MARTIN LYNCH'S MEMORIES: THE BATTLE OF PARA MEADOW

April 20, 1898.

I, Martin Lynch, native of Appin, left Appin on 4 of March 1827 landed the 1st night at the foot of the mountain Just at the old Bulli track near Bulli mines and slept in the big old tree called government House On the 5th of March 1827 landed at what is now called Cabbage Creek the Aborinagal name was towel creek remained there until the year 1835 also parents recollet to see the fight between the bong bong Aborinagal tribe and Wollongong tribe both tribes in number would be fully 15 hundred 1000 500 the number killed would be over 100 this war origanated by Aborinagal Dr. Ellis taking a gin away from Bong Bong tribe the fight was on Mr. James Towensend paddock what is accultiry para Meadow they burried the dead at the bottom on Towensend paddock on an arm of Fairy Creek.

[MS. notes by Archibald Campbell]:

Mr. Martin Lynch

Interview with above 22/2/93.

Mr. Lynch now nearly 76 years of age—came to Illawarra in March 1827 with his step-father’s family—the latter’s name being Mr. Dundon.

Came from Appin locality via (the now) old track down the Bulli Mountain—said old track leaving the present Bulli Pass near the “Elbow”2 and passing down close to where Bulli Colliery now is.

Family stock (?) brought in horse cart, which had to be lowered down parts of the mountain backwards by ropes.

Had to camp whole night about half way down the mountain—in the burned-out bottom of a standing Turpentine or Gum tree—not certain which kind—Inclosure (?) within butt of tree so spacious that horse with man could easily turn round inside of it. Whole family camped within the tree all night—Tree stood long after and was known as “Government House.” (Evidently the tree mentioned by Dr. Lang in his History of N.S.W.-A.C.).

Settled at once at “Towal Creek” (blackfellow name of Cabbage Tree Creek) on part of Balgownie Estate—then owned by Mr. William Wilson, who had purchased it from Mr. Buckland of Narrellan [sic]—to whom it was granted by Govnmt.

Mr. Dundon and family started farming near where Fairy Meadow Post Office now3 stands East side of now main road.

2.—This is, I believe, incorrect. For reasons given at length in “The Oldest Road,” I believe that the old Bulli Mountain Road was completely distinct from Bulli Pass.—Ed.
3.—i.e. in 1898.

The Editor thanks Miss Margaret McDonald, Hon. Research Officer, for bringing Martin Lynch’s reminiscences, and Archibald Campbell’s notes thereon, to his notice; and also for the work she has put into cracking the code and deciphering Archibald’s incredible handwriting. It is hoped that we will be able to publish further extracts in future issues.
THE BATTLE OF FAIRY MEADOW

[In the December 1980 Bulletin we published a brief extract from Martin Lynch's reminiscences dealing with the great battle at Fairy Meadow between the local aborigines and the Bong Bong tribe. Further code-cracking and deciphering of Archibald Campbell's hieroglyphics shows that he evidently examined Martin at length on the subject. His notes (except for a few words which defied decipherment) appear below].

Mr. Lynch in his early boyhood—about 1830—witnessed a battle at Fairy Meadow, between the Illawarra blacks & the Bong Bong blacks—over something in the lady line [illegible]. The battle took
place in a naturally clear spot—the real Fairy Meadow—situated immediately on the North & East [of] what is now the junction of the Main Road & Mt. Ousley Road. Mr. Lynch declares that several hundred men on each side took part in the battle—which consisted of a series of intermittent onsloughts—which extended over three days & nights. During the continuance of the battle, some of the men & women would go abroad hunting for food. The battle was won by the Illawarra blacks—many blacks on both sides were killed and more wounded. The killed were buried in the Tea Tree Scrub between the site of the battle and the sea (between two arms of Fairy Creek). The weapons were mostly Spears, “Nullah Nullahs,” & “Waddies” of one shape or another. Mr. Lynch states that he never remembered the blacks having actually murdered any white persons in the district, though several were scared by them [illegible].

He mentioned however that Mr. Hicks [?]—subsequently of Bulli, was decoyed into the bush in the Shoalhaven district under the plea of showing him some cedar & that he narrowly escaped being killed by his false guide or guides—he saving his life by jumping over a precipice—falling on suspended vines & thereby being saved from being smashed in the fall.

Continuing his account of the battle between the Blacks—in answer to questions (by me AC) Mr. Lynch explained that the dead of both parties were buried along the northwest bank of Fairy Creek—east of the North Illawarra Council Chamber—about 70 (seventy) men were killed in the battle—including both sides, and all the corpses were buried by the victorious Illawarra tribe. The graves were dug along the bank of the creek, which was somewhat sandy, the depth of each being about three or four feet. The blankets, Tomahawks, “billy” cans, and all other articles owned by each deceased were buried with them—some wood also being placed on top of the corpse. The explanation given by the survivors was that the wood and other articles would be required by the departed “in another country.” He (Mr. Lynch) witnessed the burial of several men killed in the battle. That place of burial was not the usual locality for interment by the blacks—the slain in battle only being placed there. The usual burial place in that quarter was in the sandy bush land on the south side of Fairy Creek—now Stuart Park—East & West of the Pavilion.

The sand banks, near Tom Thumb Lagoon, Bellambi & Towradgi, were likewise burial places, where many bodies were interred from time to time. He had witnessed nearly twenty blacks buried in the spot near Fairy Creek already mentioned.

As a rule they did not desire white people to know where they (the blacks) buried their dead, but after the district became somewhat settled, their burials could not be kept secret.

The blacks carrying out the burials and the deceased’s relatives used to stripe their bodies and heads and necks and limbs with pipeclay, as marks of mourning for the departed.
Regarding the battle, he had witnessed it each of the three days over which it extended—hostilities being suspended at nightfall. His mother & stepfather also viewed it each day—from the elevated ground between Mr. Mote’s brickyard and Mrs. Aquila Parsons’s residence. The Illawarra tribe fought on the North side of the Meadow, & the Bong Bong tribe on the South. Spears were thrown thick and fast between the combatants, and repeatedly he had seen men struck with them on both sides—sometimes causing the man struck to fall mortally wounded, while in some instances the wounded person would struggle to withdraw the spear—not always successfully. In close quarters “Nullah Nullahs” and other hand to hand weapons were used furiously in the mortal combats—one of the persons so injured not infrequently having his skull crushed or limbs broken. The dead were left unburied until the battle was over, after which the victors carried the bodies to the place stated, and buried them there as already mentioned.

The cause of the battle was the taking away from the Bong Bong blacks of a young “Jin” of their tribe by an Illawarra black designated “Dr. Ellis” by the whites. He induced her to leave her tribe with him, and carried her away captive unknown to them—and hence the rupture between the two tribes—resulting in the battle & bloodshed narrated. The captive maid was in the immediate vicinity of the hostilities all the time, as were other “Jins,” the latter carrying about and supplying to the male warriors, the deadly weapons and other requirements of the sanguinary engagement. The young Jin, who was the cause of all the bloodshed, did not hide her desire to flee to her own tribe, even while the battle was proceeding, but from doing so she was forcibly prevented, and beaten again and again most brutally, until her head was almost in a state of jelly and was covered with gore, the brutality being inflicted mainly by her captor (“Dr. Ellis”).

So frightfully was she beaten and battered that his (Mr. Lynch’s) mother took compassion on her & took her to her own home and doctored her there for some time, until she recovered sufficiently to rejoin her lord & master & his tribe.

The Bong Bong blacks came down the mountain range from their own country, making the descent opposite Dapto, to wage war with the Illawarra tribe, at whose hands they sustained defeat in pitched battle as stated—the survivors returning again by the same route over the Mountain to Bong Bong to tell their tales of blood [illegible].

The young woman—or “Jin” concerning whom the battle took place, remained in Illawarra all the remainder of her life—and passed away, as did the whole of her race—from time to time in rapid diminution—unknowing & unknown in a historic sense. Sanguinary as was the mortal tribal conflict that had taken place regarding her, & numerous as were the slain that bled & fell in her interest. Her remains, like those of the sable warriors who died concerning her, were interred in the usual [a word missing] in Illawarra soil—without a stone or any other sign to show her last resting place.