"DUCK AND CABBAGE TREE — A Pictorial History of Clothes in Australia, 1788-1914" by Cedric Flower; Angus & Robertson Ltd., 1968.

Quoting from the jacket flap: “Anyone interested in clothes, for their social significance or their aesthetic appeal, will enjoy this book. It is the first pictorial history of clothes in Australia. . . . A neat, sharply flavoured text provides the fascinating background against which colonial fashions evolved.”

This reader heartily agrees. However, one item is of particular relevance to us. In his introduction Flower talks about the cabbage-tree hat and the duck trouser. He records the hats worn as early as 1799 and retaining their popularity over the next century, especially on the eastern seaboard, where the palm flourishes (two in our street).

He says: “My great-grandmother, widowed in Wollongong, supported her family by weaving these hats. They sold for £10 and must have been the period’s most expensive headgear.”

To see an excellent specimen of the craft, visit our Museum, where the one on display might have been woven by Flower’s maternal ancestor!

He says also that the duck trouser was made from “a strong, untwilled cotton . . . worn by 18th century sailors and considered most suitable for the dress of convict transportees”.

If you can acquire a copy, do so, as it is a most valuable reference.

“CURRENCY LAD.”

P.S. — Did you know that the bushrangers of 1850 and beyond, including Ned Kelly, in the main would be described today as “sharp” dressers?

BY THE WAY, WHEN YOU’RE GOING TO SYDNEY:

MITCHELL’S ROAD

From the top of Bulli Pass to a point between Heathcote and Engadine Princes Highway follows the line marked out by the Surveyor-General, Sir Thomas Mitchell in the 1840’s. The only previous land access to Illawarra had been by way of Campbelltown and Appin, descending the range by Throsby’s track behind Bulli, by O’Brien’s Road, or by Mitchell’s own Mount Keira Road, with which the new road was intended to connect.

Having marked out the general line, Mitchell sent his son, Assistant-Surveyor, Roderick Mitchell, to make a detailed survey, but apparently young Mitchell, despite official prodding, did not get on with the job; and finally, having overstrained the patience of his formidable father (never the most easy-going of men), Master Roderick was “placed on the reduction list’ and replaced by Surveyor Darke, whose name survives in Darke’s Forest.

Mitchell’s Road was not much used. Though much shorter than the route through Campbelltown, it passed through many miles of barren and desolate country; and within a few years of its completion the opening of the railway to Campbelltown made the longest way round (in distance) the shortest way home (in time).
With the completion of the Illawarra Railway in 1888 it was even more neglected, and Frank Cridland, writing in 1923, says “it is only in recent years that the section between Waterfall and Bulli Pass has been put into really trafficable condition”.

Mitchell’s Road must have been practically the last of the big convict construction jobs. Transportation to New South Wales had ceased in 1840, but for some years afterwards convicts already transported were working out their time.

MADDEN’S PLAINS

The name is said to be derived from the Madden family, who had land at Thirroul. Their cattle roamed over the open swamp country above the escarpment, which became known as Madden’s Plains. Members of the family afterwards had land at Avondale and Balgowie.

WATERFALL

The township of Waterfall (which takes its name from falls a couple of miles away on one of the tributaries of Port Hacking or Hacking River) was a by-product of the railway. After the opening of the line in 1886 to a temporary terminus about half a mile south of the present Waterfall Station (near the southernmost of the two overridges), it was the railhead from which coaches plied, at first to Wollongong, then, after the opening of the isolated line between Wollongong and Clifton, to Clifton. When everything ran to time and all connections were made, the journey by train, coach and train from Sydney to Wollongong took 5 hours 23 minutes. The coast road was said to resemble a Spanish mule-track, and the coach trip must have been a hair-raising experience in bad weather — even in good weather, as the contemporary description in the August Bulletin shows, it put some strain on the passengers’ nerves. From the same description it appears that, even in its brief hour of glory as the railhead, the village possessed “but four houses — the Heathcote Hotel, a store, bakery and refreshment rooms.”

(To be continued)

THE SUBURB OF COMO, NEW SOUTH WALES:

These notes are a summary of a paper prepared for the St. George Historical Society in 1964 by Mr. and Mrs. Gifford Eardley. Mr. Eardley has published a number of books on the history of the St. George district, and railway history, including “Transporting the Black Diamond,” a history of Illawarra colliery railway.

(It is being serialised in our Bulletin by special permission of Mr. and Mrs. Eardley.)

One of the prettiest suburbs of Sydney is located at Como, a settlement situated on and around a short promontory jutting from the south bank of the beauteous George’s River immediately adjacent to its confluence with the equally beautiful Woronora River. It is understood that Mr. James Murphy, the secretary and manager of the vast Holt-Sutherland Estate Company, was responsible for the naming of Como where, with the coming of the Illawarra Railway, he established a large pleasure