

Report on June Meeting

Mr D.K. Muir at our June meeting continued with the theme of our first 50 years and identified "Wollongong's other Smith, Henry Gilbert Smith 1802-1886". Firstly, thanks Mr Muir for leaving with us a verbatim account of your address. ON that note, the Society should undertake publication of the more interesting addresses we have had so far this year. More discussion please.

From his address we learnt that Henry Gilbert Smith came to Australia in 1827 with his younger brother Charles. He was then 25 year old. he was well connected in England and came to Australia with letters of introduction to the Governor from Downing Street, London. He did not come as a tourist, but to trade and did very well.

He was not to remain in Australia, but returned to England on four occasions and in fact died there.

He was a man of many parts; he was responsible for building the very first steamship in Australia, called the Surprise" for commercial purposes. It was to work the Paramatta River but was found to be "top heavy". He experienced poor health associated with the excessive dust in Sydney in those days. and found Wollongong as a "watering place" where his spirits were lifted and his health restored. He lost no time in establishing a base here.

He realized the unique features of the locality. While enthusiastic about its potential and acquiring a hotel in Market Square (The site of ST Mary's College) and a number of the town's allotments, he was more impressed by the similar delights of Manly and built an imposing home "Fairlight" there.

He married on 3 occasions and survived 2 wives who died tragically of tuberculosis very early in their married life.

We were assisted with maps of the location of Mr Smith's property holdings in the town of Wollongong. He owned the sites of the Congregational Church, Wollongong Police

Station and many other holdings.

After his death, the family were involved for some years in winding up his estate, from England. Wollongong featured large in those activities, as was demonstrated by the family adopting their own coat of arms and describing themselves as "Smith - Rowse, Manly - Wollongong."

Peter Daly