

## The Theft of Wollongong's Timepiece.

by  
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On the 6 August, 1957 the City of Wollongong lost its Colonial timepiece manufactured by the famous cannon maker G. R. North of England. At the time of manufacture the barrel was inscribed with Queen Victoria's monogram and a phrase in Latin reading "**Tri Uno En Juncto**" - (**Three Welded Into One**). This inscription symbolised the strong friendship between the three allies of the Crimean War. The field piece was originally a naval gun with a barrel measuring 4ft 6ins. The barrel was made of solid bronze and weighted 6cwt (305 kg). On its arrival in Sydney in 1860 it was installed as a weapon of defence in Sydney during the time of the Russian Invasion scare.

As its services was no longer required the cannon was dismantled and brought by ship to Wollongong in about 1880 and installed at Flagstaff Barracks, the headland overlooking Wollongong Harbour.

From the time of the gun's installation in Wollongong it was never used as a weapon of defence, but as a timepiece for the surrounding district. Mounted on the roof of the Wollongong Post Office (presently the Illawarra Museum) in Market Street was a flagpole which a large disc. Just before 1pm the disc was raised to the top of the flagpole. At exactly 1pm each day the Post Office received a telegram from Sydney announcing the time. At precisely 1pm the disc was dropped signalling Flagstaff Barracks to fire the cannon. Every household in the district knew exactly when to synchronise their clocks. After the completion of the new Post Office in Crown Street Wollongong, this brought about the closure of the Market Street Post Office. The disc was removed and installed at the new Post Office in Crown Street where it continued its job of sending the 1 pm signal to Flagstaff Barracks. The service of the cannon as a timepiece ceased in 1910.

Next we knew of the cannon was when it was installed in front of the Wollongong Town Hall, where it remained for many years.

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In the 1950s Wollongong City Council lent the cannon out for special occasions to R. S. L. Groups for display purposes.

In August 1957 the cannon was placed into the care of Mr Peter Morton, a firearms expert, who was in the process of reconditioning the cannon for its installation in Pioneer Park in September 1957. Unfortunately this proposal never eventuated. When it was loaned to Port Kembla Golf Club for the Ex-Servicemen's Day, it disappeared without trace bringing about an end to Wollongong's early history. The Police estimated it would have taken at least 6 men to carry the cannon off. All local police stations were notified to watch scrap metal yards in case the cannon had been sold for scrap, as at the time its estimated value as scrap material was about £70.

The news shocked the members of the Illawarra Historical Society and Mr Morton made many appeals for the cannon's return.

I have made enquiries at the society and the Council if the cannon was ever returned as I could not see it displayed anywhere in our city. I drew a complete blank We truly lost a significant part of our history the day Wollongong lost its first timepiece.