

BROKEN JETTY, BROKEN DREAMS

By JOSEPH DAVIS

The year 1988 saw the last vestiges of historic Bulli jetty demolished. Wollongong City Council has lodged a development application with itself in order to undertake the demolition.

the jetty's remains, situated on the northern side of Sandon Point, today pose a threat to unwary surfers and those unfamiliar with the area.

Bulli jetty has claimed many lives in its long history. Moreover, many of the dreams of local residents, along with a great many sailing vessels, have foundered on the rocks of Bulli Point.

Indeed, the hopes and plans of sections of the northern Illawarra community have been associated with the area known as Sandon Point which stretches up to Old Bulli and out to Thirroul.

A jetty was first constructed at Bulli Point in 1863. From near this site, some 30 years earlier, Cornelius O'Brien had operated a whaling station.

O'Brien, the earliest known white settler in the area, erected a temporary hut at Bulli Point as early as 1818. In 1821, Governor Macquarie granted him 300 acres (121.5ha) between Bulli and Waniora Points on which he established a substantial farm. It even included a windmill high on Bulli Point.

O'Brien's permanent settlement in the area after 1821 must have shattered the native Thurrawal (Djarrawal) people's hopes that the invading Europeans were not here to stay. The Aboriginal population's relationship with O'Brien is intriguing and conflicting records of his treatment of the Thurrawal exist.

When O'Brien left the area to go to Yass in 1836, any hopes the other white invaders would leave with him were dashed when he sold his farm to Captain Westmacott.

By 1863, with the construction of the jetty, the Thurrawal had witnessed the complete dispossession of their traditional hunting and fishing grounds. Bulli Point and its jetty were now the life-blood of an emerging white community.

That community's hopes were also to be shattered. Within a year of its construction, the jetty was damaged by heavy seas.

The prosperity of the mining community at old Bulli depended on the jetty and its collapse meant immediate economic hardship.

This was to happen many times in the life of Bulli mine and the community which grew up around it. Great efforts were therefore always made to reconstruct the jetty as quickly as possible.

In 1867 Bulli Colliery purchased a locomotive to haul coal from the mine to the jetty. The nearby waterway that flowed to the sea, beside which the tracks were laid, thus earned the name Tramway Creek.

A momentous event in the life of the small community occurred on the route of this tramway in 1886. During a strike caused by the coal company's attempts to reduce wages, the mine owners shipped in 40 non-union labourers from Sydney.

The scabs landed on Bulli jetty and the locomotive pulling several wagons attempted to take them to the mine. The tramway was blocked, however, by the striking miners and their families.

Much commotion ensued, speeches were made, and eventually the scabs were persuaded to return to the ship. Things, however, did not always work out so

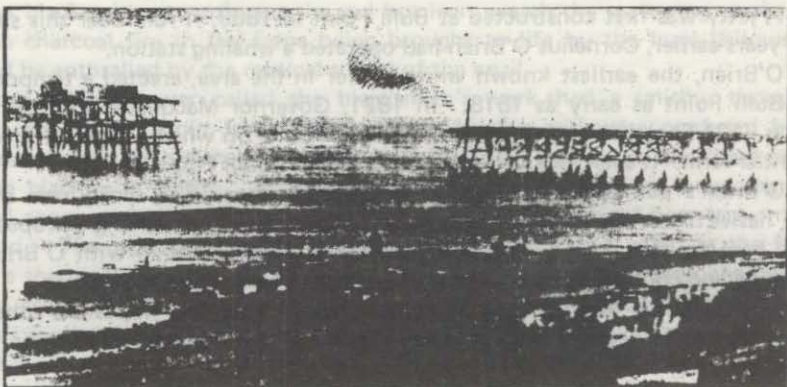
well for the miners.

Tragically, after six months, the men were eventually starved into submission and returned to work on reduced wages. Their hardship was worsened the following year when 81 miners were killed in the Bulli Mining Disaster.

After the disaster, the colliery went into liquidation. When the economy was at its lowest ebb in the Depression of the 1890s, George Adams purchased Bulli Colliery outright for £10,000.

Adams, the founder of Tattersalls Sweepstakes and Sydney's Marble Bar, was an extraordinary figure. He had established the Bulli Cokeworks at the junction of the tramway with the Illawarra rail line. Before that he had bought, then sold, the licence of Kiama's Steam Packet Hotel.

(to be continued)



● One of many occasions when the Bulli Jetty was damaged by heavy seas, this in 1907.



● Bulli Jetty, the area's lifeline, pictured in 1920.