OBITUARY: Mrs. WINIFRED MACARTHUR ONSLOW

The Society regretfully records the recent death of Mrs. Macarthur Onslow, whose passing severs a close link with Illawarra's past. Born as Winifred Hall Owen she was a member of one of our most prominent pioneer families. Though her marriage brought about her residence at Camden, she displayed her sense of affection for the locality of her origin, amongst other ways, in continuing membership of our Society. We extend our sincere sympathy to her daughters, and especially to Miss Annette Macarthur Onslow, who not only shows an interest in Illawarra by her membership, but is active in aspects of our work, contributing her well-known talents towards one of our cherished projects. Those talents, it is fair to say, came through the family of her mother: artists and personalities of charm from the earliest days.

E.B.

THE HISTORY OF IRON SMELTING IN AUSTRALIA

(Continued from June Bulletin)

In Illawarra, Patrick Lahiff had been taking a keen interest in the attempts of the various enterprises to produce pig iron by smelting local ores. He was manager of the Illawarra Coal Co. at Mount Pleasant Colliery, which opened in 1861. He had approached the managers of the various ironworks in Tasmania, Victoria, Mittagong and Lithgow recommending the use of Illawarra Bulli seam coal or coke to solve their fuel problems. Lahiff was taking quite an active part in the development of Wollongong, in the construction of sandstone buildings in the town as well as the building of Belmore Basin in Wollongong harbour. Lahiff knew of the existence of ironstone deposits along with the coal seams on the Illawarra Range from Coalcliffe to Jamberoo that had been discovered in 1863. These deposits, in various places, were described as ferruginous shale, clayband, carbonate of iron and brown hematite, varying from 20% to 50% iron.

Very little coke was being produced in Illawarra prior to 1888 and when Lahiff found coke produced by spontaneous combustion at the base of the coal slack dumps, he built a small blast furnace in 1882. Using this coke as fuel he produced some ten tons of iron to test the local materials. This furnace is of particular interest as it was the only experimental blast furnace built that could be examined in modern times.

It was typical of such furnaces and gave an insight to the relatively modest outlay needed to test local ores and fuels. This was built at the foot of the Mt. Pleasant Colliery incline, at the end of what is now Robsons Road. It stood on a six feet square sandstone base four feet high above which was erected a cylindrical brick furnace bound for reinforcement with the material most readily available to the owner, a colliery haulage rope. This brick structure was six feet high and six feet in diameter. There were two nine inch courses, the outer of common building brick from which the inner firebrick lining was separated by the usual layer of 4 1/2 inches of insulation. The hearth diameter was 30 inches and there was a 16 by 14 inch opening in the side of the furnace for a single uncooled tuyere. When inspected by the author in 1943 there was severe burning of up to three inches of the firebrick lining in the lower part and a hole had been knocked through the side of the furnace allowing the close inspection to be made.