HISTORY OF THE VILLAGE OF FIGTREE

The following notes on the village of Figtree have been compiled by Mr. C. W. Gardiner Garden, Honorary Research Secretary of our Society:—

The figtree, growing on the Eastern side of Prince's Highway, at a point about three miles southwest of Wollongong, gave rise to the surrounding village being named Figtree. The tree stands in Fig Tree Park, which contains an area of 0 acres, 1 rood, 16 perches, being part of 100 acres comprising portion 23, Parish of Wollongong, County of Camden, granted to Matthew Ryan. This area was surveyed by Surveyor J. F. Truscott on 1st February, 1902, and was proclaimed as a public park on 5th November, 1903. On 7th May, 1937, the Central Illawarra Council was appointed Trustees of the Park and when the
City of Greater Wollongong was incorporated in 1947, control of the park passed to the new Municipal Council.

The figtree is situated near where Prince’s Highway bridges American Creek and is joined by O’Brien’s Road. The tree belongs to the species of fig known as Ficus Rubiginosa or Port Jackson or Illawarra Fig—also Rusty Fig from the colour of the underside of its leaves. Early this month two experienced surveyors independently established the height of this tree to be 130 feet.

It seems that the first approach to Illawarra with a view to settlement, was made by Dr. Charles Throsby early in 1815. Acting on information received from natives in the vicinity of his farm near Liverpool, he found a way into Illawarra over its mountainous barrier near Bulli. In 1821, Cornelius O’Brien discovered another route from Illawarra to Appin. This road commenced its ascent over the mountains near the figtree. Governor Macquarie, after visiting Illawarra early in 1822, used this road on his return journey to Sydney.

A plan prepared by Surveyor P. L. Bemi in 1839, marks the “fig tree bridge” near the junction of the “road to Sydney via Appin and Campbell Town,” with the “main road to Shoal Haven.” Standing prominently near this once important road junction, the tree became the well-known landmark that it is. Not only the immediate surrounding of the tree, but the whole locality was referred to as “at the Figtree,” for instance, Publican’s licence No. 851 was issued in 1853 to George Graham for “The Figtree Inn at the Figtree.” Other references of a later date can be found to locations “at the Figtree.”

The “Illustrated Sydney News,” dated 16th October, 1867, contains a picture of “the old Figtree near Wollongong.” If the tree was considered old in 1867 it might well be that it is now in the vicinity of 150 years old.

No information is immediately available to the writer as to when the village became known as Figtree, but it is probable that this came about when the Post Office was established there.

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