“JOHN DUNMORE LANG ON MULLET CREEK”

The speaker at the meeting held on 2nd October last was Mr. Archibald Gilchrist, author of “John Dunmore Lang, Chiefly Autobiographical” and the following precis has been made from his address:
Lang and his brother Andrew Lang had associations with the land the subject of the paper, described broadly as the area on either side of the Prince's Highway at what is now known as Kembla Grange. The story of their association commences with their friend John Dunlop Wyllie, who arrived in Australia from Ayrshire on 15th January, 1824. Wyllie brought with him a very valuable acquisition to the colony, namely some Ayrshire cattle consisting of at least one bull and one cow, possibly more. The Governor at the time, Governor Brisbane, was aware of the value to the colony of such an acquisition of pure stock and it would seem that this was good reason for granting land to a practical experienced farmer possessing the nucleus of a valuable herd. This grant was in the Kembla Grange area, and was subsequently increased by a further grant to 2000 acres. The property was then known as Shoan Vale, Five Islands.

Wyllie was in occupation by 30th June, 1825, for on that date a glowing advertisement appeared in the Sydney Gazette offering “to take in cattle to graze on moderate terms, for improvement of the herd by the famous Ayrshire bull”. However, his venture was not successful. The year 1826 was one of great economic difficulty, and in that year Wyllie left his property. For assistance in his financial difficulties, he looked to Dr. Lang who, though himself without means, was able to get advances totalling £700 on his own personal security. The amounts were paid over to Wyllie who wanted Lang to take over the property by way of repayment, but this Lang naturally would not do. Fortunately, however, by 1829 Wyllie was reasonably stable financially.

An application for a grant of a further 1000 acres adjoining the original property was acceded to by the Crown and Wyllie was authorised to take possession of the additional area on 13th October, 1829. In that year, he transferred the whole 2000 acres grant to John Dunmore Lang in consideration of moneys paid to him. The property was then described roughly as being bounded on the west by the veterans’ allotments, and the Government reserve (at the foot of the mountains), on the south by Mullet Creek and the shore of Lake Illawarra, on the east by the land of Mrs. Jemima Jenkins, and on the north by sundry small grants (running approximately east and west about where the Main South Coast railway line crosses Princes Highway at Unanderra).

Wyllie apparently retained, nevertheless, by private arrangement, a right to half the estate and to half the proceeds on any sale.

Lang's interest in the land was purely to recoup himself for his losses in assisting Wyllie. He found it necessary to mortgage the property to Samuel Terry for £225, and attempted to sell it in 1832, without success. In point of fact Lang was, in his usual manner, violently against holding land by way of speculation, and had a proposal for settling a large number of immigrants on the area, pursuant to his vigorous immigration scheme, which he was fostering on his voyage to Scotland in 1833-34. However, the settlers did not settle on the property, the change of plans being necessary apparently because Wyllie then appeared able to settle on his half of the grant with two young Scotch brothers, relatives of Wyllie, then recently arrived, namely Robert and William Carruth. Accordingly, Lang discharged his mortgage to Terry and on 7th March, 1835, conveyed to Wyllie with the Carruth brothers that portion of the grant west of the main road containing by estimation 1000 acres. In point of fact, later sur-
vey showed this to contain 928 acres, leaving Lang with the eastern half of the property containing 1207 acres. The Carruth brothers worked the property until 1838, when the serious drought of that year caused the brothers to sell out their interest and they emigrated to New Zealand where they finally settled after colourful and adventurous experiences.

Meanwhile, Lang realised his interest in the property, then known as Dunlop Vale. It was sold at auction on 6th September, 1838, and Lang’s 1207 acres was knocked down to his brother, Andrew Lang, for £2400.

On 30th March, 1840, very belatedly as was usual at the time, the Crown Grant for the whole 2000 acres was issued in favour of Andrew Lang as to his own half for himself and as to the other half in favour of Gerard Gerard, the latter having by this time purchased the western portion of Wyllie and the Carruth brothers.

Andrew Lang’s area was in 1840 subdivided into 34 farms of from 6 to 70 acres each which, when offered for sale by auction, realised the substantial amount of £6876, the price per acre varying from £5 to £14/10/-.

The District was then progressing well and the property was described in 1840 as being “six miles south of Wollongong where a breakwater and basin are now constructing, with a steamboat running to and from it twice a week and which will unquestionably make the District of Illawarra, with its fine climate, its frequent rain, and its semi-tropical vegetation, the garden of New South Wales.”

That brought an end to Lang’s active association with Illawarra, but he maintained an interest in the area. In 1867 he was present in Wollongong and concluded an address with a remarkable prophecy reading as follows:

“I cannot bring the speech to a close without expressing the great gratification I have experienced at witnessing the rapid and progressive improvement of this promising town and district under the auspices and exertions of its municipal corporation. Knowing it personally, as I have done, for upward of thirty years, I have always taken a deep interest in its welfare and advancement. Considering its vast and various resources, especially its inexhaustible mines of coal, I feel confident that it will one day, and at no distant day, be the seat of a numerous population and a great centre-point of manufacturing industry for Australia.”—E.B.