A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

RAILWAY PLATFORM AT FAIRY MEADOW

(IIlawarra Mercury 25.9.1885)

The I.M. of that date carried a lengthy report of a public meeting held in the Council Chambers at Cabbage Tree, chaired by the Mayor, Mr. K.W. Bate. The following resolution was carried unanimously:

'That this meeting is of opinion that it is desirable for the convenience of the residence (sic) of the thickly populated localities of Mount Pleasant, Fairy Meadow, Balgownie and surrounding neighbourhood that a platform should be placed on the Illawarra railway line at a point convenient to all the said localities, and would recommend as a suitable position the site immediately adjoining the municipal road known as Elliott's Lane, at 46 miles 50 chains, as shown on the railway plans.'

Alternative sites being pressed at the time were Towrodi Lane (Yes, two o's) and Bode's (North Wollongong). Reference was also made to Corrimal: 'A platform had already been granted for Corrimal, where there were no houses and no people, whilst there was a large number of residents in and around Fairy Meadow'.

OLD PUBLIC SCHOOL SITE

The Illawarra Mercury of 29th September 1885, carried a lengthy report of a public meeting held in the Wollongong Council Chamber on 25th September. The Mayor, W. J. Wiseman, presiding, outlined the purpose of the meeting, which concerned the former site of the Public School at the S. E. corner of Crown and Kembla Streets:

'So far as he could learn, Government had no claim upon the land in question. It had been dedicated many years ago as a public cemetery, and the Council's solicitor, who had means of ascertaining the truth, informed him that the land had never been revoked, so that as a matter of course it still belonged to the people of the town and district. The site not being used as a cemetery, Government, when about establishing a National school in Wollongong, took possession of the land, and held it from that day to this, and now intended to sell it in building blocks.'

'The meeting was to protest against the people being robbed of their rights, as it were, and he hoped they would be able to bring sufficient influence to bear upon Government as to cause them to alter their intention about selling the old school site.'

Alderman Parsons moved 'that the townspeople of Wollongong, in public meeting assembled, disapprove of the intention of the
Government to sell the old Public School site in Crown Street, instead of granting same as a site for a town hall.'

Alderman Hosking, in seconding the motion, mentioned that the Council was so sure of getting the land that they had borrowed money for the purpose of erecting a town hall. Mr. W. G. Robertson, supporting the motion, drew a parallel with Sydney’s struggle to secure a similar site, previously dedicated as a cemetery, for the Sydney Town Hall. The motion was carried unanimously.

THE OLD STONE JUG - TRANSFORMED

The old two-storey house at the intersection of Allen Street and Gipps Road has been a Mount Keira landmark for as long as anyone now living can remember. The land on which it stands was part of 1,000 acres (Portion 7, Parish of Wollongong) promised by Sir Thomas Brisbane in 1825 to James Stares Spearing, one of the most enterprising and versatile of Illawarra pioneers. Spearing was also promised a further 1,000 acres adjoining, and his wife Harriet was promised 1,800 acres - an irregular block extending as far north as Bellambi. As the custom was, the Spearings moved in and built their home (near the present site of the Mormon Church) without waiting for the actual grant.

The estate, in the Spearings’ time known as Paulsgrove, was sold in 1835 to Lieut.-Colonel John Thomas Leahy, who renamed it the Mount Keera Estate. Colonel Leahy died intestate, unmarried and, according to a contemporary diarist, ‘unprepared’, about four years later. The property passed to his heir-at-law, his brother Daniel, who was living in Ireland. Daniel appointed two Sydney merchants, Robert and Charles Campbell, his attorneys, and conveyed the land to them on trust for sale, so that when the grant finally issued in 1841, it was in the Campbells’ names. (It seems at first sight that these dates must be wrong; but because of the delay in issuing grants a practice had developed of buying, selling and mortgaging promised grants as if the grant had actually been made).

The Campbells subdivided the estate into numerous lots of varying sizes, from about 7 to about 70 acres. The land around the Mount Keira foothills was slow to sell - it was probably too rough and hilly to attract purchasers. At last Lot 31, of about 14 acres bounded on the north by Gipps Road and on the west by Mount Keira Road, found favour with Henry Osborne of Marshall Mount, and he entered into a contract for its purchase, together with several neighbouring lots, for the sum of £280-8-4. Osborne, though already the lord of many thousand acres in Illawarra and the Riverina, seems to have been always ready to add a bit more to his domains; but in this case he probably had a special reason - he was engaged in the opening up of the Osborne Wallsend Colliery a few hundred yards further up the mountainside.

But before the conveyance was completed Henry Osborne died, and his