

Happy Valley - Keira Street.

by Carol Herben

During the depression years of the 1930s with high unemployment and destitution amongst many families the will to survive drove many of the citizens into makeshift **Shanty Towns**. One of these settlements was established in Port Kembla and became known as the "**Official Camp**". Two other settlements, both known as "**Happy Valley**", cropped up, one in Corrimal East and the other at the bottom of Keira Street in Wollongong. Happy Valley in Wollongong was established at the southern end of Keira Street and at its peak consisted of 100 shanties. These places were home to many families who were driven by the need to survive. Built from whatever material was available or whatever could be scrounged from the nearby garbage tip, they were constructed as one or two room shanties with earthen floors and chimneys made from off casts of wood and corrugated iron. Happy Valley at the bottom of Keira Street was located within 50 metres of swampy land on the edge of Tom Thumb Lagoon and bound by the Old Port Road, and of course in the vicinity of the local garbage tip.

Central Illawarra Council charged the residents £6 per annum to live in these makeshift abodes. There was never a shortage of tenants; as soon as one was vacated it was occupied by one or more new tenants, usually strangers to the surrounding residents, who were in desperate need of lodgings after the previous residents had moved upmarket into something better.

After some 20 years of these old shanties the Council decided enough was enough. As soon as one was vacated Council quickly demolished it. By the mid 1950s the last three of these old dwellings were occupied by two men aged about 70 years and a third man, a former Council garbage tip employee, named John Widd aged in his 80s. These men, the last occupants of **Happy Valley**, grew their own vegetables and cooked their own meals. They had three dogs in the camp to keep the area free from snakes, whilst two cats rid the place of rats from the nearby garbage tip. By 1960 all traces of the shanty town, known as **Happy Valley**, had disappeared.

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