

## BALGOWNIE—EIGHTEEN EIGHTY NINE AND ALL THAT

(A summary of Mrs. Lorraine Francis's talk at the August meeting of the Society)

John Buckland, British army officer, applied for a land grant in the Balgownie area in 1823. At the time of application he was living in India. He arrived in Sydney aboard the "Australis" during 1829. Buckland's wife and children came to Australia on the "Reliance" later in that year. Buckland applied to The Colonial Lands Board, stating his case and declaring his assets. During this time he was living at Hoare Town. Towards the end of 1829 he was granted the land which he duly named "The Balgownie Estate," which consisted of 1,920 acres north of Wollongong. However, he did not obtain the deeds to the land until 1835.

Balgownie Estate was sold to William Wilson, land investor, in 1839. The land was then sub-divided into ten eighty-acre lots. One of these land owners, Mr. Cram, was responsible for the first cottages to be built in the area, then known as Cramsville.

The opening of the Mount Pleasant mine in 1862 proved to be the most important single event in the history of Balgownie, and indeed the reason for its existence. Prior to this happening, the inhabitants of the area were mainly timber cutters who lived in tents or shanties dotted along the escarpment on locations chosen for the cutting and removal of the valuable cedar found in the district.

The miners' cottages built by Mr. Cram were among the first truly stable residences in Balgownie, giving an air of permanence to the village which hitherto had been little more than a shanty town. The only other house in existence in Balgownie, prior to those mentioned, was the now vanished "Balgownie House," which records state was built by James Wright in 1850. According to legend this abode was built by convict labour and was said to have achieved the proportions of a mansion. However, the dimensions of this property are lost to posterity and the only remaining oil painting of the house was unavailable, somewhere in the storeroom of the Mitchell Library.

The year 1889 saw many changes for the township of Cramsville/Balgownie. The opening of Balgownie Public School was the major happening of the year and was probably one of the most important social events in its history. That year also marked the commencement of many commercial ventures with the opening of a local Co-operative Store, Smithy, and Bakery.

It is interesting to note that most of the entertainment in the area was provided by the two churches, the Primitive Methodists and the Church of England. The churches were fiercely competitive and one may imagine that the entertainment provided (suppers and concerts) by these bodies proved all the better because of their rivalry.

The villagers of Balgownie were keen sportsmen and women. Quite a few prominent sportsmen came from this area which boasted a soccer captain of the Australian team, Jim ("Judy") Masters, and Cliff Sproule a Davis Cup umpire, not to mention many good cricketers.

The daily coach service (which was horse-drawn) provided by "The Lily of Balgownie" allowed passengers to commute between Balgownie and Wollongong. Records show that this service was in great demand. The post was sent up to Balgownie from Fairy Meadow. This proved to be a slow process and it was during 1889 that a new Post Office at Balgownie was petitioned for.

The Village people were actively involved in their township, none more than Messrs. Keegan and Lahiff and it was largely due to the efforts of J. G. Keegan that the school was built. Although times were hard and money was scarce, the people of Balgownie left a heritage of fun and laughter along with evidence of their hard work. Their great-grand-children are justly proud of their tough, resourceful and tenacious people.

Today Balgownie still retains some of the atmosphere of by-gone days in spite of the new housing developments to the west of the area once known as Cramsville. The land behind Balgownie Public School has now become a somewhat "select" residential district, affording its occupants breathtaking views of the surrounding mountainside.

The small township is still a bustling, lively place where the local people stop to talk to each other, often on a first name basis, in an "old-world" friendly relaxed manner. Many of the old family names still linger to the present day.

The land which once was the old Jolliffe farm is now a housing development as are the Caldwell estate, Dobson's township and others. The main gates to Balgownie Public School bear the name of one of my ancestors, James ("Judy") Masters. Narrow streets and lane-ways are a characteristic of the older area of Balgownie. The only change they have undergone over the years has been the addition of a little asphalt and concrete.

Very few of the original miners' cottages are still in existence today though one or two small houses, possibly of that era, can be found scattered around the older part of Balgownie, formerly Cramsville. The celebrated "Orpheus Hall" is now no more than a memory, and the original Primitive Methodist Church, though still standing, is about to be demolished. The Mount Pleasant mine ceased to function many years ago, making it difficult for anyone other than a historian to point out with any degree of accuracy its location.

A small supermarket, chemist and newsagency, etc., now dominate the area which once boasted a blacksmith's shop, co-operative store and bakery. No doubt "Hops Beer" Keegan is spinning in his grave since the erection of the Balgownie Hotel in 1906. Judging from its popularity, it stands in little danger from the threat of modern day and temperance societies and stands firmly entrenched as an integral part of Balgownie.

Many of the buildings and landmarks of the Balgownie of yesterday are now no more. The surrounding bushland and rain-forest are slowly vanishing in order to make way for yet another housing development. In spite of this, the descendants of many of the original settlers are still living in and around the district. The shouts and

laughter of the children at play in the grounds of Balgownie Public School bear living testimony to their pioneering forefathers.

—LORRAINE FRANCIS.