In April, 1884, the first land sale in Illawarra took place, that of Smith's Hill property, which extended on the Northern side to Fairy Creek.

It appears that a Mr. James Anderson purchased most of that area and later made an offer of 40 acres for recreational purposes.

Mr. F. A. Franklin, M.I.C.E., who was an Alderman of what was then called The Wollongong-Borough Council, and Mayor of it for two years, was the guiding force behind a subsequent proclamation to have Fairy Creek Reserve proclaimed as such.

It was, and still is, an area of 56 acres, 2 roods, and apparently included the area of 40 acres offered by Mr. Anderson.

The complete area is bounded on the West and North by Fairy Creek (which has its source in two arms in the foothills of The Illawarra Range), on the East by the Pacific Ocean, and on the South by what was then, and until quite recent times, the Mt. Pleasant Colliery Railway Line which ran to Wollongong Harbour.

At that time, The Hon. Alexander Stuart was the local member of Parliament in the N.S.W. Assembly and also Premier and it was considered that the name of the Parkland should be changed to Stuart Park. The Dept. of Mines — Public Parks Branch, was approached and accordingly gave its consent, and on 18/9/1885, the following announcement appeared in the N.S.W. Govt. Gazette.

DEPT. OF MINES — PUBLIC PARKS BRANCH — SYDNEY.

It is hereby notified for Public information that His Excellency, the Governor, with the advice of the Executive Council, has been pleased to approve the appointment of the undermentioned gentlemen as Trustees of the Land at Wollongong (known as Stuart Park) purchased for the purpose of a Public Park hereinafter described.

Namely — Messrs. Archibald Campbell, George Hewlett, Francis Woodward, Frederick Augustus Franklin and Donald McDonald Campbell. — Area 56 acres, 2 roods.

Plans for the improvement of the property to suit the Public needs were prepared by Mr. Franklin and submitted to the Government and subsequently the Colonial Secretary considered the plan a model one and should be reserved by the Department for further use. This plan envisaged ornamental lakes and channels in different sections.

Mr. Franklin, who lived at "Bustle Farm", Church Street, Smith's Hill, was an extremely able gentleman and must have had considerable standing in England, prior to his departure for Australia. Indeed he was the Engineer responsible for building most of the Railway Bridges in New South Wales.

Actually, the Dept. of Mines did not proceed with any of the plan of beautification. However Mr. Franklin was responsible for a scheme of ornamental channels that were constructed.
An area about 100 yards long by about 50 yards wide extended from just inside the Park Gate to within 50 feet of the Sports Oval, and water lilies etc., grew therein. Another, also about 100 yards long by 50 yards wide was constructed in the North-Western section of the Park, but was considerably deeper. This pool drained into Fairy Creek and quite a lot of bird life frequented this waterway.

The present sports oval was formed and the present roadway encircled it. The Main and Inner section of the Park was heavily timbered with fine specimens of our Australian Eucalypts.

Opposite the North-Eastern side of the Oval was a small area, fenced and timbered with oaks, which was a favourite place for picnickers. The roadway which ran from the entrance and encircled the whole park separated this section from the Eastern and elevated area which extends from the entrance to Fairy Creek. Two pathways, one along the top, or middle, and the other, known as "Lovers' Walk", along the lower track ran the full length of this delightful stretch and was mainly timbered with Banksia and Tea Tree. In turn this was separated from the beach by a protective brush fence, otherwise sand blown by the sea breezes would have covered the whole area. A circular shaped rest pavilion was an attraction in the centre. Almost opposite this building and adjoining the Roadway was a well-grown Banyan Palm, enclosed in a square and high protective fence with a notice board intimating the name of the park and its trustees.

Close to Fairy Creek itself was a splendidly constructed pavilion with an upper storey. Tables and seating accommodation catered for large picnic parties during indifferent weather.

Fairy Creek itself was a really beautiful waterway. That portion close to the Ocean was shallow and a safe area for children swimming. Further back the water was much deeper, that part where the two arms meet being very deep and was a favourite swimming and fishing resort. It was known as Oakley Point, As well as fishing, prawning was a favourite pastime. Boating was possible as far to the West as Bode's Hotel (at the Prince's Highway) and to the North as far as Fairy Meadow. This arm was called Towradgi.

As the years rolled by, so did the Creek become shallower. This came about as a result of the Fine Slack Coal from the mines at Mt. Keira, Mt. Pleasant and even Corrimal, being washed by flood rains into the watercourses that fed Fairy Creek. Immense quantities of this material eventually accumulated in the Creek bed and naturally the deep areas and pot holes gradually became shallower. Now there is practically no depth of water anywhere.

Usually the Creek is closed to the Ocean, but after heavy rain storms, the Creek overflows and a channel remains for some time until sand banks up and closes the Creek again. About 30 years ago a caretaker was appointed and subsequently a residence with a shop front was constructed and was occupied by the Needen family, until very recently. Camping was becoming popular at that time and the Wollongong Council which had taken over control of the park from The Lands Department, arranged to cater for campers.

This soon became so popular that the camping area extended well beyond the prescribed limits and the whole park area suffered accordingly.

From the earliest days vandalism has been a constant worry and very difficult to police. Nowadays Stuart Park is anything but the lovely parkland it was, and commercialisation has had its usual effect and now the beauty and glory of Stuart Park is nothing more than a memory. — W. V. M.