REPORT ON MARCH MEETING

Speaker: Mr Joel Thompson
Topic: My Family Connections to the Pioneers and Early Properties of the Illawarra – Part 1

‘Horsley’, West Dapto - the Weston and Thompson Families
The story of my connections with Illawarra begins in the village of West Horsley in Surrey, England. The Weston Family, landlords of the village, had acquired *West Horsley Place* via an obscure family connection resulting in the inheritance of the property by Henry Weston in 1749. The history of *West Horsley Place* dates back to 1056. How it came into the ownership of the Westons, as well as its earlier connection to the ancestors of Carol Herben, is detailed in her article ‘My Interest in West Horsley Manor, Surrey, UK’ published in the *Illawarra Historical Society Bulletin* of July/August 2008.

Generation 1 - William Francis Weston and Elizabeth Crouch
Henry Weston’s grandson, William Francis Weston was born 20 March 1793. William, like many in the Weston family, joined the East India Company and served in India as a young man, reaching the rank of Lieutenant. During 1816 William returned home from service in India and created a scandal worth of the television program *Downton Abbey*. It would seem that it was this scandal that resulted in his migration to Australia.

In November 1816, Elizabeth Crouch, a maidservant at *West Horsley Place*, gave birth to a son, John Crouch. Shortly after, in January 1817, William married Elizabeth in the old St Pancras Church in London rather than at the church associated with the Weston estate, St Mary’s West Horsley. Shortly after the wedding, the newlyweds departed England for NSW. According to Pam Bowley in her book *West Horsley Place* the Weston’s had a “respectable upper class view of what was socially right or wrong so when one of the sons got a maid servant into trouble, he was duly packed off to Australia together with the unfortunate maid”.

Arrival in Illawarra – The Weston’s Story

William and Elizabeth arrived in Sydney aboard the *HMS Larkin* in November 1817. They were accompanied by their son who was referred to as John Weston on the shipping records. Elizabeth gave birth to their second child, Augusta Sydney Weston, two days after their arrival.

William arrived with a letter from the Secretary of State for the Colonies recommending that he be given a grant of land. *In 1818*, Governor Macquarie allocated him a promise of a grant of 500 acres located in Illawarra and the family settled there during the same year. In doing so, the family became the first free settlers to personally take up their grant in the Illawarra. Weston named this property *West Horsley Place* after his family residence in Surrey. He then set about trying to build his estate, no doubt with aspirations of replicating its English namesake. Life in the colony proved not as easy as the young couple may have hoped.

By October of 1818 Charles Throsby Smith had written to Governor Macquarie complaining about Weston and Cornelius O’Brien for their treatment of the Aborigines. The complaint followed an incident in which Weston and O’Brien apparently formed a party to chase down a group of Aboriginals who were allegedly stealing crops. The end result being that an Aboriginal was shot although the evidence and documentation around this is sketchy. An investigation by the Sydney Bench of Magistrates found in favor of the settlers. Governor Macquarie expressed his surprise, regret and displeasure at the levity of the magistrates’ decision.

In 1822 William petitioned the Governor for a position in the Marine Establishment due to a bush fire burning down his property, leaving him homeless and in extreme want.
William and Sarah went on to have three more children, William Henry (1820 – 1837), Mary Ann (1822-1838) and Elizabeth (1825-1859). William died suddenly at West Horsley Place, on 25 April 1826 and was buried on the estate. He left his widow with five children, a new estate in a scarcely developed district and the responsibility of overseeing convict servants. Elizabeth’s situation is summarised well in the 1828 census record which reads:

“Elizabeth Weston, widow, 5 children, 500 acres, 40 acres cleared, 25 acres cultivated, 35 horned cattle.”

This would undoubtedly have presented a daunting task for a woman who was a maidservant only a few years earlier. It may explain the reasoning behind William’s brother, Captain George Weston, visiting the Colony from his post in India during 1826. He may have visited to see to the affairs of his sister-in-law. George went on to become a prominent citizen in the Colony and the owner of an estate near Fairfield west of Sydney which he named Horsley Park.

A Convict Marriage - Thomas Williamson and Elizabeth Weston (née Crouch)
Following William’s death, Elizabeth Weston (née Crouch) took over as the owner of West Horsley Place. In October 1827, less than two years after William’s death, Elizabeth gave birth to a daughter who was listed as Sarah Weston in the 1828 Census. Then, in 1830, Elizabeth married a convict named Thomas Williamson who had arrived on 27 January 1820 on board the Prince Regent. Thomas Williamson was in Illawarra by 1828 as he was listed in the census as a Government Servant and tenant farmer at Illawarra, responsible for 15 acres and 34 cattle. He was granted a ticket of leave in 1829.

In the 1841 census, Sarah Weston was listed as Sarah Matilda Williamson which suggests that Thomas was her father. The same Census return indicates that West Horsley Place had become a small village of 84 people, both convict and free, living in 21 slab houses. Much of the 500 acre estate was leased to tenant farmers on clearing leases.
Elizabeth Williamson (Weston née Crouch) died in 1853 at West Horsley Place and was buried at St Luke’s Cemetery in Dapto.

**Generation 2 - Andrew Thompson and Elizabeth Weston**

In 1841, William Francis Weston’s promised grant was finally issued 23 years after it was promised. The beneficiaries of the estate were Weston’s daughters - Augusta Brooks (née Weston) and Elizabeth Weston. Augusta had married in 1837 to Richard Brooks whose father owned a neighbouring estate, Exmouth.

Elizabeth married Andrew Thompson in 1843 and the *West Horsley Place* estate was subsequently split into two portions. Augusta and Richard Brooks took the eastern portion and retained the name *West Horsley*. Elizabeth and Andrew Thompson took the western portion which became *Horsley*.

Andrew Thompson came to Australia from Ireland and arrived on 24th April 1839 along with his sister, Catherine. His occupation was listed as farm labourer and he was able to read and write.

By March 1841 he had established himself at Mullet Creek and was already the owner of a wooden dwelling occupied by four males, three free and one convict. The census form was completed in Andrew's own handwriting and signed by him at Mullet Creek on 13th March 1841.

Andrew and Elizabeth had nine children including Catherine Thompson (born 1845). Elizabeth died during the birth of her ninth child in 1859, aged just 34.

**Horsley Homestead**

The date of construction for *Horsley* homestead is somewhat of a mystery, and it is likely that various components were built at differing times, making it difficult to pinpoint a construction date. The date commonly adopted for the building has been 1842, which would place it in the year following Elizabeth’s inheritance of the property and the issue of the land grant and a year prior to her marriage to Andrew Thompson.
There is, however, considerable evidence that parts of the house and the outbuildings are likely to date from earlier than this. It is more likely that the major construction occurred from 1843. This would coincide with Elizabeth and Andrew’s marriage, and Andrew taking over the running of this half of the estate.

Andrew Thompson was a highly respected gentleman in Illawarra. This is evidenced by his election to the Illawarra District Council in April 1861, a position he retained until his death at Horsley on the 7th August 1867 at age 56. He was buried in the family vault at St Luke’s Brownsville. According to the Illawarra Mercury of 13 August 1867, Andrew’s funeral was attended by between 300-400 people.

During his life Andrew acquired a large number of properties in the Illawarra including:

- **Yalla** - 713 acres between Wollongong and Kiama on the main road.
- **Benares** - 260 acres on Mullet Creek.
- **Horsley** - 330 acres.
- **Mount Pleasant Farm** - 100 acres (at the cross roads 1 1/4 miles from Wollongong).
- **30 Acre Farm** - adjoining Mount Pleasant Farm.
- **Cosgrove’s** - at Fairy Meadow.
- **Wholohan’s** - 150 acres possibly at Dapto

Most of these properties were sold or auctioned by his executors - his son, Francis A. Thompson and his son in law, Evan R. Evans.

The sales notice from the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 25 June 1874 described the Horsley estate:

**HORSLEY- 250 ACRES** by grant, 340 acres by survey, 1 mile and a half from the Kiama Road and about 8 miles from Wollongong. About half of the land has been ploughed and laid down in grass, and about two-thirds cleared, the residual being lightly timbered for shelter. Horsley House (formerly the residence of the late Andrew Thompson, Esq.) is a commodious well-finished gentleman’s residence, brick-built, cemented, slated roof, containing 12 apartments, two of which are 22 x 18, kitchen, dairy, stables, coach-house, and other out-buildings.
The paddocks, excluding the residence and garden, are let for dairy purposes, for £200 per annum, which is a sufficient guarantee as to the nature and value of the rich pasture land of this estate.

By 1876, both sections of the Horsley estate had come into the ownership of the Lindsay family who ran a renowned Ayrshire dairy stud. The property remained in the Lindsay family until subdivided into smaller lots in 1954. Parts of West Horsley remained in family ownership until 1967. By the time, the Housing Commission resumed the western section of West Horsley for public housing in 1972, a large proportion had already been developed by private operators. From 1981, Landcom and other developers continued to subdivide parts of the old estate.

The Evans Family of Penrose and Avondale
Andrew and Elizabeth Thompson’s son-in-law, Evan Roberts Evans was the scion of the Evans family who farmed Penrose at Dapto. Evan and his parents, Evan Robert Evans (snr) and his wife Sarah Roberts migrated to Australia in 1837. By 6 May 1839, Evan (snr) had taken out a lease over Francis O’Brien’s grant which later became part of Stream Hill at West Dapto. The lease appears to have been ceased by agreement by June 1840 after the sale of the land to William Sheaffe. (see http://www.library.uow.edu.au/archives/pdfs/d197.pdf)

The 1841 census shows that Evan was not the only Evans based in the area at this time. His elder brother, Thomas was at Stream Hill while Evan had relocated to William Keevers property – Hussar Farm west of Kembla Grange. Shortly after the Census Evan appears to have moved onto the land near Mt Brown which he would come to own and name Penrose. McCaffrey claims that Evan moved onto this site in 1841, but it seems more likely that he may have responded to the advertisement in the Sydney Morning Herald of 13 July 1842:

ALLUVIAL AGRICULTURAL FARMS, to be Let on Clearing Leases, with Working Bullocks, Dairy Cows, &c.

About Four Thousand acres of Land, within a few miles of Wollongong, and fronting on the Illawarra Lake, which affords water carriage nearly to Shell Harbour.
The whole will be divided into Lots suitable for cultivation, with a Hun for working Bullocks and Dairy Cows, securely fenced. Apply to Mr. William Nimmoa, on the Farm, near Dapto; or, at the Office of Messrs. William and Co., to the undersigned.

IMLAY. Sydney, July 8.

The land that was to become known as Penrose was put up for sale in 1848. It was a portion of the Yalla, or Wollingary estate:

TO CAPITALISTS, RESIDING IN AND AROUND THE DISTRICT OF DAPTO, ILLAWARRA.

To be sold by Private Contract, BY MR. STUBBS,

PART of the Beautiful Estate of YALLA OR WOLLINGARY, (1000 Acres).

BEING the portion occupied by Mr. T. Evans; bounded on the south by the Macquarie River and Mr. David Johnstone's fence; on the east by the road leading from Jamberoo to Wollongong; on the north by the land occupied by Mr. Smith; and on the west by Henry Osborne's road with the Duck Pond running in the centre. 100 acres or more are cleared and in cultivation; the richest and most productive land in the district.

(Sydney Morning Herald, 13 January 1848)

The sales notice refers to the land being occupied by T. Evans which indicates that Evan’s brother had joined him at Penrose and being the elder by 20 years, may have been the more noted resident hence his inclusion in the notice.

In 1852 Evan is believed to have begun the construction of the homestead - Penrose Villa. He apparently heard of a stonemason from his home village, Penzance, coming to Australia. He went to Sydney to greet him and offered him his first job in Australia.
Evan Robert Evans (snr) played an active role in the local community, served on the Illawarra Council and was involved in the agricultural societies and shows as well as with St Luke’s Church, Brownsville. He had interests in cattle that extended to other areas and districts, including at Murramarang (near Ulladulla), which explains his death occurring in Milton in 1865, aged 60 years. His son, Evan Roberts Evans (Jnr) took over the estate and his wife, Sarah, remained in Dapto until her death in 1891. Both Evan and Sarah are buried at St Luke’s Cemetery, Brownsville.

**Evan Roberts Evans and Catherine Thompson**

Evan Roberts Evans (jnr) married Catherine Thompson at Dapto in 1866. Catherine was the daughter of Andrew and Elizabeth Thompson of Horsley. Like his father, Evan jnr played a very prominent role in the community, agricultural societies and the affairs of the township.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* of 27 June 1874 indicated that Evan had acquired the property known as Yalla from the estate of his father-in-law, Andrew Thompson. The estate was sold in 1881:

> DL. DYMOCK has received instructions from E. R. Evans, Esq. J.P., Dapto, to sell by auction, The well-known property known as YALLAH, containing, 720 acres (more or less), adjoining the celebrated properties of P. H. Osborne, Esq., and Penrose Villa, bounded by the Illawarra Lake, and fronting the main road from Wollongong to Kiama. The land is rich meadow finished in artificial grasses, of large area, with superior forest ridges, all highly improved and subdivided in paddocks, with suitable residence and premises, forming an extensive and productive dairy farm, well watered in the driest season.

(*Sydney Morning Herald, 26 February 1881*)

*To be continued in next issue.*