THOMAS MITCHELL & SON

Major Sir Thomas Mitchell, surveyor-general of New South Wales, and explorer, met Thomas Smith, the owner of Stanwell Park, on his last expedition. This led to Mitchell buying this most northern valley of the Illawarra area in 1848. Previously he had bought the coal-bearing cliffs between Clifton and Stanwell Park. He hoped that these buys would be good investments.

As Surveyor-General, Mitchell surveyed and dreamed of a great highway system emanating from Sydney. The line he surveyed to the Illawarra follows today’s route across the George’s River at Lugarno, thence to Heathcote, and on to Wollongong along the route of the present highway. His road was seldom used, being narrow and through wild country subject to bushfire. Hence his land remained remote and inaccessible until his death in 1855.

Mitchell built the first house in Stanwell Park, on “The Dress Circle,” which was completed by his son Campbell and later used as Hopkins’ Guest House, “Stanwell House.” It was dismantled in 1916 and its timbers incorporated in another dwelling. Campbell Mitchell inherited Stanwell Park and “The Coal Cliffs” and lived there during the early 1860s.

Campbell had been in the army in India but was courtmartialed out of his regiment on the charge of cheating at billiards. Like his father he found it difficult to work peacefully with others. Campbell became “the best of all my sons” to Mitchell Senior, but although he inherited a fair amount of property it was all heavily mortgaged.

With his brother-in-law, Lord Audley, Campbell tried to promote the coal reserves on his property but only plunged further into debt. The man who turned down his invitation to invest, Alexander Stuart, did in fact buy “The Coal Cliffs” in 1877 and developed a mine and jetty. By that time in order to pay his debts, Campbell had been forced to sell all his Illawarra land to Judge John Fletcher Hargrave, father of Lawrence who did such good work in Stanwell Park on the development of stable wing surfaces for the aeroplanes of the future.

While the Hargraves reaped a fortune off the lands bought from Campbell Mitchell, he died in 1873, frustrated in all his ventures, and, like his father, not able to make anything from his Northern Illawarra investments.

—Michael Adams.

(A summary of a paper presented to the Illawarra Historical Society, April, 1983)

OWEN GUN

A copy of the following book, received from John Lysaght Aust. Ltd., has been placed in the City Library:-


Congratulations to Mr. Wardell, who is one of our members.