REMINISCENCES OF FORTY TWO YEARS RESIDENCE IN ILLAWARRA

by

Charles Throsby Smith (1)

(With Notes by Michael Organ)

(1) Charles Throsby Smith (1798-1876) initially arrived in New South Wales in April 1816 and assisted his uncle, Charles Throsby senior, in moving his cattle to Illawarra, along with exploring the area around Lake George. During 1818 he sailed to England on business, however he returned to Sydney in November 1819 and after marrying Sarah Broughton in October 1822 decided to settle at Wollongong, on his property called Bustle Farm, near where his uncle's stockman had erected a hut in 1815.]

(Being the substance of a lecture delivered in the Hall of the School of Arts, Wollongong, by C. T. Smith Esq. J.P., the President of the Institution, during 1863)(2)

(2) [This article is based upon an undated and typed transcript of the lecture, currently part of the Wollongong City Library collection. The actual date of this lecture has not yet been determined, however it can be dated at 1863 from internal evidence. The substance of the lecture was later published in the Illawarra Mercury of Tuesday, 3 October 1876, with some minor addition, and the document presented herein is an amalgamation of both 1863 and 1876 versions.]

"In the years 1814 and 1815, the County of Cumberland and the neighborhood of the Hawkesbury were the only parts of the colony in which any improvements had been made. The soil in the neighborhood of the Hawkesbury being good, some of the land was cleared and cultivated, and although subject to be inundated during wet seasons, the settlers continued to reap fine crops; but their proceedings are foreign to my subject.

In the year 1815, the County of Cumberland was suffering from the effects of a drought, very like the one that afflicted us during the last year (3), and the cattle were dying daily for want of food and water. My late uncle, Dr. Throsby (4), was then residing at a place called Glenfield a few miles south of Liverpool, and, as he was of an enterprising disposition and fond of rambling, he, in one of his rambles about Liverpool, met with some of the Aborigines who told him there was plenty of grass and water at the 'Five Islands'; and from their representation of the coast he at once made up his mind to proceed thither and see for himself (5); and so, accompanied by a couple of men (6), and two native blacks, and a pack-horse carrying provisions, he started on his journey. Having reached Appin the first night, the party resumed their direction; and after four days of hard work in arking a track from Appin, they at length reached the top of the mountain range, and caught a glimpse of the ocean (7).

(3) [New South Wales experienced widespread drought during 1862.]


(5) [This excursion most likely occurred early in 1815, for the Sydney Gazette]
of 18 March 1815 reported on "a considerable extent of fine grazing land... describes by late travellers to be about the Five Islands." Whether these late travellers were Throsby and his party is unknown, though quite possible.]

(6) [The party probably included Joseph Wild, who had visited Illawarra with the botanist Robert Brown in 1804, and on later occasions to collect bird and plant specimens. Joseph Wild was appointed the first constable for the Five Islands district on 9 December, 1815. Refer Illawarra Historical Society Bulletin, June, 1989.]

(7) [Though it took 4 days hard work to mark the track from Appin and to clear the trees and scrub down the Bulli mountain for the passage of wagons and cattle etc., the task was greatly assisted by the knowledge of the Aboriginal guides and men such as Joseph Wild, who had been using it for many years previous. There was a well-worn track between Appin and the Illawarra mountain Aborigines for thousands of years. It was the custom of the mountain tribes from the Appin and Cowpastures areas to make an annual pilgrimage to the coast via this Appin-Bulli road, and Throsby and party would undoubtedly have followed their route.]

There they halted for the night, and on the following morning commenced cutting a track down the mountain (8) near the place where Mr. Somerville now resides, at Bulli (9). They found abundance of grass and water, and having found these, they lost no time in returning to Liverpool. Very soon afterwards they drove down a mob of cattle, the first that had ever visited Illawarra, spent their first night in the district near where Mr. Somerville's house now stands, on the point (10). Afterwards they were driven on to Wollongong and a stockyard was erected for them near the site of the present Roman Catholic school-house, while a hut was erected for the stock-men near the corner of Smith Street". (11)

(8) [This refers to the Illawarra Escarpment behind Bulli, in the area of the present-day Bulli Pass. Refer W. G. McDonald, The Oldest Road, Illawarra Historical Society, 1974, for a history of this track - the oldest road into Illawarra.]

(9) [Near present-day Sandon Point. A hut was erected near here by Cornelius O'Brien around 1818, and he later built a house and operated a whaling station from the site. The property was sold to Captain R. M. Westmacott in 1837, who expanded it before selling out in 1841 due to financial difficulties. Mr. George Somerville obtained ownership of part of Westmacott's house and estate around 1845.]

(10) [Sandon Point, Bulli.]

(11) [Refer B. T. Dowd, The First Five Land Grantees, Illawarra Historical Society 1966, for a plan of the location of Throsby's stockman's hut at Wollongong harbour. It was supposedly erected sometime during 1815, possibly to accommodate Joseph Wild, the assistant to Charles Throsby who was made first Police Constable for the Five Islands District on 9 December 1815.]

As soon as it became known that Mr. Throsby's cattle were at the Five Islands, various owners of cattle began to send herds to the district (12), and amongst these owners of cattle was the late Colonel Johnston (13) who, with a great deal of trouble and labour, drove his stock to that part of the district now known by the
name of Johnston’s Meadows. The late Mr. Samuel Terry then selected the opposite side of the river to Colonel Johnston’s (14), and then Mr. Brown, merchant from Abbotsbury (15), drove his stock to and stationed them on the banks of the Illawarra Lake (the native name of which is ‘Yalla’); and then Captain Brooks (16) stock came from his place at Denham’s Court, and he also drove his stock to the banks of the lake, about due east of the Dapto Post Office.

(12) [The report of ‘fine grazing land’ at Illawarra in March 1815 would have been a godsend to stockholders suffering from the prevailing draught to the south and west of Sydney. According to B. T. Dowd (op cit.) the first white settlers to move their cattle to Illawarra and apply for grants there were Richard Brooks, George Johnston, Andrew Allan, Robert Jenkins, and David Allan. Whilst these five men were the original grantees, their overseers - such as Charcoal Will and George Cribb - were actually the first residents of the grants.]

(13) [Colonel George Johnston (1764-1820), of Rum Rebellion fame, was granted 1500 acres in Illawarra on 24 January 1817. This property was later known as ‘Macquarie Gift’. Refer also B. T. Dowd (op cit.) for biographical details of Johnston and his family’s interests in Illawarra.]

(14) [Samuel Terry was granted 2000 acres at Illawarra on 9 January 1821.]

(15) [Refers to William Browne, also known as ‘Merchant’ Browne. See J.F.R. Browne, A History of William “Merchant” Browne of Abbotsbury and Appin 1762-1833, 1975.]

(16) [Captain Richard Brooks. Refer B. T. Dowd, The First Five Land Grantees, op cit.]

The next person who brought cattle down was Mr. George Cribb, the father of Mr. Cribb, late a member of the Parliament of New South Wales. Mr. Cribb located himself near to where the Figtree bridge now stands, and the place was called Charcoal Creek, in honour of Cribb’s stockman, an old soldier, who was better known by the name of Charcoal Will than by any other name (17).

(17) [Charcoal Will was actually William Richards, an old friend of Charles Throsby.]

The next person that came to the district was the father of the present W. W. Jenkins (18). This was the year 1817. I piloted this gentleman down the mountain and he selected near the present site of Mr. Jenkins’ hospitable mansion, and named the place Berkeley (19). I have a very vivid recollection of the time, because old Charcoal Will got very drunk on the occasion.

(18) [William Warren Jenkins was the son of Robert and Jemima Jenkins. Refer K. H. Barwick, History of Berkeley, Illawarra Historical Society, 1978.]

(19) [C. T. Smith arrived in Sydney in April 1816 and accompanied Robert Jenkins to Illawarra sometime during the remaining months of 1816, for Jenkins’ Berkeley grant was surveyed by James Meehan on 7 December 1816, not 1817 as earlier stated. Jenkins was officially granted the 1000 acres on 24 January 1817.]

About this time some of Dr. Throsby’s cattle had got very fat, and a small lot was with some difficulty driven up the mountains and on to Sydney which was then a very small place. These cattle were slaughtered at the Government slaughter house, the site of which was near where Dawe’s battery now stands, the Government butcher being Mr. Hill. The beef was so very fat and fine, that afterwards
the Five Island beef became very celebrated, and as a result, the place was soon overstocked with cattle and horses. In the year 1820 Mr. Throsby had his cattle removed to Bong Bong, and I assisted him in removing them.

About this time I made up my mind to remain in the colony, and become a settler. Accordingly I obtained permission from Governor Macquarie to remain in the colony, and selected to do so by the fact that there was a good boat harbour here, and by the numerous other advantages of the place (20).

(20) [C. T. Smith was promised 300 acres at Wollongong by Governor Macquarie on 1 December 1821, though the grant was not officially registered until 29 June 1836.]

In those days men acted on the principle of free selection before survey, and accordingly, in the year 1823, about forty years since, I located myself hereabouts with my wife (21), and four Government men, commenced clearing the land, in defiance of the blacks, who at times were disposed to be very troublesome; but I always however, treated them with great kindness, and we soon became great friends.

The Aborigines were never particularly hostile to the whites. The Wollongong tribe numbered about one hundred. They were very much finer looking than one would suppose by the few miserable specimens now left; but in the early days they had abundance of fish, kangaroos, opossums, ducks, and other wild fowl. One occasion, I saw a blackfellow spear a kangaroo between the two large trees now standing in front of my house.

The Aborigines owned the authority of Chiefs, in a certain degree. 'Old Bundle' was the name given to the chief who claimed Wollongong as his particular domain - and no end of tribute have I paid to his Majesty, in the shape of tea, sugar, flour, meat, etc. Another Chief, called 'Old Timberry', ruled another portion of the tribe; but these chiefs and their adherents were by no means confined to particular localities. Timberry, however, claimed Berkeley. They roamed through the district at this time they were at war with the Kiama and Shoalhaven blacks.

(To be continued)

(21) [Charles Throsby Smith married Sarah Broughton at Campbelltown on 22 October 1822. Another early Illawarra settler - Cornelius O'Brien - had married Rebecca Broughton the previous week, also at Campbelltown.]