FOUNDATION OF BULLI:

Recently material newly located by some of our members and published in the Bulletin and booklets from time to time has thrown some doubt on previously published statements and preconceived ideas on the date of the foundation of Bulli.

There is no doubt that Cornelius O'Brien arrived in New South Wales in 1815 and worked on his uncle Charles Browne's farm at Abbotsbury in the Appin district, from which he advanced in subsequent years to the Illawarra coast. When in 1817 William Browne drove cattle into Illawarra he must have followed Charles Throsby Smith's track down Regent Mountain to Bulli, there being no other recorded route in use to that time.

Cornelius O'Brien managed "Athanlin" property, later called Yallah, for his uncle and in 1817 is recorded as having sold beef to the army. A notice on March 21, 1818, described O'Brien as being "of Illawarra." He applied for a grant of land for himself in July 1820 when he stated that he owned £1000 worth of cattle.

On March 31, 1821, O'Brien received from Governor Brisbane a grant of 300 acres which he selected at Bulli between Bulli Point and Wannon Point and extending back to the mountain on the west.

Subsequently on April 7, 1821, he sought financial help from landowners to construct a road up from Figtree to a break in the mountains afterwards called O'Brien's Gap and so to the Cataract River and Appin, thus shortening the route via Throsby's track up the mountains at Bulli. To be interested in the shorter route he must still have been on his uncle's farm south of Figtree. His appeal for funds must have succeeded for the "Sydney Gazette" of January 18, 1822, stated that O'Brien's Road had been completed.

Meanwhile on his tour to Illawarra, Governor Macquarie and his party on January 15, 1822, camped towards Illawarra from Appin near the Loddon River, a tributary of the Cataract River.

"Mr. Cornelius O'Brien joined us at this station . . ." wrote Macquarie next morning. When they reached the summit Macquarie named the peak Regent Mountain and descended it. He wrote: "We arrived at a creek containing a very pretty stream of fresh running water about 1½ miles from the foot of the mountain . . . and here we halted to breakfast . . . I have named this stream of fresh water Throsby's Creek in honor of Mr. Throsby who first crossed it on his descending the Regent Mountain . . . Having breakfasted we pursued our journey . . ."

That creek today is Slacky Creek running from Slacky Flat to the sea between the two points.

Cornelius O'Brien was in the party and if he resided at Bulli Point at the time surely would have welcomed Governor Macquarie and the latter would have mentioned it in his diary.

The party travelled on through the site of Wollongong, stayed at Browne's for the night and returned by "O'Brien's new road" which led through O'Brien's Gap.

The Bulli grant had evidently not been developed (other than, perhaps, for grazing) at that stage. Cornelius O'Brien on October 10 the same year married Rebecca Broughton at St. Peter's Church of England at Campbelltown.
O'Brien apparently worked in earnest at Bulli and soon had too many cattle there, applying to the Governor for grants at Yass and East Bargo to depasture many cattle and sheep.

Soon afterwards, however, he turned to the Kangaroo Ground for which on October 24, 1823, he applied for a ticket of occupation instead of in the south-west. He soon sent his cattle over and in September 1824 drew a fairly accurate map of the whole valley.

Meanwhile N. S. King records that O'Brien built a house and barns with 4½ miles of fencing; built a schooner and cultivated 90 acres, producing crops of wheat. James Jervis states that O'Brien's was the only house in Bulli in 1825.

An advertisement in "Sydney Gazette" of July 2, 1828, shows that the harbour (Bulli Bight) was a quarter of a mile from the house, which would place it about Somerville and Point Streets at Bulli today, confirmed by Mitchell's map of 1834 which marks the position of a cottage.

Meanwhile Dr. Alick Osborne in November 1832, on his first visit from Sydney to Illawarra by riding on horseback via Campbelltown and Appin, mentions the most steep, rugged pass down the mountain to "... the residence of Mr. O'Brien whose windmill is a land-mark in the wilderness."

"The name is sufficient to assure the wayfarer of every kindness and hospitality; it is literally the oasis in the desert where the unaffected cordiality and frankness of an ancient Irish family give double zest to the excellence and abundance of their domestic fare."

By 1836 Cornelius O'Brien had sold his Bulli holdings and moved to Yass.

From the above evidence it would appear that subsequent to the writing of "Black Diamonds" in 1956, material brought to light would show that the year of settlement of Bulli was later than 1815 stated in the first edition and 1817 in subsequent editions. Cornelius O'Brien was certainly the founder but it appears from evidence so far available that he secured his grant at Bulli in 1821 but that his house there was built in either 1822 or 1823.

—W. A. Bayley.
FOUNDATION OF BULLI:

The editor is indebted to Miss Margaret McDonald (Hon. Research Officer) for bringing to notice a further item on the settlement of Bulli not mentioned in our previous article.

Allan Cunningham the botanist visited Illawarra from October 19 to November 19, 1818. He travelled by way of Liverpool and “the King’s Fall” and reached the “Mountain Top” overlooking the sea-coast and “country in the vicinity of Five Islands” on Wednesday, October 21.

He camped the night there and on the following morning sent his servant down with the packhorse loaded with luggage which the latter left “... in the charge of a new settler, who had erected a temporary hut on the sea-shore, about 2 miles east of the mountain’s foot.”

The servant returned to the top of the mountain with the packhorse at noon. They loaded again and went down to the seashore, recording, “Arriving at the palm-thatched hut of the settler, who very liberally offered me part of the same, we halted for the night...”

On his return journey on Friday, November 13, Cunningham reached again the “settler’s hut” where he spent the night with his servant. The following day (Saturday) was spent entirely carrying the luggage up the mountain to the hut at the top.

Nowhere does Cunningham record the name of the “new settler” so that any conclusion can only be conjecture. However, in view of the knowledge that O’Brien was “of Illawarra” in March 1818 and that subsequently he secured legal right to the land at Bulli, it may well be that in October 1818 he had erected a “temporary hut” at Bulli and that he had begun to build up his private stock by letting them run there. There is no record that anybody else had settled there at the time.