history of Australia which must be embedded in the race-memories of the kooris of the south coast.

If there is any justice in this world, this book will become widely acclaimed - for it is a gift not only to the Aboriginal people of the south coast of New South Wales, but to all Australians. It has the potential to be the catalyst that will enable the original owners of the Illawarra to gain the social justice they have to date been denied.

Only 300 copies have been produced in the first print-run. So if you want one, you’d better be quick. The book will be launched at 12.30 on Friday 12th April at The Aboriginal Education Unit, The University of Wollongong. It will be for sale both there and at the Illawarra Historical Society Museum.

Joseph Davis

THE STANBRIDGE PIONEER SETTLEMENT
KENTISH CREEK 1864 - 1929

As we look back over the history of our pioneers, one must admire their courage to leave the land of their birth for a new life in a country still in its infancy.

My ancestors, Thomas and Susannah Stanbridge, with their family, were among those pioneer families; they achieved no fame but I feel that their history is worth recording.

Both were born at Goudhurst, Kent, a pretty spot in the South of England. The family was booked to leave England on the ill-fated Dunbar but, at the last moment, were informed that it had a full load. Eventually they left England on the Sailing Ship Mary Pleasant and arrived in Sydney on 16th November, 1858. It was a 786 tonnage vessel, and carried 276 passengers. The rate of charter and freight was £ 13.3.9. Moore Gilchrist was the Master and the Surgeon was Phillip Beal, who died on the voyage. There were two deaths (males) and no births during the voyage. The amount of freight payable for those alive was £2,363.18.0½ and for those who died £9.17.9½.

The Stanbridge family consisted of Sarah Ann, 14 year, Susannah, 12 years, Elizabeth, 10 years and Thomas, 8 years. A married son, Joseph with his wife Elizabeth and their two children, George, 4 years and baby Elizabeth, 1 year, accompanied the family. Their son James, 18 years, arrived in Australia 10 months before his parents. A married son, George, with his family, remained in Kent and son John was born in Australia.

On arriving in Sydney their son Joseph with his family went to the Sofalo Goldfields. The parents ventured to the South Coast, firstly going to Nowra for a short time. They journeyed back up the coast and settled at American Creek (now Mount Kembla). Here they were joined by their son James. The father farmed on the hillside and around the area which later became the Mount Kembla Mine and incline. Stories are told that the family tried their hand at growing wheat on that land but with little success.

The Post Office Directory records Thomas Stanbridge as a farmer at American Creek, 1864. It was during this era that he was granted 50 acres of virgin bush at the head of Kentish Creek, a remote spot behind Mt. Keira.
The access to this portion of land was so rugged and steep it puzzles one how they made the journey into that valley to start a settlement. It has been told that in the early stages many of their goods were lowered down the steep bush track with ropes tied around trees to steady their loads.

Kentish Creek starts its journey in a gorge a short distance from the Appin-Wilton road and is fed from springs and swamps around that area; it continues for some 5 miles and joins the Cordeaux River (now No. 3 Dam).

A few other pioneer settlements were further down the creek; their entrance was from another angle.

The Stanbridge's first humble home of slabs and bush timber was erected on a hillside, a well-planned position to get the winter sun. The valley had heavy frosts with many waterholes covered with ice and in winter very seldom thawed out.

Their home looked down onto a flat which later became their orchard and garden.

Thomas Stanbridge was classified on his immigration papers as a farm labourer; I would class him Jack-of-all-Trades for, without the skills and knowledge he had to adapt to all situations, he would never have survived those first years in that valley.

As time passed the family came to love that spot which had been granted to them and, after years of toiling and hard work, it eventually became a fine settlement.

The father had the art of grafting and produced many of his own fruit trees. He was especially proud of two seedlings and named them the Flower of Kent and the Stanbridge's Queen. Many of those apple trees remained in the family orchard until it was abandoned.

No descendants had the privilege of seeing their first humble home; remains of the stone chimney and a few posts indicated where it had stood; under the house had been a cellar where Grandfather kept his home-made wines. Colonel Owen of Wollongong, on a trip home to England, was asked by Grandfather to bring back some hop seed for him, which was fulfilled, so I guess a new kind of brew was produced at Kentish Creek. The hop seed multiplied and bags of it were in the shed for years.

We assume those first years were hard and tough for all members of the family. One old-timer from Mt. Keira many years ago told the story that, when he was a child he remembered Mrs. Stanbridge walking home past Mt. Keira village carrying a 25lb. bag of flour; she had walked to the market and exchanged farm produce for the flour. He stated that sometimes the flour was carried on her back, at other times balanced on her head. She was asked why her sons had not made the journey and her reply was that they couldn't be spared from their cultivation. Their first pack-horse was their pride and joy and the only transport for years to take fruit and produce to market.

The children of the family ventured out at different times to work elsewhere; many returned to Kentish Creek. Susannah (my Grandmother) had married Robert Benjamin of Mount Kembla before the family moved to Kentish Creek and remained there, rearing a family of ten children. On the imminent event of a new baby in the Benjamin household at Mount Kembla, Grandma Stanbridge would be sent for and she walked from Kentish Creek to deliver her new grandchild; after her chores were completed she walked back home over the rough mountain track.
Their daughter Elizabeth was proud of the fact that she became the most travel-led member of the family. She worked as a waitress in one of Wollongong’s early restaurants; there she met her husband, Mr. Carter, a tailor with his business in Crown Street. Eventually they moved to Queanbeyan and later to Cooma. While in Cooma she made a practice of returning home once a year to visit her parents, some of her journey was by Cobb & Co., which made many overnight stops; stories of these trips she reminisced over in her latter years. On the death of her husband at Cooma, she returned to live at Kentish Creek. Her tailored clothes made by her husband were always admired and upon her death, she still had a few tucked away in a tin trunk.

Sarah Ann never married and remained at Kentish Creek until her death in 1918. James spread his wings and ventured as far as Grafton, helping with bridge building. After a broken romance he returned to Kentish Creek and also remained single.

Tom worked at Belmore Basin and a simple injury cost him his life. While working a horse team a chain flew, inflicting a small cut to the head; little notice was given to the injury and within a short time blood-poisoning developed, causing his death on 8th March, 1875 at the age of 25 years. He was laid to rest in Old Wollongong Cemetery (now Pioneer Park).

Joseph and his wife Elizabeth over the years increased their family to seven children. On his return to the South Coast from the goldfields he drove horse teams, hauling coal from Mt. Keira to Wollongong. Upon his death some years later he also was buried in Old Wollongong Cemetery.

John, the youngest member of that pioneer family, left Kentish Creek to be married and to seek work elsewhere. He had five children. Ruby, his daughter, was reared at Kentish Creek by her aunt, Elizabeth Carter, and became the main workforce in the settlement’s latter days.

As time passed, a new weatherboard home had been built a short distance from the first one and the adjoining property of 40 acres was purchased. A slab dwelling was erected on this land, thus giving two homes for the family and they were referred to a “top” and “bottom farms”. A feature of the slab dwelling was the large slab chimney the width of the kitchen. A stone floor was laid down and on it the fire would be made and far enough away from the wall to walk or sit around, a large back log, which took two to carry, was placed on the stone floor with the fire made against it and during the winter months never went out. A camp oven and boilers hung from hooks extended from the beams. My father often talked about the beaut quince dumplings made on that fire.

Many stories came out of that valley - some amusing, some a little sad. One story I feel sure is worth putting to paper. In the early days of the settlement the cattle belonging to the family went missing and could not be found for days. James walked the swamps and gullies searching for them then, looking down a gorge from a high spot, he located them; it took some time to find the only entrance to the gorge and when he reached the cattle they didn’t want to leave because the grass was sweet and lush. Looking around, James discovered bush-rangers had used the spot for many years; yards and fences had been erected for their horses and a cave nearby was used for camping quarters. The Stanbridge boys named the gorge “Frogs Hollow”. It was in such an isolated spot that only
a few members of the family knew its location.

As they grew old the parents very seldom ventured out and upon their deaths both were laid to rest in a corner of their settlement. Susannah passed away on 30th October, 1886, aged 70 years, and Thomas on 2nd November, 1895 at the age of 86 years. A bush head-stone had been placed on the mother’s grave in its early days; nothing had been placed on the father’s grave so, in August 1975, Mr. Clive Bissell, an historian of Mt. Keira, thought it fitting to place one on that pioneer’s grave. With a great-grandson, John Carter, he went back to that sacred spot, split a bush stone, carved on the inscription and place it on the grave. After the parents’ death the settlement passed on to the three children still residing at Kentish Creek, James, Sarah Ann and Elizabeth. Upon the death of James in 1914 and Sarah Ann in 1918, Elizabeth was able to maintain the settlement with the help of Grand-Nephew John Carter, niece Ruby and Ruby’s step-brother Fred Walker. In the early 1920’s the settlement was resumed by the Water Board. At that time all settlements on Kentish and Gondarian Creeks were resumed for the making of No. 3 Cordeaux Dam. As the filling of the dam did not affect the Stanbridge property - only the bottom farm received a small backflow of water - Elizabeth Carter was allowed to live in her humble home until her death, which occurred on 2nd February, 1929 at the age of 81 years.

Elizabeth Carter, the last member of that pioneer family, was carried out of the valley, passing her parents’ graves, to the top of the steep road; a waiting hearse conveyed her remains to the Wollongong Church of England Cemetery and placed them in the plot beside her brother and sister. By November 1929 all legal transactions had been completed and the remaining members who helped Elizabeth Carter to maintain the settlement until the last vacated that valley, the spot which those pioneers had worked so hard to establish. Within a few short years the valley had grown back to its beginning. It is almost impossible now to journey to any part of it; the few descendents who remember its location visit the graves occasionally, but the undergrowth is so thick and harsh that it is hard to visualise a settlement ever being there. Up until the mid-1920’s apples were brought out of that valley and sold around the Wollongong district.

Many folk, young and old, including myself, enjoyed holidays at Kentish Creek. The grandchildren and great-grandchildren often told stories of the fun they had romping around the creek, catching perch and crayfish. Around the 1870-80’s the Benjamin grandchildren were often sent on errands to the grandparents after school, a journey on foot over the mountain from Mount Kembla; many times they were caught in the dark on the homeward journey and said how frightened they were to hear the dingoes howling and the koala bears crying.

The Stanbridge family were of tall build - the sons reaching the height of 6’2” - 6’4”. A Christian family, each member had his or her own Bible and many books and Christian literature were brought to the country by the family. The parents had a set rule that only necessary work be carried out on the Sabbath. The boys had fine singing voices and were often requested to sing in the Church Choir.

My first memory of the daffodil was growing in the Kentish Creek garden. The laurel and bay trees were favoured as many grew around. Two bay trees adorned the gateway to their first cottage.

Elizabeth Stanbridge, the one-year-old granddaughter and the youngest member
of that pioneer venture would have given many hours of pleasure to the family on their long journey to Australia. One only has to visualise the fuss her three teenage aunties made of her as they romped around that sailing ship for almost six months. There was no memory for her of the country she left behind. As she grew up her memories were of the goldfields where her parents went when they first arrived in Australia, then later coming to the South Coast to live at American Creek. The journey was made by bullock dray over Rixon Pass, the only road down the mountain at that time. She was in Wollongong at the time of the construction of the breakwater.

At the age of 15 Elizabeth Stanbridge went into service at Kiama. She left the South Coast in 1875, going to Campbelltown by coach over Bulli Pass. The journey occupied eight hours and the stables for changing horses were situated at Kings Falls. Campbelltown at that time was the terminus for the Southern Line. While at Campbelltown she met her husband, Mr. W. Larkin, to whom she was married at St. Barnabas Church of England, Sydney. After their marriage they went to live at Mt. Hercules, Razorback, Picton, on the property of an old country family. The wages were 14/- a week and double rations. They lived at Luddenham for a short time and at Narellan for 24 years.

In 1911 the Larkin family came to Bulli to take over a news-agency business; there she remained until her death at the age of 85. Mr. and Mrs. Larkin had a family of 8 sons and 2 daughters; one daughter, Mabel, the only member of that family still living, is 83 and lives at Fairfield; she still drives her own car. Elizabeth Larkin, while living at Bulli, journeyed many times to Kentish Creek to visit her aunties.

Elizabeth Carter had the art of bush nursing and was always on hand when help was needed; many ailments were treated with her home-made remedies. For some 18 months during 1903-04 she returned to Mount Kembla to nurse her ailing sister, Mrs. Benjamin. She was fond of children and, with none of her own, she welcomed many a child into her home. Grand-nephew John and niece Ruby always had memories of living under her care. Ruby was reared by her Auntie from a small child and their companionship grew very close. Over the long winter night they sat around the fire and Auntie told stories of her childhood, of which Ruby never grew tired. I spent much time in Ruby’s company and it was from her that I acquired this family history. It was Ruby’s wish that, on her death, her ashes by placed in the grave of her Auntie Elizabeth Carter. Ruby passed away on 20th September, 1977 at the age of 79 years. Her wish has been fulfilled.

We have little left to remind us of our ancestors - a few photos of some members of the family but none of the parents - snaps taken around Kentish Creek are treasured. A small Bible presented to George Stanbridge in 1823 by the Goudhurst, Kent, National School for “Good Conduct”. Within is written the date and births of the family. There are two slips of paper which were given to the family on boarding the sailing ship. On one is printed the Emigrant’s Farewell and on the other is the Emigrant’s Prayer. The last verse of the prayer I find fitting to close this story.
"And grant whene'er our wanderings cease,
    Whene'er our home we raise,
That home may be a home of peace,
    A home of prayer and praise."

As time marches on and the mortal remains of those two pioneers lay buried in the plot beyond the range, their many, many hundreds of descendants living on the South Coast and many parts of Australia are enjoying the country their ancestors ventured to and helped pioneer. So all was not in vain.

September, 1978 Ivy Murray (nee Benjamin),
Great-granddaughter.

WOODLANDS PARK, BULLI

On Sunday, 14 April 1991, a dedication ceremony will take place at Bulli to set in place a plaque and name a hitherto unnamed piece of parkland on National Avenue, just under the escarpment to the south of the elbow at Bulli Pass.

The land (formerly a block affected by slip) will be named Woodlands Park, in honour of the original title allocated by Captain Robert Marsh Westmacott to part of his northern Illawarra property which he held between 1837-47. The park is located just to the west of the 300 acre block originally granted to Cornelius O'Brien, but purchased by Westmacott in 1837.

This area of the Illawarra escarpment, just to the south of Bulli Pass and running off Georges Avenue, is of immense historical significance to the region, for it was through this land that the original Old Mountain Road into Illawarra passed. This route was used by Charles Throsby to bring the first cattle into the district in 1815, and if followed the track which had been used by the local Aboriginal people for thousands of years. A detailed history of the various roads in this area and the fate of the Old Mountain Road (which was used sporadically until the 1930s but is now overgrown and 'lost') is contained in Bill McDonald's The Oldest Road (IHS). It is hoped that in the future the old track will be rediscovered and perhaps partially cleared to reveal some of the convict stonework to be found near its upper reaches.

In the meantime, our only record of the road is contained in Bill McDonald's comprehensive account, and within the various paintings of the area. Perhaps the most famous of these, and the most significant, are the set of watercolours taken by Augustus Earle in 1827, a number of which are reproduced in The Oldest Road, and one of which graces the Woodlands Park plaque.

When Earle visited Illawarra in April-May 1827 he travelled from Appin to the top of the Bulli Mountain, then down the Old Mountain Road and along the coast to Wollongong and Kiama. An outline of his adventures in Illawarra and the artworks he produced of the region are to be found in the IHS Bulletin of April 1987. His journey, and unfortunate fate therein, is also partially described in a piece of doggerel verse which he composed on 19 May at Mr Hassal's, Appin, and included in a letter to Mrs Ward (Mitchell Library, Ae23). The verse reads as follows: