

WOODSTOCK MILLS :

Ref., Notes from "THE HISTORY OF ILLAWARRA." — McCaffrey.

The Woodstock Mills were established in 1838 for Mr. Hart, an English gentleman, who had Captain J. G. Collins, an officer of the 13th Light Dragoons, find a suitable locality to invest £8000 for the purpose.

"From information received from the old Jamberoo settlers one might venture the opinion that John Ritchie and John G. Collins both belonged to the same regiment, the 13th Dragoon Guards. Captain J. G. Collins belonged to that regiment and, we learn that in 1832 he was at Ritchie's station, Jamberoo, buying horses for India. Captain Collins in the following year was commissioned by Captain Thomas Frederick Hart, of the Light Dragoon 2nd Life Guards and 94th Regiment, to come to Ritchie's station Jamberoo, and establish there, on a gigantic scale, a village on a 99 years lease. This Collins did, and called the place Woodstock, after a village in England.

This was one of the most ambitious undertakings entered up to that date in New South Wales, as it was backed up with capital to the amount of £82,000. Money was spent freely, and soon absorbed men of all classes and callings. A saw-mill, a flour mill, and a brewery, the Kent brewery. Much of the power came from a water-wheel. A water-course was cut into the works from the Minnamurra river. Large boilers and engines came from sea and land from Sydney. Brick-making, and charcoal-burning were carried on in the vicinity. Horse-teams and bullock-teams did the hauling between the primitive ports of Wollongong, Shellharbour, and Kiama, along roads of the most difficult nature. The early roads went up and down the hills, no money available for side-cuttings or zig-zagging to save bullock or horse-power. True co-operation in those days, when they came to hills, one teamster unhooked his bullocks and helped to haul the load to the top. Timber was hauled out of gullies and deep ravines in the same way."

The mills were big ones, a large two-storey building with flour and timber mills, and saw-mill, using water power from the Minnamurra River and later steam. They stood on John Ritchie's 300 acre grant (No. 9 of the Parish) granted March 21st, 1829. It was promised in 1824 and Ritchie had been in possession for many years.

"It was presided over by a good miller named Henry Hughes, and wheat was brought from as far south as Gerringong in the forties, and from Shellharbour to be ground into flour. No roads in those days, only cedar tracks.

Bullocks, with a set of harness on the one chap who worked in shafts, collar and hames, the collar turned upside down. Seven and nine bullocks in each team. The dray was like an ordinary horse dray — on a much smaller scale. It took three days to travel from Gerringong to Woodstock mill and back. As the land was cleared more wheat was grown — 60 bushels per acre. Three other small flour mills were erected. One on Griffith's Hill (now Pike's Hill, Kiama) and one at Blay's Creek towards Gerringong. A few years later, one was erected by John Sharpe at Bush Bank, Kiama. John Sharpe afterwards erected a large mill in the town of Kiama, and William Wilson erected a flour mill at the water's edge, Shellharbour. Of the Woodstock mills and brewery nothing remains but the mill races which supplied the water power for the water-wheel. The water-wheel and machinery were built up under the supervision of George Atkinson. He was brought from Tasmania for this purpose, where he had some experience in the convict settlement of Van Dieman's Land. He settled in Kiama after a time, and established an orchard, in which he was buried."

In June, 1838, the public were informed that the mills would commence work in July. Connected with the flour mill was a biscuit factory, and in the timber mill was machinery for dressing timber, spokes, naves and felloes. Eighteen months later, 1840, as no orders were coming in, Mr. Hart wrote to Dr. Waugh of Goulburn, to investigate affairs at the mills. Dr. Waugh's son James, looked into matters and for a few years was accountant there. John Waugh describes the country and works in a letter dated October 21, 1840 . . . "The place was quite a valley surrounded by densely timbered hills." (Ref. Waugh's papers, Mitchell Library). He also states Captain Collins had a "very nice cottage" with the overseer residing nearby.

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WOODSTOCK MILLS (Continued from January Issue) :

In 1842, four years after opening, the newspaper "The Australian" states the mill was still incomplete, the reason according to Mr. Heathorne, who had succeeded Captain Collins in 1843, was lack of funds.

The mill continued the struggle to survive against increasing competition, for wheat was in evidence, according to one historian, "everywhere", even in the suburban lots in Kiama where James Colley established the "Hill Farm" north of Terralong Street and had wheat growing right over the hill. It is not strange then, that flour mills sprang up at different places, Wollongong, Dapto, Shellharbour, Kiama, Bushbank, Terrara and elsewhere, in opposition to Woodstock Mills.

In the same year, 1843, Henry Heathorne added a brewery and malt-house to the mills, the establishment cultivating its own hops. The brewery was of great benefit to the settler, who could advantageously get rid of his barley. Beer was made for some years.

Despite the efforts of Captain Collins, James Waugh and Henry Heathorne, Woodstock Mills was not a successful enterprise and the sale of land in the "Village of Woodstock" was advertised in 1848. The land was sub-divided in half-acre sections. In 1862 the Woodstock Mills estate and "Man of Kent" Inn were advertised for sale. The buildings are said to have been taken down in 1873 and no trace remains today.

"The staff of Captain Hart's Woodstock Mills and brewery were men of great worth to Australia. They were in the forefront of matters relating to agricultural progress. Hop-growing, fruit-growing, as well as root crops and cereals of every kind, were carefully experimented with at the old Woodstock-Jamberoo establishment. One might with very confidence say that the Kent Brewery, established there in 1835 with the capital supplied by Captain Thomas Frederick Hart, was the forerunner of Tooth's Kent Brewery in Sydney, as John Tooth was associated with Hart's Brewery in its later stages.

As mentioned elsewhere, the last mortal remains of Captain Hart are lying in a "neglected" grave at Unanderra, Illawarra. Yet few, if any, of our old Australian pioneers were more worthy of a public monument.

The people who had nestled around Captain Hart's great enterprise came from the chief centres of Great Britain and Ireland, bringing with them the newest ideas of the old lands. True, an Agricultural Society had been formed in New South Wales as early as 1822, but it had not the same ideals as the Illawarra Society. This is plain when we know that the former was under the domination of the City merchants and large landed proprietors, whilst the latter has been controlled and supported through all the years of its existence by the dairy farmers and small agriculturists."

The village of Woodstock and its neighbour Jamberoo are not without romance.

In 1847 Thomas Huxley, the famous scientist, visited Sydney and went to Illawarra in a buckboard buggy. Whilst at the little Inn at Jamberoo he met Henrietta Heathorne, daughter of the manager of the Woodstock Mills. Shortly after returning to Sydney, Huxley met the young lady again at a dance at Dawes Point, at which Sir Charles Fitzroy, the Governor, was present. The engagement of the couple was announced in the ballroom, the marriage solemnised somewhat later.