

THE FOUNDATION OF BULLI

by
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Recently material newly located by some of our members and published in the Bulletin and booklets from time to time has thrown some doubt on previously published statements and preconceived ideas on the date of the foundation of Bulli.

There is no doubt that Cornelius O'Brien arrived in New South Wales in 1815 and worked on his uncle Charles Browne's farm at Abbotsbury in the Appin district, from which he advanced in subsequent years to the Illawarra coast. When in 1817 William Browne drove cattle into Illawarra he must have followed Charles Throsby Smith's track down Regent Mountain to Bulli, there being no other recorded route in use to that time.

Cornelius O'Brien managed "Athlanlin" property, later called Yallah, for his uncle in 1817 is recorded as having sold beef to the army. A notice on March 21, 1818, described O'Brien as being "of Illawarra". He applied for a grant of land for himself in July 1820 when he stated that he owned £1,000 worth of cattle.

On March 31, 1821, O'Brien received from Governor Brisbane a grant of 300 acres which he selected at Bulli between Bulli Point and Waniora

Point and extending back to the mountain on the west.

Subsequently on April 1821, he sought financial help from landowners to construct a road from Figtree to a break in the mountains afterwards called O'Brien's Gap and so the Cataract River and Appin, thus shortening the route via Throsby's track up the mountains at Bulli. To be interested in the shorter route he must have been on his uncle's farm south of Figtree. His appeal for funds must have succeeded for the "Sydney Gazette" of January 18, 1822, stated that O'Brien's Road had been completed.

Meanwhile on his tour to Illawarra, Governor Macquarie and his party on January 15, 1822, camped towards Illawarra from Appin near the Loddon River, a tributary of the Cataract River.

"Mr Cornelius O'Brien joined us at this station . . ." wrote Macquarie next morning. When they reached the summit Macquarie named the peak Regent Mountain and descended it. he wrote: "We arrived at a creek containing a very pretty stream of fresh runningwater about 1½ miles from the foot of the mountain . . . and here we halted to breakfast . . . I have named this stream of fresh water Throsby's Creek in honour of Mr Throsby who first crossed it on his descending the Regent Mountain . . . Having breakfasted we pursued our journey . . ."

That creek today is Slacky Creek running from Slacky Flat to the sea between the two points.

Cornelius O'Brien was in the party and if he resided at Bulli Point at the time surely would have welcomed Governor Macquarie and the latter would have mentioned it in his diary.

The party travelled on through the site of Wollongong, stayed at Browne's for the night and returned by "O'Brien's new road" which led through O'Brien's Gap.

The Bulli grant had evidently not been developed (other than, perhaps,

for grazing) at that stage. Cornelius O'Brien on October 10 the same year married Rebecca Broughton at St Peter's Church of England at Campbelltown.

O'Brien apparently worked in earnest at Bulli and soon had too many cattle there, applying to the Governor for grants at Yass and East Bargo to depasture many cattle and sheep.

Soon afterwards, however, he turned to the Kangaroo Ground for which on October 24, 1823, he applied for a ticket of occupation instead of in the south-west. He soon sent his cattle over and in September 1824 drew a fairly accurate map of the whole valley.

Meanwhile N S King records that O'Brien built a house and barns with 4½ miles of fencing; built a schooner and cultivated 90 acres, producing crops of wheat. James Jervis states that O'Brien's was the only house in Bulli in 1825.

An advertisement in "Sydney Gazette" of July 2, 1828, shows that the harbour (Bulli Bight) was a quarter of a mile from the house., which would place it about Somerville and Point Streets at Bulli today, confirmed by Mitchell's map of 1834 which marks the position of a cottage.

Meanwhile Dr Alick Osborne in November 1832, on his first visit from Sydney to Illawarra by riding horseback via Campbelltown and Appin, mentions the most steep, rugged pass down the mountain to ". . . the residence of Mr O'Brien whose windmill is a land-mark in the wilderness."

"The name is sufficient to assure the wayfarer of every kindness and hospitality; it is literally the oasis in the desert where the unaffected cordiality and frankness of an ancient Irish family give double zest to the excellence and abundance of their domestic fare." By 1836 Cornelius O'Brien had sold his Bulli holdings and moved to Yass.

From the above evidence it would appear that subsequent to the

writing of "Black Diamonds" in 1956, material brought to light would show that the year of settlement of Bulli was later than 1815 stated in the first edition and 1817 in subsequent editions. Cornelius O'Brien was certainly the founder but it appears from evidence so far available that he secured his grant at Bulli in 1821 but that his house was built in either 1822 or 1823.

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