“Illawarra—A Century of History”

The Monthly Meeting was held on 6th September, 1945, at Brandon House when the speaker was Mr. James Jervis who addressed the members on “Illawarra—A Century of History—1788-1888.”
Mr. Jervis commenced his story with the unsuccessful attempt of Captain James Cook of the "Endeavour" to land at Red Point near the present town of Port Kembla on April 28th, 1770; heavy surf preventing a landing.

A small party left the south shore of Botany Bay on May 14th, 1794, with the intention of examining the country south of Sydney. They believed they reached the neighbourhood of Red Point but the account of their journey is too indefinite to decide if they actually touched Illawarra.

Bass and Flinders left Port Jackson on March 25th, 1796, in the "Tom Thumb" to explore a large river said to enter the sea some miles to the south of Botany Bay. They eventually got as far as the Five Islands where the famous "hair cutting" episode took place.

From the latitudes given by Flinders the place he named "Tom Thumb's Lagoon" we now know as Lake Illawarra and the place on the modern maps marked "Tom Thumb's Lagoon" was not seen by the explorers.

In December, 1797, Bass set out again in a whale boat on an expedition to the southward and on the 6th of that month took shelter in what is to-day the harbour of Kiama. Bass gave an interesting description of that famous scenic attraction known as the "Blowhole." The next evening the party entered a place which he called "Shoals Haven"—now the Shoalhaven River.

There is no evidence of any examination of the Illawarra district between 1797 and 1805 until the latter year when Surveyor James Meehan visited the Shoalhaven River and surveyed it for about 15 miles.

The cedar-getters begun operations on the Shoalhaven in 1812 and by 1819 had penetrated all the cedar bearing areas in Illawarra. The district was first reached from the west in 1815 when Dr. Charles Throsby led a small party from Appin down the mountains in the vicinity of Bulli.

Development quickly followed and by 1824 the area between Stanwell Park and Nowra was settled. The census of 1841 gave the population of Illawarra as 2,633 males, 1,411 females. There were 659 houses in the district of which 88 were brick or stone and 571 wood.

In the forties the dairying industry was well established and in 1856 milk from the district was advertised for sale in Sydney at 1/- per quart.

The opening of the first coal mine during the late forties also accelerated the progress of the district. This mine was near Mt. Keira, the first coal being brought to Wollongong on August 27th, 1849.

With the rapid growth of the area, the citizens pressed for some form of local government and in March 29th, 1859, the first election was held for the Wollongong Municipal Council. The first Kiama Council was elected on September 13, 1859.

The establishment of the stone trade at Kiama in October, 1870, also gave an impetus to that part of the district. Shipping business was brisk and in 1877 it was reported that there were as many as nine vessels in that port at the one time.

However, the day of the ship was drawing to a close. In 1888 communication with Sydney by rail was completed. Prior to the coming of the railway practically all traffic to and from Illawarra went by sea, but when the railway was established an interesting chapter in the history of Illawarra was closed.