

RARE IMAGES
OF
Garden Hill, near Wollongong
the property of H.G. Smith Esqr
and
The Royal Marine Hotel Wollongong
the property of H.G. Smith Esquire

As part of his address to the June meeting, Mr D.K. Muir (author of a book published by Manly & District Historical Society entitled, *Henry Gilbert Smith, of Manly and Wollongong*, now available at the museum) spoke about "Wollongong's other Smith, Henry Gilbert Smith 1802-1886". Mr Muir explained that Henry came to Australia in 1827 at the age of 25.

After being given an initial grant of land on the Molonglo River, Henry purchased land at Kiama, Wollongong, Hunter River, Deniliquin, Ourimbah, Bathurst, Parramatta, Fairy Meadow, as well as in Sydney and Manly."

According to Mr Muir, "there is little doubt that the idea of developing Wollongong as a holiday resort for Sydney was in Henry's mind even in the 1830s, almost twenty years before he became involved [in a similar venture] in Manly."

Henry discovered Wollongong during a pleasure trip in 1835 and Mr Muir quotes from a letter Henry wrote to his mother on 23 March, 1836:

"I have bought such a nice house in a little town or village called Wollongong with 4 acres situated on the sea side...". It was situated, Mr Muir, explains between Harbour Street and the now Marine Drive, southwards from Robertson Street to just north of the

now Catholic School and Convent, and on the coast side would embrace part of what is now Lang Park."

The block was purchased in a complicated arrangement (between 1836-1844) with the Reverend Wilkinson from an original 5 acre block Wilkinson had purchased from Charles Throsby Smith.

Because he was interested in developing Wollongong as a spa or resort on the English model and, because he wished to use the name 'Brighton' for his holdings in the Manly area, I asked Mr Muir after his address whether he felt that it was Henry who gave the name "Brighton" to the area in Wollongong which we once called 'Brighton Lawn' but which doesn't have a lot of lawn left of late.

In answer to my question about who first applied the name 'Brighton' to part of Wollongong, Mr Muir said that he couldn't be sure, but felt it was possible that HG Smith was involved.

I greatly enjoyed Mr Muir's address and was particularly interested to learn that, Smith acquired The Royal Marine(r) Hotel in Market Square (The site of St Mary's College) and another hotel, as well as a large number of other town allotments. I was also fascinated to learn that it was Smith who was largely responsible for originating the idea of Manly as a pleasure resort and that he built an imposing Georgian residence named "Fairlight" there designed by none other than the great Edmund Blackett.

As Mr Muir pointed out, "Fairlight" has been demolished and there remains "no trace of his Wollongong cottage". Only in England does H.G. Smith have memorials where all the houses in which he lived remain.

This set me thinking about a number of issues. Could there be a trace of H.G. Smith's presence still in Wollongong and did he have given Brighton Beach and Lawn their names?

As A. P. Fleming points out in his 1969 IHS publication, *Brighton Beach Wollongong*, Brighton is the name of a seaside resort in East Sussex in England. "Brighton is synonymous for watering places and pleasure resorts all over the world, so with the birth of Wollongong it is not surprising that the name should be applied to the district. As the English Brighton is 51 rail miles from London, so is Wollongong from Sydney, distant enough for the 'change' prescribed by medical men to this day."

"In the 1850s and 1870s unsuccessful attempts were made to name the Balgowlah/Manly area Brighton. The principal promoter of the first attempt was one Henry Gilbert Smith who had extensive holdings in Wollongong..."

A.P. Fleming also remarks that "C.W. Gardiner-Garden in his valuable *Port of Wollongong* (another IHS publication) credits Governor Bourke 1831-8 as giving Wollongong the title of the Brighton NSW". Mr Garden is now unable to cite authority for this statement and the present writer has not found any confirmation. It is suggested that the statement has been confused with Bourke's immortal description of Illawarra as "The Garden of NSW".

Fleming then cites an advertisement in *The Australian* of October 23, 1838 suggesting that Wollongong "must eventually be the BRIGHTON OF AUSTRALIA".

The present "Brighton Lawn" at the junction of Cliff Road and Harbour Street was granted as a reserve for public recreation on September 19, 1906. It was directly opposite a public house named the Brighton Hotel in 1856 after being originally licensed as the Black Swan. This building was demolished in 1923.

The name Brighton, however, has been applied to other areas of Illawarra and my own research has uncovered a South Coast Times journalist mentioned that "Austinmer was destined to become the Brighton of NSW".

Thus, while it has by no means been conclusively proved, I feel there is a strong chance we owe the names Brighton Lawn and Brighton Beach to H.G. Smith.

After all this inconclusive research, however, I started to look at old maps to see if the name Brighton appeared.

I had no luck in that respect but I did have a spectacularly serendipitous find: three old maps in the Wollongong City Library Reference collection are not only interesting in that they list many of H.G. Smith's holdings but are bordered by marvellous sketches of Wollongong buildings.

One of the them is none other than H.G. Smith's 'Garden Hill' residence which I am delighted to re-publish in this edition of the Bulletin. Garden Hill, by the way, is the area around the present Wollongong Hospital.

So excited was I by this find that I asked Peter Daly for a copy of the text of Mr Muir's address to the Society.

The odd thing about the maps, however, is that someone in the library has dated them "185?". Another odd thing is that they don't seem to be conventional Parish Maps which, in my experience, list only the name of the owner of the original grant of land. One block in Central Wollongong, just north-west of Tom Thumb Lagoon reads "J. Thompson buo [sic] /John Osborne/ now H.G. Smith". This, along with the fact that two of the sketches on the borders are of "The property of H.G. Smith Esquire" (no-one else

gets more than one sketch) makes me suspect that the maps may have actually been commissioned by H.G. Smith himself, perhaps with some possible development plan in mind. And the final question, of course, is who was the anonymous artist who produced the sketches?

I also have serious doubts about the accuracy of the date "185?" ascribed to the map because one of the sketches is of the Presbyterian Church in Crown Street without its spire. According to extensive research I conducted for that building in our *Greetings from Wollongong* book, the church was constructed in 1838, but the spire was only added in 1842. Does this mean that the map containing the sketch of H.G. Smith's Garden Hill residence should really be dated pre 1842?

It was obviously necessary to look again at precisely when H.G. Smith made land purchases and at what times he was resident locally.

Mr Muir's very interesting paper had the following to say on the matter and the changes taking place in respect to Charles Throsby Smith's original grant of land.

"Originally given as a rural type grant it was subsequently seen by Government surveyors as a good site for a town. Issue of the formal grant deed to CT Smith was delayed 14 years until 1835 when, about the same time, the lower part of the grant between Smith and Crown Streets was laid out and proclaimed as the town of Wollongong.

This comprised 122 allotments which, as part of the Smith grant, he was able to sell privately and it is known that HG Smith purchased at least 29 of these.

This so called private town of Wollongong soon proved inadequate and two further subdivisions were made on Crown Land south of Crown Street, first to Stewart Street and then to Swan Street by 1848. These were offered at Crown auctions and HG Smith successfully bid for 20 of these between 1845 and 1849 at a total cost of over 400 pounds.

He also purchased land privately including the two large coastal blocks south of the old Wilkinson Home which meant that he owned all the coastal strip from Smith Street to Crown Street embracing all of the now Lang park

As well as property in the heart of Wollongong, he also invested in land further out. The largest of these acquired in 1849 was 278 acres and 69 acres, north and south of the Princes Highway, near the now hospital, and part of Thompson's original 640 acre grant.

He also purchased 76 acres of the Balgownie estate in 1847, and 37 acres, part of Palmer's grant on Mullet Creek in 1854. In all his total holdings in Illawarra amounted to nearly 600 acres."

Mr Muir also suggests that by 1847, H.G. Smith "became a gentleman of leisure again,

regularly travelling down to Wollongong where he had bought a holiday cottage." But by 1849 he had returned to England again.

Although retired, Mr Muir remarks, HG still had a nose for business back in Wollongong and one very big project he financed in England was "a Tyneside built steamer for the Sydney Wollongong run, called the Keera, 113 tons, that arrived here in 1852." By December 1852, according to Mr Muir, "the Keera had already been taken off the run and sold in Melbourne."

"We know from his letters that Henry went to live at his Wollongong Cottage soon after arrival back in 1852. But it would seem that on returning to Wollongong after an absence of 4 years he found that the novelty of the place had paled, and we find him writing, "...Wollongong has not got the attractions it had."

"By March 1853 he had made his first purchase of land in Manly and in these circumstances it is perhaps no accident that he started to unload some of his larger land holdings in Wollongong. He first sold his Balgownie land in 1853 for 200 pounds, followed by the 278 acres in 1854 for 7000 pounds (a profit of over 5000), and the 37 acres at Mullet Creek for 430 pounds.

I am still very uncertain as to when this simple sketch of H.G. Smith's residence was made. I still have been unable to date the map by any of its features and the mystery of the Presbyterian Church will be taken up in future issues as I republish all of the sketches from the map.

But it seems to me that one of the reasons H.G. Smith may have been able to make such a big profit on his 1854 sale of 278 acres in the vicinity of Garden Hill was that he had erected a substantial residence on it.

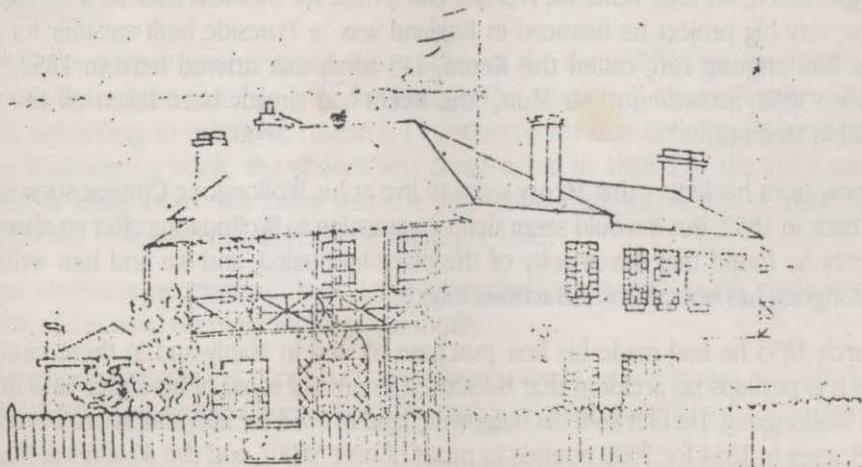
On the basis of Mr Muir's research the house would presumably have been constructed between 1849 and 1854. But why then does the same map on which it is sketched show a pre-1842 image of the Presbyterian Church? Did someone else construct the residence before HG purchased it? If so, why are there no other references to such a substantial residence in the Historical Literature of Illawarra? When was it demolished?

Be assured that much debate and research will follow. If any one can help, I'd love to hear from them.

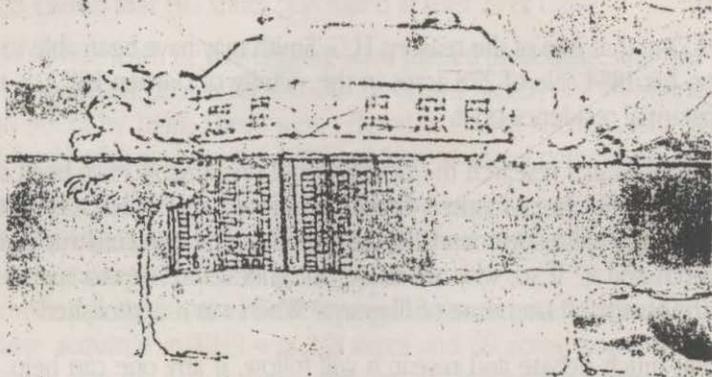
What with big landholders like CT and HG Smith being the subject of address by John Shipp and Mr Muir, and the revelation of that other Smith as the author of the Paulsgrove Diary by Peter Cuffley, 1996 is really proving a very big year in the development of our knowledge about early Wollongong.

In the meantime, I think we owe Mr Muir a great deal of thanks for opening up new vistas for historical study in Illawarra.

Joseph Davis



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