WHY REIDTOWN?

No, it was not named after Sir George Reid!

A massive old Abstract of Title which recently came into my possession appears to indicate that the name of Reidtown (“Reid Town” in the abstract) comes from a family who owned a substantial part of the area in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The land was originally part of 1920 acres promised by Governor Darling to Harriet Overington, who married James Stares Spear of “Paulsgrove,” West Wollongong. The grant actually issued to Spear’s attorneys Robert and Charles Campbell in 1841, by which time 1840 acres had been sold to Lieut.-Col. John Thomas Leahy, Leahy had died unmarried and intestate as to his New South Wales lands, and his heir-at-law, his eldest brother Daniel, had conveyed the property back to the Campbells on trust for sale. (It is never safe to assume that the history of an area began with the Crown Grant). The Campbells contracted to sell part (74 acres) to William Ryan Senior for £797.18s.4d.—big money in those days; perhaps it was during the boom period of the 1840’s. By 1868 this “had been long since fully paid and satisfied” but no conveyance had been executed. Both the Campbells were dead, but one John Campbell was trustee in their place, and in that year, by direction of William Ryan Senior, he conveyed to William Ryan Junior the 74 acres, described as bounded on the west by the Bulli Road, on the south by Thomas Collaery’s land, on the east by a road (Carter’s Lane?) dividing it from the properties of John Musgrave and Thomas Hale, and on the north by a road (Towradgi Road?) dividing it from Gerald Anderson’s farm.

The younger Ryan mortgaged the land to the Hon. Robert Owen, and defaulted. Owen put the land up for sale, and Robert Sparkes Reid was the purchaser (for only £240). By his direction the land was elaborately settled on trusts for the benefit of his wife Elizabeth Reid “for the term of her natural life” (ominous words!), then for himself and his son Samuel, for Samuel’s “lawful issue if any,” and failing such issue for another son John Steel Reid.

Samuel died in 1875 unmarried, “without leaving lawful issue him surviving” (which seems sufficiently obvious). In 1885 four acres were resumed for railway purposes. Elizabeth Reid died in 1889. In the same year her husband leased the property for his lifetime to John Steel Reid for £15 a year, reserving to himself “the garden and two rooms of the house with the furniture therein for his own use as long as he should live.” He lived another twelve years, dying in 1901 at the age of 81 (his life-span being almost identical with Queen Victoria’s).

John Steel Reid, now the sole owner of the property, apparently began to subdivide it into fairly large lots. The particular parcel to which this abstract relates, containing nearly nine acres, was sold to the Balgownie Colliery Ltd. in 1912. The Reids then drop out of the picture. After various vicissitudes and changes of ownership the land came in 1939 into the hands of the well-known Wollongong estate agents, A. R. and A. F. Bevan (better known as Bob and Butts) and by 1941 had been subdivided into suburban lots, under the name of “Harbour View Estate.” (Have you seen our ‘arbour? Well as Sam Weller said, “Bein’ only eyes, you see, my vision’s limited”).

—W.G.M.