THE GUNS OF WOLLONGONG:

The information available on the fortifications of Wollongong is rather scrappy, and some of it contradictory; but apparently fortifications of some kind are as old as the harbour itself. Colonel Barney recommended fortifying his first harbour basin, and some time in the 1840's guns described as "of Waterloo vintage" were mounted on Flagstaff Hill. An 1873 picture shows them in position between the pilot's cottage and the flagstaff.

In the seventies and eighties there were constant apprehensions of war with Russia. The local people were convinced that, even if the Government in Sydney did not appreciate the strategic importance of Wollongong, the Czar of All the Russias did, and would make it his first objective in the event of war. Repeated agitation led to the installation in 1879 of three 68-pounder muzzle loaders to replace the Waterloo guns on Flagstaff Hill. One of these is believed to be at the old Court House at the end of Harbour Street, and the other two at Gwynneville. According to one authority the guns on the end of Smith's Hill between the Continental Baths and North Beach also date from this time.

One of the old Waterloo guns was afterwards set up as a signal gun. At one o'clock each day the time was telegraphed from Sydney to the Post Office, a ball on a pole on top of the Post Office was dropped, and the gun was fired — as one old chap said, "Ain't it marvellous the way they hit that ball every time?"

Another Russian scare in the late eighties led to a demand for improved fortifications and guns to sweep the sea from Bulli to Red Point. This produced at least one modern piece of equipment — a six-inch breech-loading pneumatic disappearing swivel gun, which was dragged from the wharf by ten horses and mounted in a 45-foot diameter gun pit, with access tunnels and underground chambers for ammunition stores and quarters for the gun crew. In one account this gun was described as a six-inch rifle, and I remember hearing a spirited argument about whether such a thing was possible — one disputant contended that "the kick would break your shoulder and knock you rotten when you fired it."

According to some other accounts the Smith's Hill guns were also installed at this time. The guns themselves bear the date 1872, and would have been obsolete in 1890. They were also set up on revolving tracks in gunpits with underground magazines. In the nineties there was also a Nordenfeldt quickfirer, which must have been a recent addition — it was the latest thing in those days. According to a 1937 account it was then still "lying in one of the disused magazines" — whether it was removed before the pits were filled in I could not say.

A detachment of permanent artillery had been sent down to install the guns, but in their heyday they were manned by a local volunteer unit. "Old Pioneer" in his "Reminiscences of Illawarra" recalled "watching the guns firing out to sea, and the gunners running a wet swab into the gun to make it safe for the next discharge. The carriages were of heavy wood blocks and the elevation was secured by lifting the guns with a lever and blocking up to the firing position." These of course were the muzzle-loaders — Captain Hornblower would have been quite at home with them. The
six-inch rifle and the Nordenfeldt were less archaic. The local volunteers, one writer says, “handled the guns with such precision and accuracy that they became the crack company of the State, and never failed during the nine days’ camp each year at Middle Head to win the gunnery competition from all comers.” They were commanded for some years by Major Mac-Cabe — that was where he got his title — who lost his life in the rescue operations after the Mount Kembla disaster and is commemorated (despite the spelling) by McCabe Park. According to “Old Pioneer” he “had no equal in the State in the laying of a gun for discharge”.

In 1907 the Commonwealth Government decided, not before time, that the Smith’s Hill guns were obsolete, and offered them to the Council for ornamental purposes. Apparently they were allowed to remain as they were till the 1950’s, when the Council decided that the old gunpits were being used for “undesirable purposes”, and filled them in. The stonework is believed to be still intact under the grass. The Flagstaff Hill fortifications were apparently dismantled about 1914, and in recent years the entries to the magazines and quarters were bricked up — “undesirable purposes” again.

A few years ago the Fort Artillery Society, thinking — no doubt rightly — that Wollongong does not appreciate its historic relics, tried to hijack the Smith’s Hill guns for Bare Island. The Society was able to beat that, for the time being anyway, and hopes at least to keep the guns — we would like to see the old fortifications reopened and restored.

— Corp’ril Wanst

AT REST AT LAST:

On Thursday 31st July 1902 there was an explosion at Mount Kembla Colliery. The greatest mining disaster in Australian history, it cost the lives of 96 men, two of whom, Henry Osborne MacCabe, a mining engineer, and William McMurray, an “off shift” deputy, perished in the rescue operations.

A memorial to the victims, which became known as the “MacCabe-McMurray Monument,” was erected by public subscription and unveiled on Saturday 12 August 1905.

Originally situated just west of the entrance to Crown Lane (near the Crown/Keira Traffic Lights), it was removed in March 1937, with the approval of the mining unions, to the rest park at Globe Lane/Burelli Street, having become a traffic hazard.

However, many people in the mountain villages had considered over the years that “Its rightful place is on the Mount.” Following representations from interested villagers, early in August 1973, with the approval of the City Council and this Society, it was again shifted to the Churchyard of the present Soldiers’ and Miners’ Memorial Church of England, Mount Kembla, where it was dedicated in the annual remembrance of the disaster service on Sunday 5th.

It stands immediately west of the main entrance of the Church, readily visible from the road.

P.S. The rest park looks somewhat forlorn without it!

(Historical information from The Wollongong Rest Park . . . And the Memorials Therein, by A. P. Fleming, an I.H.S. Publication, November 1971).
particular the biting, realistic, whimsical, cynical humour of those ex-depression lads who became companions during the Middle East campaigns of World War II. He could well emulate and shine as brightly as the bard whom he generously quotes, though his professional competence would never place him in the category of the "gentleman one."

This short piece of memorabilia serves so much to demonstrate that its author is just touching on the fringe of his capacity to recount our past, in his own distinctively entertaining manner. The booklet could have been presented with more apt illustrations, in that most of the ones incorporated with the text have only a marginal relevance (particularly the references to the Harbour proposals and even the centre litho of Wollongong) to the story. Perhaps a photo of Woodward's home, of the old Masonic Temple, and of a typical political meeting of the day may have added more colour and been more worthy of the excellent literary material. In the material itself perhaps the author could have applied himself a little more assiduously to the circumstances of the "downfall," treating it more subjectively and dramatically and not leaving the reader so much to draw his own conclusions. The author seems to have lost an opportunity to arrest his readers and cause them to pause and think, for there is a moral to be drawn which is equally apposite in our own times, that many fine persons of the utmost rectitude can become involved in others' affairs to a stage where they do not understand and cannot manage them.

The overall impression is that Francis Woodward made a substantial contribution to the welfare of his fellow-man, and that he was sincere and honest and rather, as Samuel Weller was apt to say, "a victim of circumstances." Thus he possibly does not deserve the analogy of the apparent rogue described by the "Banjo." Having examined numerous legal documents prepared by Woodward and read some of his own handwritten comments on aspects of conveyancing law in his "Solicitors Certificate as to a good selling title," I can only add that he appears to have been a competent practitioner, with a clear, concise method of expressing his opinion.

We can not be sure where his soul doth rest, whether it did follow that "descensus averni" (an expression which I suspect was indelibly marked in the author's brain by the Hairy Master at the School on the Hill) or whether it dwells in a more pleasant place. Wherever his soul may rest, it will be pleased with the author's effort.

—N.E.A.L.

THE GUNS OF WOLLONGONG:

Although, as my superior officer points out, the Czar of all the Russias was not worried about the guns like those pieces he was worried about at Balaclava, their history is to some extent shrouded in mystery, and I look forward to his someday giving us a detailed account of them.

However, a few points may be of interest:

Firstly, the Smith's Hill Guns (now Battery Park) were saved by the Society, and in particular by the professional skill and resourcefulness of our past president Gordon Worland. In 1946 the City Council decided
to remove them by cutting them from their mountings at ground level, and to use the area as a car park. Despite our protests and those of private citizens, the Council persisted with its proposal until Mr. Worland discovered the land was Commonwealth, not State, property. A telegram was sent to the Prime Minister and the Federal Government intervened, resulting in the present compromise. This writer would like to see the gun mountings uncovered.

Secondly, the 68 pounders: As noted, one is preserved at the old Drill Hall, Harbour Street, and the other two at the new establishment in Gipps Road. Here again preservation and mounting resulted from efforts by this Society, in this case the prime mover being a former Hon. Secretary, Dave Ellson, who was (and probably still is!) a C.M.F. officer. Restoration and mounting were completed in 1962 by the army.

Unfortunately nothing was done about the six-inch rifle, our Society not being then in existence, but two out of two is not bad! However, there are some details available, supplied by Mrs. Norris of the Wollongong Reference Library (they know something of everything and never fail on a local historical query!).

The Illawarra Mercury of 13 August 1937 reports:

“The old recoiling gun which has stood for nearly half a century on Signal Hill, adjacent to the new lighthouse, was removed to Sydney last Tuesday by the military authorities. The gun ... was then the most up-to-date type of armament in the State, replacing old muzzle-loaders.”

In a long report the Mercury of 28 June 1890 recorded its arrival on 25 June by the I.S.N. Co's Bega. It stated that as certain spares were still to come it was not to be unpacked for some two months. Apparently this time was optimistic, as evidence suggests it was not put into use until some time in 1891.

—L/CPL (BREVET T/ACTG/HON/UNPAID) NAPBON.

STILL ANOTHER MANGERTON!

A further contribution to the discussion on the origin of the name of Mangerton has been made by Mr. Spencer Graham (Member), who has produced documentary evidence of the existence of a mountain named Mangerton, overlooking the Lakes of Killarney, and rising to a height of 2379 feet—a high mountain by Irish standards. The name is said to be a corruption of An Mhangarta (The Movements); if so, there are other places in Illawarra which might have borne it more appropriately.

So there is an Irish Mangerton; but the original story was that it was in County Tyrone, from which the Osbornes came. This Mangerton is in County Kerry, almost as far from Tyrone as it is possible to get in Ireland. Nevertheless, Doctor Armstrong has been told by an Osborne descendant that one of the Osbornes spent his honeymoon at Killarney, and that because of this one of the family's Illawarra properties was named Mangerton. The existence of a Mangerton in Northern Ireland remains to be proved or disproved.