JAMES ARMSTRONG ("Bedad"):  

The article "WHY MANGERTON?" in the Illawarra Historical Society's Bulletin of July, 1973 raises the question of why John Osborne chose to name his Wollongong grant "Mangerton" and suggests that there may have been a connection between the Scottish Mangerton and James Armstrong ("Old Bedad") who, for a number of years, worked a clearing lease on Osborne's "Garden Hill", later known as "Mangerton".

James Armstrong was born in County Fermanagh, Northern Ireland, in 1773, son of a sailor, Robert Armstrong, and his wife Isabella. With his first wife and nine* children he came to New South Wales on the "Susan", arriving in Sydney in 1839 where his daughter Isabella and son-in-law Joseph Vance had arrived in October 1838.

Together with a group of other men and women from County Fermanagh, many of whom are mentioned in McCaffrey's "History of The Illawarra and its Pioneers" and Cousins' "Garden of New South Wales", the Armstrongs and the Vances moved to Wollongong and took up clearing leases on John Osborne's land which was then named "Garden Hill". Most of this group, led by George Grey, moved from Wollongong to Kiama in 1843 to undertake the task of clearing Robb's "Riversdale" grant between Kiama and Jamberoo.

James Armstrong remained on "Garden Hill" until 1844, at which time the "Bonaira" grant at Kiama was being cut up and sold as farms. James Armstrong and his son-in-law Joseph Vance both bought farms—the Vance farm on the eastern side of the Gerringong road being called "Wesley Park" and James Armstrong's "Bonaira Vale". Unfortunately Bonaira Vale has been known for many years now, simply as "Armstrong's Gully" and "Wesley Park" on the other side of the road is the prosaic "Kiama Heights".

"Bedad" died at Kiama in August, 1880 at the stated age of 107 years. It is not known that there was any strong link between him and the Osbornes, but there certainly was one between Joseph Vance and Alick Osborne. There is a simply worded brass plaque on the wall of the Methodist Church in Kangaroo Valley which reads:

"In loving memory of their faithful and valued friends
JOSEPH and ISABELLA VANCE this tablet is
erected by Alick and Isabel Osborne.
'I have fought the good fight,
I have finished my course'."

It appears unlikely that Osborne named Mangerton because of any connection between James Armstrong and the Scottish stronghold of the clan but the said James was a colourful and remarkable pioneer of the Kiama district. He and his first wife are buried in the Kendall family's burial ground at Kiama.

Alick Osborne's tombstone in the Wollongong cemetery reads "Alick Osborne of Mangerton". One wonders which of the Osbornes chose the name.

—Ian Young

*Not fifteen, as alleged by McCaffrey. It was Armstrong's daughter Isabella Vance who had fifteen children.