

'ESBLEMONT'- 23 KEIRA STREET

("position position position;
a colonial winner facing north;
a must for you artists and writers;
charmer!")

'Esslemont' at 23 Keira Street, Wollongong, is probably the oldest house on Smith's Hill. It was built in 1888 by Dr Lee who at that time owned 'Little Milton' in Smith Street, Wollongong.

He was the medical all rounder to the men building the Otford Railway Tunnel. The rail track at that time only extended from Wollongong to Otford and the new tunnel would connect the South Coast to Sydney. Part of his fees were paid in bricks being used to build the tunnel and these bricks were used to build the extensions to 'Little Milton' which fronts Smith Street, and used as his surgery and to build 'Esslemont'.

'Esslemont' was built for a Doctor Esslemont who was to marry Dr Lee's eldest daughter. However the young doctor was diagnosed as having consumption and as such not suitable to marry.

He went off back to England and was expected to have a short life expectancy. The eldest daughter never married and lived to the age of 92 at 'Little Milton'.

Strangely enough there have been several strangers knock at the door of 'Esslemont' and announce they are the descendants of one Dr Esslemont who lived to a ripe old age and had several children.

'Esslemont' has been carefully restored and all the best old features retained on the advice of past and present heritage officers of Wollongong Council by Captain Gerry Seymour who previously owned both 'Little Milton' and 'Esslemont'. The

worry is that having parted with 'Little Milton' to caring new owners who are further restoring it, what will happen to 'Esslemont' now that it is to be sold? Estate agents advise that as units around North Wollongong are now selling for over \$300,000, the most viable use would be to build units on the site.

This would be a shame as a lot of care has been taken to bring the old house up to modern standards without changing the street frontage.

A few surprises await on inspection of the house, as old has been carefully blended with modern. The claw footed bath now has gold plated taps. A north facing conservatory helps to heat the house in winter and provides a light and airy place for semi-outdoor dining during the rest of the year.

Upstairs there is a self-contained artist's studio with its own modern bathroom and kitchenette. Leadlight windows facing east give good light for true colour choice, with the veranda giving tree-top views over the surrounding gardens. Full insulation in floor and ceiling keep this space quiet and at a pleasant temperature. Concealed cupboards give a huge amount of storage space for materials and storage.

The old world atmosphere of the main kitchen has been retained with the only known 'Illawarra' brand fuel store and the very efficient 'Early Kooka' gas stove retained. Security lighting, smoke alarms and multi gas and electricity points are just a further concession to modern needs.

One of the most pleasant places to spend an hour is on the front veranda in the evening watching the sunset over the mountains through the swaying fronds of the 100 year old pepper tree.

Anyone who is interested in purchase of this bit of history and its continuation can contact Captain Seymour at Sydney 02-5559221 or mobile 018-628671.

(although this piece submitted by Gerry Seymour is clearly an advertisement, I have included it in the Bulletin for two reasons: I'm impressed with it as a piece of writing; and I think if more people cared enough for their houses (and the love really does come through in the writing) to research them properly, Wollongong would be a lot better off. I should also point out that the heading and sub-headings are mine, not those of Captain Seymour. Ed.)