By 1955 only the sandstone hearth remained and in 1970 the whole site disappeared completely in the excavation for the extension of Robson Road. No provision was made for continued operation of the furnace and it would appear that the three feet eight inch gauge skipway and its rails, near which the furnace was built, would have had to be covered with sand to allow the furnace to be tapped.

Following the successful trial smelting Lahiff tried to encourage investors into setting up a local coal industry. The name of the company was changed to the Mt. Pleasant Coal and Iron Co. in 1888 and the Wollongong Argus of 28 November, 1894 carried reports of a meeting of local dignitaries and businessmen at the O'Briens Hotel to discuss the matter. Two proposals were discussed, one for a furnace producing 500 tons per week and a less ambitious scheme for a 70 tons per week furnace. After inspection of the nearby iron ore seam was carried out by representatives of the interested parties interest appears to have waned and no more was heard of the project. The quality and quantity of ore in the local deposit, the costly transport problems to obtain limestone and the experience of previous iron smelting enterprises prevented any enthusiastic support.

Other schemes in the Illawarra included the formation of the North Bulli Coal and Iron Mining Co. in 1863 but they did no more than observe Lahiff's attempts. From the 1870's, two politicians, Henry Parkes and John Sutherland, with land holdings in the Shoalhaven and Jammeroo areas, had plans to produce iron from ore, coal and limestone in the district. Plans initially called for the iron to be shipped from Jervis Bay or Kiama, then by rail with the move to build the Illawarra railway. In 1890 the location suggested for the smelting works was Port Kembla but again further interest in the scheme was not forthcoming and nothing more was heard of the project.

(concluded)

J.L.N. Southern, B. Met.E., M. Aust.I.M.M.

STURT'S MEN HARRIS AND FRASER IN ILLAWARRA
PART 1: JAMES FRASER ON STRUGGLE FARM

It is well known that two men, noteworthy as having served under the explorer Captain Charles Sturt, settled in Illawarra. The outline story has been told in Mr. W.G. McDonald's Nineteenth Century Dapto (p. 25); but now, using material located in the Archives Office in Sydney, the story can be rounded out. Of the two Joseph Harris was the more important, particularly in relation to Illawarra; and yet the story begins with Fraser.

Wheras a little of the antecedents of Harris can be discovered from War Office records of the 39th. Regiment of Foot, to which both Sturt and Harris belonged, nothing is revealed of James Fraser. This and other facts suggest that, contrary to previous beliefs, he was not a soldier. It will be seen that the procedure for obtaining his grant of land was different from that of Harris, who undoubtedly was a soldier, and whose grant came as a matter of right. Fraser's petition makes no reference to army service; he describes himself not as a soldier (as Harris did), but as a free man. This is all very strange, when the tradition is that he was a soldier; yet the records are all against it.

Working back from his death certificate, it seems that Fraser was born about 1801. His petition for a grant of land shows that he was "induced by the prospect
of ultimate reward” to accompany Captain Sturt, first down the Macquarie River in 1828 when the Darling was discovered, and then again down the Murrumbidgee and Murray in 1829. Fraser claimed that he took his share of the necessarily hard work of the men, but was obliged at times, when the other men were at rest, to search for specimens of natural history, meriting Sturt’s approbation; it was with his help, Fraser added, that Sturt was able to add several valuable curiosities to the Colonial Museum (now the Australian Museum in Sydney). It appears elsewhere that Fraser was a crack shot with a gun and had some knowledge of birds and the preservation of specimens.

Although there can be no doubt that Sturt appreciated the services of Fraser, he did not say so explicitly. A strange man, in his published account of the expedition he accorded his men high praise generically, but continually dropped remarks about them which as likely as not were a bit “off”, even slightly derogatory. As the expedition left Sydney, the character who stands out in Sturt’s book most vividly is our friend “the eccentric Fraser”, who “stalked along wholly lost in thought”. It was impossible to guess from Fraser’s odd get-up, Sturt wrote, how he intended “to protect himself from the heat or the damp, so little were his habiliments suited for the occasion. He had his gun over his shoulder, and his double shot belt as full as it could be of shot, although there was not a chance of expending a grain during the day”. At other times he was described as seldom assisting in erecting the tents, tending to exaggeration, and being a “reluctant oarsman” in the boat journey up the Murray. On one occasion, Sturt wrote, and old Aboriginal woman, “a picture of whom would disgust my readers, made several attempts to embrace me. I managed, however, to avoid her, and at length got rid of her by handing her over to Fraser, who was no wise particular as to the object of his attention”. Again, there came a time when Sturt wished to impress the natives with the power of their firearms by bringing down a bird; he himself fired the shot, speaking of what he was pleased to call “my dexterity - - for I did not trust Fraser, who would, ten to one, have missed his mark”. It seems to have been Sturt’s way of demonstrating his own superiority; and yet later Fraser was again allowed to be the best shot amongst them, for which reason he was placed in the prow of the whaleboat on the voyage downriver, his gun ready for specimens of new wildlife. Sturt had an odd way of acknowledging appreciation, however genuinely he felt it. More pleasing glimpses of Fraser are gained as he shaves an old Aboriginal, and cheers the straining oarsmen by whistling “sundry tunes” in the boat while he skins birds to preserve them. (See Sturt’s Two Expeditions into the interior of Southern Australia, London 1833, vol.2, pp. 9, 73, 100, 101, 102, 121, 135, 149, and elsewhere generally).

The expedition over in early 1830, Sturt was sent off to do his turn of duty on Norfolk Island, having set in motion rewards for convicts of the party by way of remission of sentences; but nothing had been done for the free men Harris and Fraser. So it fell to Fraser to seek his own “ultimate reward”. On 24 September 1830 the Surveyor General had penned a memorandum about some available land in Illawarra, and on the following day Governor Darling wrote an official minute: “Let Wm (sic) Fraser who accompanied Captn Sturt on his two Expeditions being skilled in the preservation of Birds, on which occasion he was very useful, receive 40 or 50 Acres, as may be convenient, in the situation pointed out, to be free of Quit Rent - - and let him further receive four Cows from the Govt. Herd”. "

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It is at this point that it becomes clear that Fraser was, as Sturt's descriptions indicated, a true individualist. He might have overlooked that his christian name had been stated as William instead of James; but 40-50 acres and four cows were not enough for him. The file bears an endorsement, dated 27 September, "William Frazer (sic) declined accepting of the above not considering it as adequate". And that was the end of that. Fraser picked up his papers and left the office in what must have been high dudgeon.

But he was not content to see his just reward slip from his grasp. Judging by a similarity of handwriting, he invoked the help of Sturt's companion, the kindly George Macleay, son of the Colonial Secretary, Alexander Macleay. By this means a petition was drawn up, in terms outlined above, adding the note that Fraser had not been rewarded before, although the prisoners of the Crown had been. Dated 15 February 1831, the petition is unsigned, indicating that Fraser could not read or write.

For several weeks, nothing happened, which is understandable enough after the earlier rejection virtually telling the Governor what to do with his lousy 40-50 acres and four cows. The file (which is contained on Archives Reel 1129) contains several undated notes from Macleay to influential officials, suggesting that Fraser was pressing for action; the documents are out of chronological order, but the aforesaid notes appear to fit in at this stage. In one of them Macleay said to Fraser: "He is a very idle fellow and doing no good in Sydney. The sooner therefore he is off to the country the better - - his suit will then be on his own shoulders". This, however, probably meant only that whilst Fraser was liable to get into trouble amongst the fleshpots of Sydney, he was a good man in the field nevertheless.

Although the delay was not at all bad by government standards it was too much for Fraser. The trouble seems to have been that Sturt, still on Norfolk Island, was not available to support the higher claim. Moreover, officialdom was non-plussed by not being able to find the earlier papers. This was understandable, because it had been forgotten that the indigent Fraser had taken them away. So on 11 March 1831 Macleay wrote again, pointing out that Sturt had been more than satisfied with Fraser's conduct on both expeditions, whilst he himself bore witness to* the man's "activity, perseverance, steadiness and civility". His exertions "could not be too highly spoken of". That representation produced results; the next day the Governor wrote a minute so terse as to signify that he wanted to be done with the whole affair. Raising the reward, he wrote: "Let him receive twenty head of Cattle and a small Grant free of Quit Rent". The Surveyor General was to be so informed quickly.

Again the waywardness of Fraser emerges; failing apparently to select his land, he was notified that the grant would be cancelled if not selected by 1 October. On the last day the land was duly designated; it was to be in Illawarra, consisting of 100 acres, Portion 43 of what became the Parish of Kembla, at what is now West Dapto. Macleay was again the scribe, and Fraser signed the note by making his mark.

At last he had his firm promise for his land, free of the usual undertaking to reside on it and improve it. But, as was usual in those days, the actual grant did not issue a title deed for some time. On 23 December 1833 Fraser caused a letter to be written asking for it, the boundaries having been surveyed. He was in
Sydney at the time, living at great expense at the King's Head Inn in Clarence street, his “pecuniary funds” almost exhausted. On 6 August 1834 he furnished the last formal particulars for inclusion in the deed. His home was given as Wollongong, and he advised that the name of the property was to be Athol Hills: a name very suitable, no doubt, for land of someone to found a dynasty on. But Fraser could not fail to be his wayward self; apparently having second thoughts, he had the august name of Athol Hills struck out, and in its place there appeared, with brutal realism, “Struggle Farm”. Nor was that all; in a very short time after the deed was in his hands he sold out to his old comrade and neighbour, Joseph Harris; and thereupon he disappeared.

His later life is only sketchily known. He joined Sturt's party which in April 1838 set out overlanding cattle to South Australia, and is last heard of at Willunga in that new province, apparently in the service of Sturt’s brother Evelyn, who had a station in that locality. There he died, aged 42, on 19 January 1843, his occupation stated as gardener. According to Sturt (see M. Langly, Sturt of the Murray, London 1969, p. 157) he died “repeating my [Sturt's] name almost to the moment he expired”; but too much credence should not be given to mawkish touches like this; they abound in the Sturt legend. It is more probable that the stricken Fraser was groaning from pain of the cause of death, revealed in the death certificate as “An abscess in his side”.

So his connection with Illawarra, though tenuous and brief, is real enough; and the name Struggle Farm was retained by the new owner, his old comrade Harris. It survives to this day; and so we may go on to study the Harris story.

(To be continued)

Edgar Beale

RAILWAY POLICY IN N.S.W. 1889

[At the Editor's request, Dr. Robert Lee, of the Macarthur Institute of Higher Education, has kindly furnished the following summary of the talk given by him to the Society on 1st. April]

In acquiring the Sydney Railway Company's assets on 3 September, 1855, the Colonial Government assumed the responsibility for planning and managing what was to become easily its largest enterprise. It was at first very uncertain as to how it should exercise this responsibility. The rapidly changing political situation following the introduction of responsible government in 1856 and of a democratic franchise in 1858 increased this uncertainty. At first the government relied on the contractor who had completed the line from Sydney to Parramatta, William Randle. He leased and operated the line for the first year after the opening 26 September 1855. Thus the N.S.W. railways began as a government-owned but privately-operated concern.

This temporary arrangement was followed by reliance on Royal Engineers. The new governor, Sir William Denison was himself an R.E. and recruited Captain Ben Hey Martindale to act as Commissioner for Internal Communications, which included management of main roads, telegraphs, harbours and rivers and railways. Martindale's term was fraught with difficulties. Denison, domineering and accustomed to command, believed the Colony could not afford steam railways and so should build horse tramways. The railway's Engineer-in-Chief, John Whitton
OBITUARY: MR. F.M. GREGORY

We learn with regret of the death of our Newcastle member Mr. F.M. Gregory. His connection with this Society began in his long-standing friendship with Alec Fleming, and was maintained after Alec's death, to our great benefit. He was a mine of information on matters associated with the history of Newcastle, and acted as local contact and guide on our excursions to that district.

His services to the Newcastle and Hunter District Historical Society, as Research Officer, Bulletin Editor and in various other capacities, were outstanding but his interests, by no means confined to his own district, ranged over many fields. He will be greatly missed.

To his relatives, and to the Newcastle Society, we extend sincere sympathy.

RAILWAY POLICY IN N.S.W. TO 1889

(A summary of the talk given by Dr. Robert Lee, of the Macarthur Institute of Higher Education, to the Society on 1st April.) (Continued from July Bulletin)

It has often been alleged that railway development during these years was subject to considerable political interference, some of it of a corrupt nature. Henry Parkes used this argument to create an independent board of three railway commissioners in 1888. The building of the Illawarra line provides an interesting example of such interference and its effect on railway policy. Whitton had proposed to build the Illawarra line to much the same route it follows at present. However in 1883 the Public Works Minister, Francis Wright, ordered construction suspended while an alternative route via the valley of Hacking River instead of via Engadine and Waterfall was surveyed. Wright produced spurious technical arguments in favour of the deviation which were effectively countered by Whitton. Cabinet ultimately decided to build along Whitton's route. Later evidence was produced which revealed that the Premier, Alexander Stuart, owned virtually all the private land through which the proposed deviation would pass. What is significant about the incident is not so much that a politician attempted to use public policy for private gain, but that Whitton was able to frustrate this attempt. It is an example of his dominance of railway policy from his arrival in 1856 to his retirement in 1889. This dominance was in part achieved through political allies like Cowper and Sutherland and in part by the force of his arguments and personality. (Concluded)

STURT'S MEN: HARRIS AND FRASER IN ILLAWARRA

(continued from July Bulletin)

PART II: JOSEPH HARRIS

If Fraser had an engaging whimsy in his makeup, Joseph Harris was the direct opposite: a stolid Englishman with both feet on the ground. Since in the 39th Regiment there were two soldiers of the same name, they were designated by their county of origin. Our man was from Monmouthshire, on the border of Wales. The need to differentiate between the two Joseph Harrises may have been the reason that Captain Sturt invariably called his man John; but then he was generally rather careless with names.

When Harris died at West Dapto on 6 July 1862, his death certificate recorded
his age as 71 years, which would place the date of birth at about 1791. He is shown as being the son of Henry Harris, the place being confirmed as Monmouthshire. There are discrepancies in the army records (PRO W012/5265, ML Reel 3771) as to his length of service, one reference placing it as high as 21 years in 1828, but this seems wrong. In a later petition Harris claimed 19 years in 1832, and other official records state 14 years in 1827. These figures put the date of enlistment at about 1813, which means that Harris did not serve in the Peninsular War, but probably went to Canada for the war then fizzling out. The 39th was then recalled to Europe, but missed Waterloo. It then formed part of the army of occupation in France until it moved to Ireland. The detachment led by Sturt and including Harris was moved to Sydney, arriving there on the convict ship “Mariner” on 25 May 1827.

Harris is said to have married Anastasia Carroll in Ireland at the age of 25, which would have made the date 1816. But the 39th did not go to Ireland until 1818. This discrepancy does not matter much; what is more perplexing, however, is that the couple did not begin having a family for about ten years or more after marriage; nor was the reason likely to have been that they were separated —given that, as the old song has it, “Love will find a way”— because the 39th was in Ireland alone until 1827. With the best of matrimonial planning one would normally expect a little biological accident in that decade, even allowing for the essential truths underlying the witty Oliver St John Gogarty’s story of the Irish priest making heavy weather of teaching the laws of holy matrimony at a mission, his bumbling ineptitude prompting a mother of twelve to remark to her neighbour “Wish to God I knew as little about it as he does!”. None the less, with a residual doubt, it could be that for one reason or another — Joseph’s living in barracks could have helped — the union was not blessed by children for many years, either by design or by chance. During the greater part, if not all, of this part of Harris’s married life (if the marriage date be correct), he was Sturt’s servant or, as we would now call him, batman.

From arrival in 1827 Harris’s movements would have been practically identical with Sturt’s. First there was the Macquarie-Darling expedition of discovery in 1828-9, though Harris received so little mention, and then never by name, that at one stage it appeared to this writer that Harris was not of the party; but he was. Later came the Murrumbidgee-Murray venture, on which the services of the “body servant” (Sturt’s description) were acknowledged for soldierly bearing, which ensured his inclusion in the crew of the whale-boat on its voyage on the rivers. Otherwise, he gets little special mention, with no idiosyncracies observed as was the case with Fraser. Harris was apparently a truly reliable but unspectacular plodder; and perhaps that is why he was to become so close to Fraser, seeing that opposites in personality are often attracted to each other in friendship. Then came Norfolk Island, where Harris’s first child is said to have been born (McDonald, Nineteenth Century Dapto, p.25).

On his return from Norfolk Island, Sturt wrote on 18 October 1831 to the Colonial Secretary seeking “indulgences” on behalf of Harris and Hopkinson, the soldiers of the expedition (not Fraser, a fact which confirms that he was not a soldier) for their “extreme regularity and good conduct”. To this the reply was that nothing could be done at present, but their cases would be borne in mind if they were discharged in the colony. This event being then in contemplation,
on the same day as that of the reply (21 October 1831) Harris was issued with two draught bullocks, and was later discharged on 30 April 1832. On 31 May he was active in getting his land and the rest of his cattle. In setting himself up for farming, he must have been very materially helped by having received the maximum gratuity on discharge of 18 months’ pay: twenty seven pounds seven shillings and sixpence.

The file (Archives Reel 1136) shows that on the same day he called at the "office" saying he was under great expense with his family in Sydney, and wished to remove immediately to Illawarra, where he had fifty acres of land "adjoining to which he [had] selected his intended purchase", and wished also to take his cattle with him. He was forthwith issued with three cows and two heifers: a small allowance compared with the twenty Fraser had secured. In this he was assisted by the influential Major Macpherson, the Collector of Revenue, an officer of the 39th who would have known Harris. A letter of request for land adjoining Fraser's at Dapto was filed, dated ten days before, and giving Harris's address as Macquarie Street Sydney. It asked for the chosen land to be put up for sale, which was presumably the correct procedure, the purchase price being then remitted as one of the terms of a veteran's grant in consideration of long service. In response to a further letter of 10 November 1832 from Harris then at Wollongong, the remission was approved, and Harris had his land in Illawarra.

(To be continued)

THE SOCIETY’S HISTORICAL COLLECTION

and THE WOLLONGONG PUBLIC LIBRARY

The July meeting of the Society in the Local Studies Room of the Reference Library in the new Council Administration Block in Burelli Street was quite a revelation. We were provided with a comprehensive insight into the most modern system being introduced for the organisation of the Reference Library including the Local History Collection as well as our own Historical Society Archives, ably explained and described by the Local Studies Librarian Mrs Jan Richards.

Being so impressed by the spaciousness and convenience of the new facilities for the library, the question soon arose as to the library facilities at the time of the formation of the Society and the means for the storage of historical archives.

The conditions at the time of the formation of the Society 42 years ago in 1944 were certainly very different. The Wollongong Municipal Library was housed in a small room upstairs in the School of Arts building in Crown Street opposite the Wollongong East Post Office. The room was a little larger than twice the size of the Local Studies Room, well filled with dark wooden book shelves, poorly lit with the appearance of being in existence for quite some time. The book stock was mostly fiction or general reading, it being difficult to find anything local or of an historical nature. Jan had described the large array of technical publications to which the Reference Library now subscribes. I remember finding the only Journal in the original library was that of the Australian Institution of Engineers which I would read with great interest at the only table in the library, making notes in pencil, twenty years before copying machines.

As for the fledgling Historical Society, fortunately the archives were no more
He is a direct descendant of William & Sarah Thomas, who migrated to Marshall Mount in 1838, with employment promised by Henry Osborne in the early construction of the first Marshall Mount house. He also played a large role in setting up extensive gardens and orchard at Marshall Mount house.

With the ending of duties at Marshall Mt. house the Thomas family moved to Logbridge Farm on Marshall Mt. Road and it was here the remainder of their large family was born.

It was in the year 1968 the Thomas family had a reunion on Albion Park Showground and up to 1000 people came from many parts of Australia.

Congratulation to Mr. Thomas for and on behalf of Illawarra Historical Society.

Jack Maynes

STURT’S MEN - HARRIS AND FRASER IN ILLAWARRA

PART II – JOSEPH HARRIS

(Continued from August Bulletin)

But another letter dated 19 October 1832 showed that Harris had been busy in a surprising way. It seems that between the date of his discharge and the date of the letter he had “purchased” a dwelling in the township of Wollongong (which strictly was not founded until 1834), erected on reserved (Government) land, which meant that he did not own the dwelling either. Yet he had finished building the house, “and opened a Shop as a General Trader, the only one in the Township, previously obtaining the Commandant’s permission”. He went on to say that it was on the east of the Dapto Road, which then swung off from the harbour diagonally across a corner of Charles Throsby Smith’s grant of land, say through Market Square, across to the present MacCabe Park, and so onwards. He described himself as “a married man has two children, and had faithfully served in the 39th for 19 years. The latter was signed in quite a good hand by Harris, showing that he was literate.

His letter asked that the town land he occupied be put up for sale, but of course since no township had been laid out as yet, his request could not be granted. For what it may be worth, Harris’s description of the location reads: “the dwelling is on the Dapto Road on the East [meaning eastern side of that “Road”?] bounded on the north by Mr. Smith’s Southern boundary [which was the present Crown Street] on the West by Government reserved Land no other person being on the reserved Land, it is also bounded on the South by Government Land the road running through”. Confusing as this is, it is to be contrasted with a passage from Part XIII of the Reminiscences of Alexander Stewart (Illawarra Mercury 2 June 1894). After describing Major Mitchell laying out the coming town of Wollongong, Stewart goes on to describe the problems of one Harris, who can now be identified almost certainly with our Joseph Harris:

“At the angle of the convent [St Mary’s College of today] and running across the last-made portion of Harbor Street to the Market Square, and having a frontage to the old track [the ‘Dapto Road’] from where the convent now stands a man named Harris had a piece of land. Major Mitchell required this corner piece of land to make it a part of the new portion of Harbor Street, which was to run due north and south. As Major Mitchell was not surveying north of Smith
Lawarra Historical Society

Street, he did not bother about diverting that portion of Harbor Street running from the convent angle to the beach. Harris was an old soldier, like himself, and I suppose that for that reason he did not like taking his corner piece of land from him unless he got some compensation. I heard Major Mitchell say to Harris that 'if Smith would not give him something in return for this piece of land Wollongong could remain as it always had been and it could go to heaven or heaven's antipodes.' Mr. Smith, however, gave Harris, in exchange for the small piece in front of where the convent now stands, that square piece of land between the lagoon and the convent bounded by the sandbank, the convent, Harbor Street, and Market Street. The convent School now stands on it. Thus Harris got a very big piece in exchange for his small piece, and so it was that a portion of Harbor Street was squared and made to run parallel with Corrimal Street."

Well, which location was correct? Harris's is vague and hard to follow, whilst Stewart's is much more precise, for which reason the latter's account seems preferable. Harris's version could place his dwelling and shop very roughly in the vicinity of the present Wollongong East Post Office, whereas Stewart's places it much more probably adjacent to the boatharbour and the lagoon which was the main town water supply (in the present park at the eastern end of Market Street). If this be correct, Harris was a fair strategist; everyone would sooner or later have to go near his store either for water or to the harbour.

The Paulsgrove Diary for 9 March 1834 provides a fleeting glimpse of Harris: the diarist "walked to the beach again to see if any boats were in the offing, met old Harris who had a story [chat] with him -- the only man I had a story with off the farm this last month."

Harris's file closes by showing that he did not lose interest in Wollongong. On 24 January 1835, soon after the town was laid out, he sought to buy five allotments of town land in Section 9, which is the block now bounded by Crown, Corrimal, Burelli and Harbour Streets; his name, however, does not appear as one of the first grantees or purchasers. But by then his main interest was probably his farm; for when he gave up the store is not known. Mr. McDonald has told how by 1836 he was living on his grant of 100 acres, a nice increment on the 50 he applied for. He sold some of his land, bought Fraser's Struggle Farm, and reared his family there to an ultimate total of six.

Yet before abandoning Harris to old age, another possible facet of his life emerges. Records (A.C. Reel 211) show that on 25 June 1842 the local magistrates issued a licence to a Joseph Harris to conduct "the house by the sign of the Commercial Inn at Wollongong". The licence carried an impost of thirty pounds to pay, so that the investment was a heavy one for the time for a man in Harris's position. There is no certainty that this person was Sturt's man, but since the Commercial Inn was in Harbour Street, where our Joseph's land was, the identity is a fair assumption, and it raises the possibility that he could have been developing his store in the meantime. Alternatively, since the early 1840s were depression years, Harris may have found Struggle Farm too much of a struggle, so that he went back into business for a while. If the assumption is correct, Joseph was a man of considerable enterprise. The records, unfortunately do not reveal how long the licensee Harris remained in business.

Be this as it may have been, "Old Harris" had many years of life ahead of him
until, aged 71, he died on 6 July 1862 at West Dapto, and was buried in the churchyard of St. Luke’s Anglican Church, Dapto. The cause of death was given as diseased heart, a condition consistent with the known circumstances of his life. He was a true pioneer if ever there was one, not only in exploration and soldiering, but in business activity for a time, and eventually farming and founding a family which is still represented in Illawarra. He fully deserved the quietness of his resting place at St. Luke’s.

Edgar Beale

THE BULLI MINE DISASTER CENTENARY

The disaster at the Bulli Colliery which occurred at 2.30 p.m. on Wednesday 23 March 1887, was an explosion which killed all those working underground at the time. There were 81 victims, men and boys. One boy who had been working and was leading his horse to the entrance of the mine was blown by the force of the explosion through the tunnel mouth to safety.

The news of the disaster shocked the Australian community; it was the first experience of a major civil tragedy, the worst of any mine accident experienced in what was a dangerous industry. Fifteen years later a similar explosion at Mt. Kembla was to kill 96 miners. The Bulli and Mount Kembla disasters remain the worst in Australia’s history of coal mining.

At Bulli the local community was stunned. Fifty women had lost their husbands. Thirty of them were pregnant. 180 children had lost their fathers. Fourteen of the boys killed were under the age of 18; most of those had not long had their 16th birthday. There were harrowing scenes at the mine, with women, their families and neighbours, miners who had not been working and all the rest of the community, waiting for the rescue parties to bring out the mangled bodies. There were more horrifying and pitiful scenes at the burial ground at St. Augustine’s Parish Church at Park Road Bulli, where 60 of the bodies were buried one after the other. Eight were buried at the Catholic ground in Fairy Meadow, 13 at the Presbyterian Churchyard at Corrimal. There were of course some Wesleyans and Primitive Methodists too, but the Methodist Church, built in 1865, had no graveyard and the public cemetery was not opened until the late 1890s.

Bereavement for the miners’ wives or mothers also meant the loss of the family’s breadwinner. There were no widows’ pensions, no government system of compensation. The Miners’ Lodges had a contributory system and usually paid 10 shillings weekly to the families of members killed in the mine; on this occasion the money was immediately made available and the fund was exhausted. Public appeals were quickly started, at Bulli and Wollongong and in Sydney and other major cities. The New South Wales government established a fund and a committee to investigate each case on its merits for sharing in the fund.

The details of the disaster were closely examined at the Coroner’s Court and then by a Commission of Inquiry established by the Government. It was found that the victims had died either as a result of the impact of the explosion or by suffocating through the carbon dioxide gas which filled the sections of the mine after the explosion. There had been no official reports of methane gas being present before the day of the disaster, though there had been unofficial reports. Carelessness of management and men had been responsible for the use of a naked