

Rev. Richard Taylor

Extract from *Diary of a Residence in New South Wales(1)*

13th - 20th January 1839

13th I had a very large congregation for Campbelltown. Afterwards I rode to Appin but being overtaken by a thunder shower I took refuge at a little villa by the wayside.

I reached Appin to a late dinner at Mr Sparling's; afterwards I walked with them to call on Mrs Carne where I saw an interesting lady who was both deaf and dumb, but still being able to read could pronounce several words which appeared very remarkable.

The following morning I rode to Illawarra by the old road(2). I ascended for several miles and then passed over several level plains and then crossed two beautiful streams which at last brought me to the termination of the mountain where I looked over a wall of rock and beheld a wide expanse of sea coast at a depth of, I should suppose, 2000 feet, and a distance of 5 miles. Hence the

road was very beautiful, running through a thick embowering shade of tropical plants, most of which were unknown to me, whose fragrance was exquisite - palms and fern trees in abundance with beautiful parasites whose long plant stems like ropes hung from the highest trees(3).

The ascend is very steep into the plain and toilsome(4). I reached a pretty villa by the sea shore inhabited by Capt. Westmacott, upon whose hospitality I cast myself and much pleased I was with the cordiality I met with, though a stranger(5). He had dined but had a very comfortable dinner prepared for me and insisted upon my sleeping at his house. Afterwards we took a long walk on the sea shore to view some large veins of coal in the bank(6). The evening however was too far advanced for me to examine them so we returned. I for my part was quite wearied. The night was intensely hot, not a breath of air - I could scarcely obtain any rest.

Capt. Westmacott, the late aide de camp of Sir R. Bourke, is the son of the sculptor, and he sketches with great taste, and having travelled in most parts of the world, has a very great number of them(7). Mrs Westmacott is a very beautiful woman, a native of Devon(8). I much enjoyed their society and was prevailed upon to stay dinner the next day [14th] which was very hot [and] dry as the weather has been elsewhere.

Here a luxuriant verdure exists. The maize which elsewhere is dried up here is 10 feet high and the potatoes are here more prolific than I have noticed them elsewhere in the colony: indeed, the ground was clothed with a thicker verdure than any I have noticed in the colony.

15[th]. I rode to Woollongong distant about 9 miles. I called on Mr Meares the clergyman(9). He was removing to a house which was only about half finished, I therefore went to the Inn where I spoke for a bed - a good looking house. After tea at Mr Meares I retired. I was obliged to sleep on a sofa in a filthy room, and when I laid down to my dismay I found that several of the staves were wanting so that I was almost in danger of falling through; at any rate [I] was unable to rest my body unless I laid on the edge, and such was the swarm of mosquitoes that next day I appeared as if I had the small-pox(10).

I got up as early as I could and went to bathe. I breakfasted at Mr Mears and then I rode with him to see the Illawarra lake. It is a fine expanse of water perhaps 9 miles in length and nearly the same in breadth, having 2 islands in

it. On the shore I discovered some curious fossils which appeared to be fish bones, and generally they were found surrounded with a kind of green jade or serpentine. Afterwards I returned to lunch at Mr Mears. The country beyond Woollongong did not strike me as being so beautiful as that towards Capt. Westmacott's.

About three I left for Appin by the new road(11). The ascent up the mountain is steep but the road is good. Afterwards there is little to be noticed until the traveller reaches Jordan falls. I passed however some beautiful green grass which it surprised me no one made any use of, but the road with that exception was gloomy and dismal. Jordan falls are very rugged. I reached Mr Sparlings by about 8 or 9. It was dark.

17[th]. I left Appin after breakfast and having called at the stockade and preached there I proceeded to Denham Court where I dined and then returned to Liverpool.

18[th]. Mr Sadlier drove Mr Duffus, Miss Renoud and myself to Campbelltown where I formed a District Committee similar to the one at Liverpool, as at present the pew rents are insufficient for the payment of the church expenses. Mr Sparling was there. We lunched at the Inn and did not reach home until near 10.

20th. I went to Campbelltown in time to open a secondary school.. Afterwards I preached and dined at Mr Redall's whence I reached home late; the same evening I had a Roman Catholic who heard me both in the morning and evening. I trust he was led to hear from the desire of knowing the truth.

At Woolongong I heard an instance of the underhand way the papists [Catholics] are working. The Revd. Mr Wilkinson, Mr Mears' pre-decessor, was the only clergyman who assented to the Irish school system(12). His people were chiefly of the same mind and when the protestant school master left, leaving the place for some time without one, the liberal inhabitants sent their children to the popish school where the master said he would teach them the same as they were accustomed. But one evening a Gentn. named Osborne expressed a wish to hear his child say his prayers when to his surprise he heard him commencing "Hail Mary Mother of God". The father was very angry and bid him say his own prayers. The child said he had forgotten them.. It is unnecessary to say the eyes of these foolish protestants were then open to see

their folly.

The Reverend Taylor's diary can be compared with that of Lady Jane Franklin who visited Illawarra between 10-17 May of that year and met with Captain Westmacott and the Reverend M.D. Meares(13). Also of interest is the diary of the Reverend W.B. Clarke who was in the region during late December of 1839.]

Endnotes

1. The following transcription is as contained in the Mitchell Library typescrip, though some punctuation has been added to aid comprehension.
2. This most likely refers to the old route constructed by Charles Throsby in 1818 and which followed a roughly east-south-east direction from Appin towards the Illawarra Mountain behind Bulli. The more modern route travelled further to the south and met with O'Brien's and Mitchell's road near Mount Keira. Refer W.G. McDonald, *The Oldest Road*, Illawarra Historical Society, 1979.
3. Taylor probably initially saw the Illawarra coastline from a point near the modern day exit to bulli Pass from the Southern freeway, at Bulli Tops. It was then a short walk south along the edge of the Escarpment, through a section of sub-tropical vegetation, until the point at which the ascent began.
4. Due to the difficulties of ascending the Escarpment via this route near Bulli, a second route down the mountain was constructed by Cornelius O'Brien in the early 1820s, coming on to Wollongong by a path to the south of Mount Keira. The old Bulli mountain road was apparently rarely used by the time of Taylor's visit.
5. Captain Robert Marsh Westmacott's 'villa' was located on the modern day Sandon Point, at Bulli. It had been built near the site of the original stockman's hut constructed by Cornelius O'Brien around 1818. . O'Brien subsequently settled at Bulli and built a house on the Point, before selling up to Westmacott in 1837. Judging from a watercolour view of the 'villa' in the

Mitchell Library, it was a conglomeration of O'Brien's original house and later additions by Westmacott.

6. Coal is exposed in numerous coastal cliff sections north of Bulli, from Thirroul to Coat Cliff. At the time of the Rev. Taylor's visit Westmacott was embroiled in a legal battle with the Australian Agricultural Company, who had the sole rights to mine coal in the Colony. Westmacott was hoping to mine Bulli coal with the assistance of convict labour.

7. R. M. Westmacott had arrived in New South Wales at the end of 1830 as Aid-de-camp to Sir Richard Bourke. He remained in this position until Bourke left the Colony in 1837, with Westmacott deciding to settle instead at Illawara. Robert's father was the famous British sculptor Sir Richard Westmacott. A large collection of Westmacott's sketchbooks are held by the Mitchell and Dixsen libraries, Sydney, and the National Library of Australia.

8. Mrs Westmacott was to eventually divorce Westmacott after she eloped with the captain of a vessel which returned them to Australia in 1851 after a brief period of residence in England. According to various accounts their relationship was always somewhat stormy, and they were living apart even whilst resident at Bulli.

9. Refers to the Reverend Matthew Devenish Meares.

10. Though we do not know the precise name of the Inn at which Rev. Taylor stayed on the night of the 15th, his account of its rather basic facilities and infestations with bugs is similar to the experiences of other diarists such as the Rev. W.B. Clarke and members of Lady Jane Franklin's party who visited Wollongong in 1839.

11. Refers to the road via Mount Keira and Jordan Pass. This route had been constructed by C. O'Brien in the early 1820s and improved by convict work gangs in the late 1830s.

12. This was a non-denominational school system which Governor Bourke had tried to introduce during his period of governorship between 1831-7. An Irish National school building was erected at Wollongong but never used as originally planned, due to local Protestant opposition, led by individuals such as Captain Westmacott, Rev. Meares, and Henry Osborne. Refer Lady Jane

Franklin's diary for further comment on this dispute.

13. M. Organ (ed), *The Illawarra Diary of Lady Jane Franklin, 10 - 17 May 1839*, Illawarra Historical Publications, Woonona, 1989.