

## 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 glad to hear it.

—E.B.