

THE BRIGHTON

A LINK WITH THE PAST

(By G. Arden Hill)

Reading a very nicely written article by Anne Wood in a recent Illawarra Mercury reminded me of an item on the Brighton Hotel which appeared in the Mercury of 17th October, 1919, under the above heading. I had saved it because it mentions my father's uncle George, one of the uncles he didn't tell me about, but this seems an appropriate time to bring it out. Please note that by 1919 the Mercury actually had graduated to paragraphs, a feature quite absent from the 1887 version above. Here it is, without comment, exactly as printed:-

"The Brighton Hotel, the license of which was allowed to lapse on the 30th ult., was one of the first buildings erected in Wollongong. That was so long years ago that it is doubtful if there is a person alive to-day who remembers its construction, but according to the calculations of old members of the district, it was between 90 and 100 years ago. At first the building was used as a bonded store, and was occupied by the first pilot (and probably customs officer), of the primitive port of Wollongong -- a man named Sandy McPherson.

"There was no harbour in those days and the sailing boats that occasionally came down from Sydney, when a favourable wind blew, used to discharge their cargoes in open boats that were run up on to the Brighton Beach. Of course, this was only possible in calm weather, and during a stormy spell, or when adverse winds prevailed, the settlers frequently ran out of flour, and had to put up with hominy, corn bread, and other coarse fare. Later on wheat was grown, and they ground their own flour, but when the rust got into the wheat that industry was abandoned for dairy farming, which has become one of the staple industries of the district ever since. It is a long way to look back, and recollection as to how the old place was used as a bonded store is not clear, but at all events a publican's license was eventually granted and so began the Brighton Hotel. Among the earliest licensees were people named Johnson, Trick, M...rrow, Mrs. Carey, George Osborne, and Mrs. Pike. Then, thirty-nine years ago, the late Mr. J. P. Galvin sold out of the Cricketers Arms to Mr. Cheadle, purchased the Brighton, and remained there until the time of his death some years ago, since when it has been con-

ducted by Mrs. Galvin, with the assistance of her family.

“When Mr. Galvin took possession, Belmore Basin had been constructed, the coal trade and dairying industries were going ahead by leaps and bounds, and population in the town and district was increasing rapidly. This induced Mr. Galvin to make several important additions to the original building. The railway had not then been constructed as far as Wollongong, and consequently the I.S.N. Coy’s steamers carried on a very busy trade between Sydney and the South Coast. The Brighton was a popular and busy house in those days. There was also an hotel on the site where St. Mary’s Convent now stands, another where Beattie’s stables are, the Queen’s Hotel, still standing, another on the other corner of Market Square, the Harp Inn, with shingled roof, and still another hotel directly opposite it. These facts are mentioned to show that the wharf and its vicinity was the “lively” busy end of Wollongong in those days. On market days, Crown street used to resound to the blaring of calves and the squealing of pigs, as they swung along in the farmers’ carts to the I.S.N. Coy’s wharf. Wollongong butter was in great demand in Sydney, and it was a common sight to see Belmore Basin dotted with bobbing empty butter kegs that had been pushed overboard in the hustle of discharging.

“Then came the railway in 1887, and about 20 years later the start of the development of Port Kembla, since when the town has extended north, south and west. The wharf is not now the busy centre of activity it once was. Most of the old hotels have disappeared, and during recent years the Brighton became more of a residential house. The passing of the license will awaken interesting memories among the older residents of the town, and will be regretted by hundreds of city visitors whose delight and recreation was to spend their holidays there in tranquil retreat within sight and sound of the waves of the blue Pacific.”