“THE ROMANCE OF WOLLONGONG”

Notes on an address by Dr. H. Norrie, Councillor and Past President, Royal Australian Historical Society, at Brandon House, 3rd October, 1946.

Dr. Norrie opened his remarks by recounting the early boyhood of Matthew Flinders and George Bass, and the events leading up to their voyage to N.S.W. with Captain Hunter in H.M.S. “Reliance.”

For light reading on the voyage Flinders read Cook’s “Voyages,” and dreamed of filling in the blank spaces in Cook’s maps. Cook had charted the coast as seen in the daytime, but left those parts blank passed during the night. Hunter told him of the discovery of and transfer to Port Jackson, and of Hunter’s partial exploration of the port and of the coast immediately to the north. Bass was an eager listener and day by day he became ‘fired with Flinders’ enthusiasm to participate in the exploring adventures.”
Arriving in Sydney, they had their duties to carry out, but with the aid of a boy named Martin, they explored and mapped the harbour and made excursions inland as far as the Camden District.

On March 25th, 1796, in company with Martin, they headed south on their famous expedition which was to add the names of Wollongong Beach and Tom Thumb Lagoon to the map.

So much for the discovery of Wollongong-by-sea. On land another medico, Charles Throsby, who came to Sydney as surgeon of the convict transport "Coromandel," in 1802, was to open up the Illawarra district. In 1809 Throsby took up residence on a grant of 1,500 acres at Upper Minto, which he named Glenfield.

About the end of Macquarie's first year of office, Throsby and his nephew, Charles Throsby Smith, had explored the rough country lying between Glenfield and the edge of the mountain range overlooking the sea, approximately along the line of the present "top" road, and seeing the inviting country along the coast sought a way down. They cut a track somewhere about the present day Mount Pleasant Pass, and finding the land at the foot of the range suitable for grazing, drove some of their cattle down and "squatted." C. T. Smith built a hut for his stockman near what is now Smith Street, Wollongong.

Macquarie reported to the Home Government that he "intended to institute a survey very soon," and instructed Deputy Surveyor, General Meehan, in 1816, to commence his survey of the coast. The survey commenced on November 28th of that year, and proceeded at intermittent intervals, but in 1826 Surveyor-General Oxley reported that land for a township had been set aside.

It was not however until November 26th, 1834, that formal notice proclaiming the town was published in the Sydney Gazette. By that time a military post, police station, and convict building had been erected and sites for churches, etc., reserved.

In 1827 a shoemaker built a hut on the beach, George Brown built an inn in 1830, John Cunningham built a shipwright's yard on the south side of the boat harbour, and so by slow degrees Wollongong grew.

Communication with Sydney was mainly by sea though the mails were brought overland on horseback via Appin. The coming of steam made sea transport easier and speedier and as a result the progress of the township was expedited.