FIRST OF BERKELEY:

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF ROBERT JENKINS

Mr. Robert Jenkins himself selected the beautiful spot where Berkeley homestead is situated. He was piloted over Mount Keira in 1817 by Mr. Charles Throsby Smith on the occasion of his first visit to choose his first Crown grant, which consisted of one thousand acres, granted by Governor Major-General Lachlan Macquarie. The other two thousand acres were given by Sir Richard Bourke, in 1834 and 1836, to his widow, who added to the property by the purchase of some six hundred acres of Veterans' or old soldiers' grants. These are on the foreshore of the lake, on the southern boundary of the property.

Mr. Robert Jenkins came from a fox-hunting county. He was a splendid horseman, but he rode over the then bridle track on the mountain with considerable difficulty, he and Mr. Smith having almost to cut their way through the dense luxurious vegetation. In selecting “Berkeley,” which he called after the historic estate of that name in his native county—Gloucestershire—he exercised peculiar foresight as to its future value. Mrs. Jenkins put her second son in possession of Berkeley upon his marriage in 1838.

It may here be mentioned that the gentleman who thus became the worthy owner of the Berkeley Estate married Miss Matilda Pitt Wilshire, who was his first cousin—their mothers being sisters. His brother (Mr. Robert Pitt Jenkins) married Miss Plunkett, daughter of Captain Plunkett, Police Magistrate, who served in the Peninsular War.

The obituary notice in the Sydney Gazette of May 10, 1822, of Mr. Robert Jenkins gives an idea of his position in the colony, and the esteem in which he was held:—“On Saturday afternoon last Mr. Robert Jenkins was killed from a fall from his horse. This lamented gentleman was returning from the direction of Surry Hills in company with some friends, when suddenly the animal took fright (at a party of Aborigines, it is believed) and threw the rider, both falling together. Mr. Jenkins was taken up in a state of insensibility, in which condition he continued to the moment of dissolution. Medical skill was utterly unavailing, the head having been violently injured internally, exclusive of bodily bruises. As a merchant of the first rank, possessing and evincing public-spiritedness in an eminent degree, Mr. Jenkins long rendered the colony of New South Wales the most essential and invaluable services. He was a strictly honourable man, and was ever actively engaged in promoting our colonial prosperity. As a husband, his inconsolable widow was to mourn the loss of an inestimable partner; as a father, none could be more tender; as a brother, the weeping sisters have to regret their sudden privation of an affectionate protector in a land to which they have but recently been introduced; and as a friend, his urbanity of disposition has been well established during a residence of fourteen years amongst us. The loss of Mr. Jenkins in the mercantile world will be felt for some time to come. He was only in his forty-fifth year.”

To give an instance of his nobility of character, he provided for his two sisters, who joined him out here, by leaving them handsome legacies in his will, duly attested in 1820. These—with his two young sons, William Warren and Robert Pitt, aged eight and six years—were his only representatives in the colony. His nine grandchildren are now the only known descendants of the family living.
Mr. Robert Jenkins was the son of Robert Jenkins, Esq., of Arlington (Glouceshershire), near Berkeley, and his mother's maiden name was Warren. She was a relative of the family of Admiral Sir Peter Warren, and was of Irish descent. Mr. Jenkins was married in 1813 at St. John's Church, Parramatta, by the Rev. Samuel Marsden, to Mrs. Forrest (widow of Captain Austin Forrest, Royal Navy, of the East India Company's service), formerly Miss Jemima Pitt, daughter of Robert Pitt, Esq., of Belchalwel, Dorsetshire, who, with her mother and sisters, arrived in the colony in 1801. Mr. Jenkins was attached to Miss Pitt before she married Captain Forrest, and upon finding her a widow on his return from a voyage to England, he married her.

Mr. Jenkins arrived in the colony in 1808 as representative of Messrs. Wilson Bros., a firm of merchants in London. Upon his employers becoming bankrupt during the great commercial crisis in England in the early part of the century, he began commercial and grazing pursuits on his own account, and amassed considerable property, most of which was inherited by his eldest son, Robert Pitt Jenkins, afterwards of Bamballa, Marulan (near Goulburn). The latter, with his wife and four young sons, were drowned in the wreck of the Royal Charter on the coast of Anglesea, Wales, October 26, 1859. The only daughter, Miss Alice F. Jenkins, aged fourteen years, who was in Paris at the time awaiting their arrival, alone survives. She married Mr. Hubert de Castella, of Victoria, at Sydney in 1865.

Mr. Robert Jenkins was associated with the late William Charles Wentworth, Dr. Redfern, and Mr. Wylde, as directors of the Bank of New South Wales in 1817. His superior education, business capabilities, and honourable character entitled Mr. Jenkins to hold the position he did. He was conversant with five languages, and was a good classical scholar. He had literary tastes, and possessed a varied and instructive library of books. He composed a short poem in 1817, which was set to the music of "Rule Britannia," and was sung at the first celebration of the anniversary of the colony in that year, which the late Mr. G. B. Barton published a short time ago, and which he considered "eminently prophetic and patriotic." He discovered it amongst old records in the Public Library. This is the composition:—

AUSTRALIA

When first Australia rose to fame,
   And seamen brave explored her shore,
Neptune, with joy, with joy beheld their aim,
   And thus expressed the wish he bore:
   "Rise, Australia! with peace and plenty crowned,
      Thy name shall one day be renowned!"
Bright Ceres shall adorn thy land,
   And gild thy fields with waving grain,
While roving herds shall o'er thy meads expand,
   And range the riches of the plain.
   Rise, Australia, etc.
Then commerce, too, shall on thee smile;
Adventurous barques thy ports shall crowd;
Well pleased, well pleased the Parent Isle,
Shall of her distant sons be proud.
Rise, Australia, etc.

While Europe’s powers, in conflict dire,
Exhaust the flower of armies brave,
Here peace shall flourish—nor conspire
With human blood thy soil to lave.
Rise, Australia, etc.


Whatever may be thought of Mr. Jenkins’s effusion as poetry, it is of some interest historically. It was in the same year (1817) that the name “Australia” was first used officially by Macquarie, and another two years were to pass before Barron Field immortalised himself by being the first to rhyme it with “failure”. Jenkins’s poem must have been, if not the first, one of the first attempts at an Australian national anthem, and might be worth Mr. Whitlam’s attention — if the obscene third and fourth lines in the third verse were deleted, it would be no worse than some he is sponsoring.

It should perhaps be pointed out that “Berkeley” must have been selected earlier than 1817 — it was marked out by Meehan on 7 December 1816 (B. J. Dowd, “The First Five Land Grantees,” p. 9); and that there was no track over Mount Keira at that time — Throsby’s track descended the range behind Bulli, but a theory was once current that it descended near Mount Keira (cf Cousins, p. 34) — Ed.

ESCOARPMENT PROPOSALS:

The natural beauty of the Illawarra Escarpment, backdrop to the coastal plain south of Sydney, is threatened by several proposed development projects.

The National Trust firmly believes this superbly scenic area must be protected. The New South Wales Minister for Environment Control recently called a Public Inquiry to determine what steps should be taken. The Trust proposed:

- Establishment of an Illawarra Regional Park to provide long-term protection for a large area of the escarpment;
- Further to the North, an area between the proposed Regional Park and the existing Royal National Park should be declared a Scenic Reserve.

The object of this second measure would be to protect the scenic quality of semi-developed rural areas in the Hacking River Valley.

The Trust advocated the abandonment of plans to dump coal waste on Maddens Plans, at the top of the escarpment, and recommended the restoration of areas already disturbed. A concerted effort is needed, the Trust said, to develop methods of coal mining which will allow waste to be returned to worked-out mines. Findings from the Inquiry are yet to be announced.

From the National Trust Bulletin, February, 1974.

(Since the above appeared, the first round has, of course, gone to Mammon. The fight is not over, though it will be an uphill battle when the referee is the government that gave us the Clutha scheme).