The discovery by Bass was made in July, 1797, prior to the discovery on September 15 the same year, of coal at the Hunter River, where Newcastle grew. This is said to have been the first coal discovered in Australia although Collins recorded that a fishing boat returned in June 1796 with pieces of coal from a bay near Port Stephens.

The Illawarra seam was about six feet thick but cropped out at some places where loading was difficult and it was concluded that it would be impossible to work the seam and extract the coal.

GENESIS OF WOLLONGONG:

Cedar trading had been operating in the Illawarra District prior to 1815, but no overland route existed until at the end of that same year (1815), Dr. Charles Throsby with the assistance, it is believed, of Joe Willim and other stockmen, discovered a track by which cattle were taken to the rich pastures of “Five Islands” from the drought-stricken area around Glenfield near Liverpool. Appin was reached the first night, and it was four days later, when marking a track as they struggled, they reached the top of the mountain range and viewed the ocean.

Very soon afterwards cattle were driven down with great difficulty and Dr. Throsby’s stockman erected a stockade for them near the present site of the Roman Catholic Church and built a hut for himself near the corner of Smith Street.

ROBERTSON:

This area was not settled till much later than other parts of the Southern Tablelands, because of the dense rain forest brush with which it was covered. When Hoddle in 1830 with great difficulty surveyed and cut a bridle track through to Kiama, he recorded that many of the trees after being cut through, would not fall, being kept upright by the tangled mass of vines and creepers. A small patch of rain forest has been preserved on the hill south of the railway station.

Settlers moved in after the passage of Robertson’s Land Act (“First selection before survey”) in 1861. A village was laid out in 1865, and was first called Yarrawa. But, when the settlers were trying to persuade the government to build a road, according to the “Herald” they applied for a rare dose of soft soap . . . for in a numerous signed petition to the Secretary for Lands they have prayed that gentleman to allow the name of the township to be “Robertson” in order that the name of the great benefactor of his species might live forever; and Sir John Robertson was graciously pleased to grant their prayer. (J. H. M. Abbott remembers him as “a terrible, hairy old man, ravingly blastiferous . . . full to the teeth of statesmanship and whisky”. He was opposed to Federation referring to Victoria as “that cabbage-garden”. It is slightly ironic that his name became attached to a district which produces so many cabbages).