Wollongong School was Beatrice Simpson, who later married Cam Grieve and whose daughter is now Lady Wyndham.

Mr. Walker, the dentist, charged 2/6 for a filling. One of the aunts was his nurse for a short time but she hated being present when extractions were made and always tried to find a job to do elsewhere rather than hold the poor patient’s head.

Miss Mary Reid was the Infants’ Mistress. The names Armour, Stone, Stumbles, Jarman, Collings are all so familiar to me. Eva Collings became Mrs. Jarman and lived near us at Hurstville. In more recent years I have met her in my grandparents’ home and even when 90 years of age she was upright and always immaculately dressed. Mrs. Jarman and my mother loved exchanging “do you remembers.”

Perhaps some one can verify this story for me—My father told me how there was a wedding at St. Michael’s which was interrupted by the news that there was a school of whales in the Harbour. The bridegroom left his bride at the altar and when remonstrated with said, “I can marry her any day but not see whales in our Harbour always.”

(Matthew John Gibbons, First Owner of Stanwell Park

Matthew John Gibbons was not only the first owner of Stanwell Park, that delightful little valley at the northern end of the Illawarra region, but was a very early pioneer of New South Wales. Coming in 1792, and dying here in 1835, he was considered an “old and respected colonist” by the citizens of the young colony. His life is interesting, not so much because he owned Stanwell Park, but because he was an average pioneer of the early colony, a type about which we know little, as most recorded history is about the great or notorious. Matthew was neither rich nor famous—merely trustworthy and loyal, and therefore one on whom the early colony depended for survival.

He arrived in 1792 as steward to Major Francis Grose, a member of the New South Wales (or “Rum”) Corps. He married a free settler, Margaret Gordon, but was forced to leave the colony when his commanding officer retired in 1794 through ill-health.

After a brief transfer to the Dragoon Guards, the Gibbons family, enlarged by two children, Matthew junior and Elizabeth, returned to Australia as civilians. A farm at Prospect Hill failed, so land at the Nepean was granted to Gibbons, whose good nature and ability to read and write made him a political deputy of the local farmers in presenting their grievances to Governor Bligh.

Farming was not for Gibbons, however, and when Bligh was deposed in the Rum Rebellion, he moved into Sydney, to “The Rocks,” and began to prosper in a mild way. His stability and honesty were recognised as he was granted a liquor licence, made a constable, and appointed Clerk of the Public Market, which position
offered considerable opportunities for corruption, as it required the collection of rents in the market place. Gibbons never seemed to make money "on the side," just doing his job honestly.

When Governor Macquarie came he selected Gibbons as one of only twenty to be allowed liquor licences in Sydney, as part of the clean-up of morals in the colony. The loss of an infant and possibly homesickness took the Gibbons family back to England for a time, but the return of Matthew junior and the romance of Esther, the second daughter, brought them back in 1821.

Esther married Thomas Smith and settled in Hobart; Matthew Junior married Charlotte Hutchinson and became a cooper in Sydney. Matthew senior had to start a new life and find a job. Old friends got him back into the civil service as a storekeeper to the Civil Engineer, in which position he remained until 1832. While he gave loyal service, he saw his two senior officers, Dumaresq and Wilson, involved in controversy resulting in their departure; Wilson duped Gibbons of money.

Gibbons' abiding worry was security for his family, and he desperately wanted a good grant of land for each of them. He particularly wanted Wattamolla because of its natural harbour, into which he sometimes took his boat; but he was given "Little Bullie," which he renamed Stanwell Park, to the south. He was not greatly impressed and tried to lease the land back to Wattamolla, but could not afford it. So he was left with a beautiful valley—the grant included Coalcliff as well—but was unable to use it, so inaccessible was it.

Gibbons even had to fight for Stanwell Park, promised to him in 1824 but not finally granted to him until 1833. By that time he had two more mouths to feed, the children of his son Matthew, who died in 1832. William and Jesse put more strain on his resources, strains which followed him to his grave in 1835. But he was to leave good property in Kent Street, on the Nepean, and at Stanwell Park.

At his death Gibbons was seventy, a good age for those days. Margaret, his wife, survived him another five years. She left Stanwell Park to her daughter Esther Smith, whose husband Thomas met Sir Thomas Mitchell on his last exploring expedition towards Port Essington and subsequently sold him Stanwell Park.

Matthew John Gibbons was a necessary pillar of the early colony, whose penal character made such men as him all the more valuable to maintain some order and honesty. Little wonder that he died a respected member of the community. —MICHAEL ADAMS.


SOME NOTES ON OLD DAPTO
(By Mrs. Eileen IRWIN, nee MORAN)

I have heard at times that in early days the Main Road was not as we know it in our lifetime; that at Kembla Grange it wound out around West Dapto and across paddocks to the Bong Bong Road; that in places it was corduroyed; and that it rejoined the Main Road as