
REPORT ON JUNE MEETING.

Speaker: Dr Joe Davis.

Subject: John Brown of Dapto.

Due to illness of the speaker Dr Joe Davis was requested to fill in on short notice.

Dr Joe Davis, a frequent and scholarly contributor to this Bulletin, told us that his curiosity had turned up a new locality, historically speaking. His labours in Thirroul and the northern area were limited by the geography of the area, but not so the locality comprising land generally to the South West of us, bounded on the west by the escarpment and on the east by the hills and waters of Lake Illawarra, all of which made up the district of Dapto, of which the suburb of Dapto is a small reminder today.

He was delighted to have accessed a treasure house of primary material in the records kept by one John Brown. His father, George Brown, a Scot, arrived in the colony in 1822, and had an inn in Liverpool, followed by The Ship Inn in Wollongong, before moving the business, name and all, to an area close by the bank of Mullet Creek. He went on to build a windmill nearby for the grinding of corn and expanded to a steam driven mill that served a range of purposes. His hotel and mill were successful enterprises and the family enjoyed prominence in the district. After his death, John Brown ran the mill. The community known to us as Brownsville became the commercial town for the Dapto district then and the Browns, with John Brown in particular, became a active landlord and a prominent citizen.

The early settlers of the District were involved with mixed fortunes in turning the agricultural lands to account. Sheep and wheat proved unsuitable. Cattle breeding and overland droving made Henry Osborne a wealthy man. But the economic mainstay was dairying. Production of butter and later milk for general trade was in its infancy and settlers took a scientific interest in breeding and good pasturing techniques. Fruit and vegetable crops were not neglected. A Show society was formed and local produce exhibited.

The Central Illawarra Council was established in 1859 to focus on roads and bridges. Transportation to the port was also a focus. In all these areas John Brown was to play a key role.

The community gathered for different pastimes. Horse racing at Bong Bong on the Tablelands and the way there started at Bong Bong Road, Dapto. Sculling regattas on Mullet Creek was a favourite, particularly when the local William Beach was World Champion.

Religion was supported by the Brown Family and Osborne Family and St Luke's Church of England is convincing evidence of it.

The town of Brownsville was to decline. Dapto to the south and Unanderra to the north were to replace it. Nearby land was low lying and the NSW Railways chose Dapto as the site for its station.

We expect our speaker to have more to say about John Brown in the future.

Finally, our speaker is to be especially thanked for filling our Society's Program when the announced speaker, Lorraine Neate, became ill.