kennedy was an admirable man: superlatively brave, extremely capable, a fine leader, generous, handsome, sincere, deeply religious, good-humoured, strictly honourable—he was a gentleman in every sense of the word. No less a person then T. H. Huxley described him as a fine, noble fellow; and criticism might well leave the summing up at that.

A note on the two Illawarra residents might not be amiss. Mrs. Sarah Turner was the elder, the widow of Lieut. Frederick Turner, R.N., who had fought at Trafalgar, and was a friend of Lord Byron's. They settled in West Australia, but when the husband died, Mrs. Turner, in greatly reduced circumstances, moved to Sydney (after a few years in Victoria) and had to live by taking in boarders. One of these was Kennedy, and thus began a very close friendship. Mrs. Turner's second husband (Mr. King Barton, private secretary to Governor Sir William Denison) was one of Kennedy's executors. The family kept Kennedy's memory alive, they being the closest friends he had in the colony. Mrs. Barton died in Wollongong in 1898 at the age of 95.

Her son, Alfred Allatson Turner, was an adventurous young man. Born Calais, France, in 1827, he was younger than Kennedy, but a close friend nevertheless. We went unpaid on the 1847 expedition as second-in-command, and was one of those who nearly lost his life then. Eventually he became Police Magistrate at Wollongong, marrying Maria Rebecca, daughter of Charles Throsby Smith, in 1850, and living nearly all the rest of his life here. His name was a byword for absolute integrity, good citizenship and kindness. He was known to have fined old hands who occasionally got drunk, and then paid their fines for them; his influence was such that he was able to quell a rising of miners at Mt. Kembla when in fact he was sent there to read the Riot Act; and when past middle age was the leader of a party which rescued some men from the wreck of the "Queen of Nations." He died at Wollongong in 1895.