

The Discovery and Growth of Greater Wollongong

(by W. H. Mitchell)

As early as the sixteenth century, and possibly before that, geographers believed there was a continent south of the equator, and several expeditions tried to penetrate the unknown southern seas.

The Dutch were the first known people to reach Australia but, beyond reporting the discovery of the land, nothing was done. In the autumn of 1770 a British ship, the "Endeavour" a vessel of 368 tons, sailed slowly northwards along the east coast of Australia. In command was Captain James Cook who was engaged on an astronomical survey, while two important people accompanying him were Dr. Solander, a Swedish botanist, and Mr. Joseph (later Sir Joseph) Banks, a man of independent means who was also an eminent botanist. On April 27, 1770, seven days after finding the east coast of Australia, Captain Cook decided to attempt a landing. The "Endeavour" had passed Mt. Keira which Cook named "Hat Hill" and it is probable that the first attempt at landing was made somewhere in the vicinity of Bellambi.

It was a grey autumn day when Cook, accompanied by Dr. Solander and Mr. Banks, put off in the ship's yawl. Long before they reached the line of breakers they could hear them crashing heavily on the shore, while the heavy seas tossed their small craft about like a cork. Feeling that it was too dangerous to attempt to reach land through the towering breakers, they returned to the ship and continued their voyage northwards in the hope of finding a more favourable spot.

The next day they found and entered a bay which Cook named "Stingray." This name was later altered to "Botany Bay." Had the weather been more favourable on April 27, there is little doubt that Cook's first landing in Australia would have been on the soil of Illawarra.

Cook returned to England in 1771, after charting the east coast of Australia from Point Hicks to Cape York.

In 1776 the first settlement was established by Governor Phillip at Botany Bay and it was not until 1778 that Phillip selected Port Jackson and established a settlement there.

To Be Continued

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(Continued from July Bulletin)

In 1795 there arrived in Australia, three men who were to make history for Illawarra; they were Matthew Flinders (midshipmen), George Bass (ship's surgeon), and a lad named Martin after whom one of the five islands was named.

About this time there were rumours that a river existed some where to the south of Botany Bay, so on March 28, 1796, the three men embarked in a small craft, the eight foot "Tom Thumb," and sailed southwards.

Having arrived opposite to Cape Solander they decided to make a landing, but the current proved too strong for their small craft and they found themselves under Hat Hill, where a landing was quite impossible. They waited until the next day then decided to make for some islands nearby, in the hope of obtaining fresh water, but this time the "Tom Thumb" was washed ashore and swamped, so that all stores and powder were thoroughly soaked.

They unloaded the boat, relaunched her and reloaded her, but by the time they had finished darkness had fallen; they could find no sheltered spot for a landing so they spent another night in the "Tom Thumb." The following day, two friendly natives, who had travelled overland from Botany Bay, offered to guide them to a landing place where they could obtain fresh water. The natives guided them by way of a stream to a lagoon which they named "Tom Thumb Lagoon" (the present: Lake Illawarra). Landing on the shore of the lake, they laid their powder out to dry. Other natives were attracted by the sight of the white men and their boat and they soon had about a score of aborigines around them.

In all probability the natives had never seen a musket before, although they may have heard of these powerful weapons from others who had seen them in action at Botany Bay, but, whatever the reason, they were rather alarmed at the sight of the white men cleaning their muskets. The crew of the "Tom Thumb" were in suspense, too, because the habits of the natives were unknown to them and it was possible they

might be cannibals.

So the situation became tense, each side watching the other warily.

It was at this stage that Matthew Flinders showed the resourcefulness of the true adventurer. He produced a pair of scissors and, making friendly overtures, he approached one group which appeared to be more fearless as the others, and persuaded them to have their beards trimmed. The new fashion evidently appealed to the natives and before long Flinders had trimmed all their beards.

This little act of courage created a more friendly feeling in the natives and restored the confidence of the sailors, and Bass's party was able to retreat to their ship without molestation.

Flinders reported that the natives called the place "Alowrie," but some years later it became generally known to the white men as "The Five Islands," "Alowrie" was later corrupted to "Illawarra."

The name Illawarra has been translated to mean "high place near the sea," but an old aborigine I knew, translated it for me as "from high place to the sea." This gives an excellent description of the terrain, and it is on this translation that the Wollongong Council's motto, "The City between the Sea and the Mountain", is based.

This translation also provides me with an opportunity to refute the claims of some of our neighbours in the north, that their townships are part of Illawarra.,

The translation obviously confines Illawarra to the strip between the coastal mountain range and the sea. It leaves even our old associate Helensburgh outside the pale, and such places as Sutherland and Rockdale base their claim solely on the fact that they are situated on the Illawarra railway line.

In the year 1797, the ship "Sydney Cove" was wrecked on an island in Bass Strait and 17 of the crew set out in an open boat for Port Jackson. Their ill-luck followed them and their boat came to grief near Point Hicks, leaving them no choice but to continue their journey by land. Bad luck still dogged their footsteps and one by one, the unfortunate men feel victims to the perils of the unknown bush. Only five of them reached Illawarra, and two more of them fell out somewhere north of Wollongong, leaving three - William Clark and two

others - to continue the journey. The nights were cold and such clothes as remained gave them little protection, so there was no more pleased man in the colony than William Clark when he discovered quantities of what seemed to be coal.

There appeared no doubt that it was coal but the party, anxious to prove it, gathered sticks and lit a fire. So William Clark sat and watched the first flames flicker from his coal. He watched the yellow tongues licking at the dry leaves which lay on the ground, as if, having found life, the fire strove to spread across the countryside. As he beat out the spreading flames to confine the fire to its small burnt area, William Clark may have realised the value of his find, but he could not visualise that in less than 200 years his small fire would fill the blazing furnaces of a mighty industrial city, and turn to white hot steel the iron ore which lay in the earth hundreds of miles away.

Clark and his two companions were eventually picked up by a fishing boat and taken to Port Jackson. Clark's report of the finding of coal created such great interest that Governor Hunter sent Bass to investigate the discovery.

At Coal Cliff, Bass found coal seams - the first coal field discovered in Australia. Apparently little commercial value was placed on it, as the historian, Collins, wrote that it was too inaccessible for it ever to be extracted.