ELLEN CHRISTINA
b. 20/2/1855 at Charcoal.
m. Edwin Walter (1853-23/3/1924) on 24/10/1878 at Wollongong.
d. 10/10/1927 at Paddington.

ALICE JEMIMA
b. 17/5/1865 at Charcoal.
d. 16/5/1878 at Charcoal.

John died at Charcoal on 14 November 1876 and is buried in the small Berkeley Cemetery atop Flagstaff Hill. For years afterwards his wife inserted the following doggerel in the "Illawarra Mercury" on the anniversary of his passing:

"I mourn the loss of him I loved
And did my best to save;
Beloved in life, regretted still,
Remembered in the grave."

After his death, Margaret made her living as an accoucheuse for many years. She continued to live at Charcoal until 1910 when she went to live with her daughter Margaret Staff (the writer's ancestress) at Fig Tree. She died, a great-great grandmother, on 16 June 1915 from bronchitis at the great age of 95 years and 196 days. At the time she was visiting her daughter Ellen at 25 Campbell Street in Paddington. It is unlikely that any other pioneer had experienced the growth of Illawarra for so many of its first 100 years.

A large tombstone, recently fallen, in a corner of the Berkeley Cemetery, has this inscription:

"Erected by/Margaret/To the Memory of/Her Beloved Husband/
JOHN ALGER/Died November 14th. 1876/Aged 67 years/Also/
MARGARET ALGER/Beloved Wife of the above/Died 16th. June 1915/Aged 95 years/At Rest."

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CRYPTIC HISTORY: A PUZZLE

See if you can work this one out. All you need is a basic knowledge of the layout of Wollongong.

In 1889 Wollongong occupied some of the time of Parliament, because in 1886 the honest burghers and civic fathers had erected a Town Hall on some land they did not own. This was at the corner of Crown and Kembla Streets, which the Council Health Department now occupies. (If you want to make sure of the location, go there any evening, say after a concert, and you'll find the biggest, fattest and niftiest cockroaches scurrying around fast enough to beat the nimblest boot. But that is by the way: those pests would thrive on the moon). The site had begun as a burying ground, the repose of the one or two intermentees being perhaps disturbed by police activities. But the 1834 Plan for the Town of Wollongong showed it as the site of the National School. So it remained until towards the mid-1880s, when the Public School took over on the site where it now stands, and in the place of the old School arose that fine Victorian confection, the hideous Town Hall, bearing the proud name "W. Wylie Mayor": "Wylie by name, and wily by nature," as the locals used to say. Apart from excesses of taste, the building had
the serious flaw of being built on un-owned land. That was Parliament's problem; and that is another story.

So much for background; now for the puzzle. In the course of debate Mr. Charles, member for Kiama, gave his recollections of early Wollongong, speaking of forty-five years beforehand, that is to say about 1844. On the face of it, this was a matter of history; but the puzzle is to make sense of what he said. He put it this way: "Forty-five years ago, the site upon which the town hall stands, was considered a common piece of ground lying between the then village of Wollongong and the sea. On the land there was a slab hut which was used as a lock-up; and near the spot was another slab hut which was used by the Government blacksmith for shoeing the horses of the police. After that a new lock-up was built, and the Government removed their establishment to the new premises. The land then became part of the common, which has since been granted to the people of Wollongong; but in the meantime a cemetery was established between this piece of land and what is now the common, thereby cutting the land off from the common. On this land, which was then considered as Government land and as a square belonging to the town of Wollongong, a public school was erected, not a public school in the ordinary sense, but a school erected by means of funds subscribed by the inhabitants. Not a penny of Government money was expended upon it. The school was maintained for years until the Public Schools Act was passed, when the people of Wollongong transferred the building to the Department of Public Instruction, not by any deed or any other legal instrument, but by allowing the department to take possession of it and pay the teacher. The school was continued there until the building became too small for its requirements, and a larger and more expensive school was built upon another site (at the corner of Smith and Church Streets). The municipal corporation considered that the square was still theirs—it had never been taken from them—but when they applied for it the Department of Public Instruction claimed it. The land never belonged to the Department of Public Instruction, but it belonged to the people of Wollongong. (Irrelevant passage omitted). The first mistake was made in not including the land in the public reserve at the time the cemetery was established between it and the reserve."

Now for the clues, or possibilities:

"Site on which the town hall stands": Although in 1889 this would have normally meant the 1886 confection, it could have meant the previous site, which was on the southern side of Crown Street, roughly where the Westpac Travel Service Office is. Take your pick: it may not matter much.

"The then village of Wollongong": Unless there is something we don’t know, the early village, as known in 1844, would have centred around the harbour and Market Square, because movement from there up Crown Street and westwards was gradual.

"Lock-up": The earliest one was, roughly but near enough, in the Harbour Street-Drill Hall region, and thereabouts it remained. Yet the possibility remains that there could have been one on another site, conveniently near a blacksmith’s forge for ball and chain purposes. That is part of the puzzle: the nearby presence of
police, on the cockroach playground, may give credence to this theory. Wherever the lock-up was as recalled by the honourable member, the late one was in Harbour Street overlooking the harbour.

"Common": probably the Showground area of to-day, or maybe (if a rather strained concept) the glebe area in South Wollongong, or even unoccupied lands on the flat well south of Crown Street. Or it could be the Lang Park reserve.

"Cemetery": could be conceivably the Roman Catholic burying ground, though more likely the Protestant burying ground, now Pioneer Park. But was either big enough to do any real "cutting off"?

"Square": could this perhaps mean Market Square? It does not seem likely, but if not, then how could the town hall site, either possibility, qualify as a square? It may be only confusing the issue to mention St. Michael's square where Market Street divides.

So there you have it. Go your hardest to sort it out, if you can. One feels sure that the Council will suitably reward contributions to simplify this puzzle. The alternative is that the honourable member, Mr. Charles, was talking through his silken topper, the very thought of which must be rank contempt of Parliament. And that must never be.

But if you can come up with a solution, the Society would be very glay to hear it.

—E.B.

A BLANKET FOR TIMOTHY

Captain Allman, Commandant and Police Magistrate at Wollongong in the 1830s, was apparently the "old Irish major" described by Alexander Harris. If so, he was a kind-hearted and benevolent man. The following letter to the Colonial Secretary seems to bear this out:

Police Office
Wollongong
22 Nov. 1833

Sir,

"Timothy" of Illawarra

The aborigine named in the margin conducted a road Gang coming into this District to assist in getting in the Harvest, across the Mountain. They had lost their way and but for him must have remained (?) out one or more nights. I consider him entitled to a shirt and pair of Trowsers.

I have the honour to be
Sir your ob servt
F. Allman J.P.
Police Magistrate

But across the back of the letter some parsimonious public servant has scrawled:

Give him a Blanket.

And a final note in Captain Allman's writing follows:

Issued a Blanket to this man 28 Nov. 1833.

(Quotations from original document by permission of the Archives Authority of New South Wales)