

Gear'd's House.

by Carol Herben.

For those not familiar where "Gear'd's Hill" is situated in Wollongong, it covers the short stretch of road from St Theresa's Church and School at Crown Street near the intersection of Mt Keira Road to the bridge on Princes Highway which passes over the southern freeway at Figtree.

A quaint single storey house, known as Gear'd's House, was situated on 20 acres of land. Its history goes back well over a century, some contending it was erected in the 1830s, as a portion of the building was certainly built by convicts. The cottage, with French doors and shutters, had the main entrance on the front verandah. Turned posts supported the verandah. A house typical of the early colonial style.

Edward Gear'd resided in the house in 1849 when the first shipment of coal came out of Shoobert's Colliery at Mount Keira on 27th August. The coal carts were met at the Cross Roads by a large number of residents. Stopping at Gear'd's house the participants took in refreshments before the procession proceeded onto the town of Wollongong and thence to the wharf where the steamer "William the Fourth" was awaiting to transport the coal to Sydney. On that day the procession was led by a band followed by horsemen carrying Union Jacks then miners with white ensigns, a good number of pedestrians followed by the main attraction a number of carts each drawn by two horses and laden with coal.

After Gear'd left Wollongong the new mining Engineer William Robson, who came to the coast in 1856 to open the Osborne-Wallsend Colliery, purchased the house. The first shipment of coal transported under his management occurred in April 1857.

William Robson was born 1817 in Wallsend, Co Northumberland, and arrived in the colony in 1841. He was elected to the Wollongong first Municipal Council in 1859.

William Robson's second marriage was to Margaret Wiseman mother of William John Wiseman. The latter, being 14 years old when he moved into the house, stayed there until his marriage at which time he moved out. He too took an interest in civic affairs and was elected Alderman on Wollongong Council from 1869 to 1920 following in the footsteps of his stepfather William Robson.

The house was purchased in 1903 by one time manager of Mount Keira Colliery Michael Phillips and his wife Mary (nee Robson). A camellia tree planted on the eastern side of the house remained there until the property was sold. After the death of Mary Phillips (1908) and Michael (1918) their daughter Margaret continued to reside in the house with two nieces.

During WWI the house was taken over by the Army and two small rooms at the rear of the house were converted into cells. The bars remained attached to the windows until the house was demolished.

It was during the 1949 Jubilee celebrations of the first shipment of coal that a re enactment of the 1849 event took place and again the party called in at the old Geard's House to partake of refreshments.

In the early 1950s the house and 5 acres of land were resumed for the construction of West Wollongong Public School which was opened in November 1952. It was not until 12th December 1952 that the house was auctioned by Frank Bevan and Sons. Condition of the sale was for the house to be demolished.

This brought an end to a graceful single storey cottage which had been so much a part of Illawarra's early residents and historical events.

Oh! The longing to step back in time to see Wollongong of the past to appreciate what man had built - "Our History, Our Heritage".
Rather than the longing to see what man has destroyed - "Our history, Our heritage".

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