THE FIGHT FOR THE WOLLONGONG PUBLIC SCHOOL SITE

The following article appeared in The Town and Country Journal of 3 October, 1885:

Wollongong

Old Public School Site. - An effort is being made by the leading residents to induce Government to hand over to the borough council the old public school site in Crown-street.

About 18 months ago the school business was removed to the new building in Smith-street, where Government purchased a site in a more central position. From that time to the present the borough council have been the whole of it, a portion. So far their requests have been refused, including, as they did, two offers to purchase a portion of the site, at £6 and £10 a foot respectively. Finding their efforts unavailing, the council convened a public meeting of the ratepayers to protest against the land being sold by Government. The matter was taken up warmly.

The site was originally dedicated as a cemetery about half a century ago, and many ratepayers argue that the department have no claim to the land, its dedication as a cemetery never having been revoked. The mayor (Mr. Wiseman) has placed himself in communication with Sir Alexander Stuart and several other members of Parliament, urging them to do their utmost to endeavour to have the site declared a reserve for recreation or park purposes.

The present call by Dr. Mitchell and others for the Town Hall and old Administration Centre site to remain in public ownership - and not be sold for private development - therefore has some historic precedence. If, in 1990, we were to suggest that the site be converted into a park - as the ratepayers of 1885 did - the howls from the money men in City Hall would be deafening.

REMINSCENCES OF FORTY TWO YEARS RESIDENCE IN ILLAWARRA

by

Charles Throsby Smith

(With Notes by Michael Organ)

(Continued from June Bulletin)

In the year 1823, the County of Cumberland was again suffering from the effects of a prolonged drought, and this induced some settlers from the neighborhood of Appin to come into Illawarra. About this time Mr. Hamilton Hume, the Mungo Park of Australia, had sawyers cutting cedar on the side of the mountain between Wollongong and Bulli, and the cedar cut there was the first that was cut in the Colony (22). It was cut into boards, carried up to the top of the mountain, and carted thence to Parramatta. The sawyers of those days were truly an unruly
set, and the consequence was that a number of bushrangers, or run-away convicts, were harboured by the sawyers to the great detriment and annoyance of the settlers (23). In fact the depredations of the bushrangers became so annoying that Governor Macquarie sent down a file of soldiers to hunt both blacks and bushrangers down (24).

(22) [Cedar had been cut at Newcastle as early as 1801, according to a letter from Governor King to Sir Joseph Banks in that year. Perhaps Smith's statement of Illawarra cedar as 'the first that was cut in the Colony' refers to it being the finest, or of the best quality. Cedar had also been cut at Shoalhaven prior to Hume's men working in the Illawarra Mountains.]

(23) [Refer Alexander Harris, Settlers and Convicts, Melbourne, 1954, for a description of the carrying-ons of the cedar getters at Kiama in the late 1820's.]

(24) [Governor Macquarie had sent punitive expeditions against the Aborigines to the south and west of Sydney in both 1814 and 1816, though they didn't visit Illawarra, for the local Aborigines were regarded as friendly towards the whites. There were however numerous bloody incidents in the Appin and Cowpastures areas.]

About this time the late Surveyor General, John Oxley Esq., with Commissary General Allen, selected what is now called the Five Island Point as a stock station (25); and the late D'Arcy Wentworth, who was then a Police Magistrate in Sydney, took a grant on the South side of the Illawarra Lake and the rented it to Mr. Badgery for a stock station (26), and after purchasing a grant of Dr. Bland's and one or two others, in all about 300 acres, he named the estate Peterborough.

(25) [David Allan's 'Illawarra Farm', of 2200 acres, was surveyed on 8 December 1816 and granted the following January.]

(26) [D'Arcy Wentworth was granted 3150 acres at Illawarra on 9 January 1821.]

After Mr. Badgery left, the place was occupied as a sheep run by several other persons, amongst whom was Mr. Robert Longmore, who rented it for 50 pounds a year. He gave it up, and then it was occupied as a sheep run by the Rev. F. Wilkinson. Afterwards Mr. T. A. Reddall's father, who married one of D'Arcy Wentworth's daughters, came down from Sydney and resided on the estate for some years. When Mr. Reddall left, a Mr. Dawson rented it as a sheep-run, and when he had done with it, the representatives of D'Arcy Wentworth took it into their own hands. They have since farmed it out, and now obtain a very comfortable rental from it.

I must here pass over the events that occurred within the compass of a few years, in order that I may say something about the introduction of the military - in any force at least. At the request of Messrs. Oxley and Allen, the Government [in July 1826] sent down about thirty soldiers, with a Major Bishop of the 40th Regiment (27), as commandant. The Major and his men were stationed at the Five Islands, on Red Point (28), but at that time, owing to the season being a wet one, the troops often experienced great difficulty in obtaining their rations from me. As the Tom Thumb Lagoon was then difficult to cross, the troops were obliged to cross the Berkeley estate in order to reach Wollongong. They also, at times, exposed themselves to considerable risk in crossing the Fig-tree Creek or Charcoal
Creek as it was called in those days. This fact being represented to the Government by Major Bishop, the troops were soon afterwards stationed on the site of the present goal and court-house (29). They lived in tents at that period. Major Bishop was relieved by a Mr. Butler (30), when a number of convicts were sent down to build barracks and a house for the Commandant part of which house is now standing.

(27) [‘Major Bishop’ was actually Captain Peter Bishop.]
(28) [Captain Bishop resided in the house of David Allan.]
(29) [The troops didn’t officially move from Red Point to Wollongong Harbour until 1829, though the transfer may have taken place earlier.]
(30) [Lieutenant John Fitzgerald Butler of the 39th Regiment was Commandant at Illawarra from 7 December 1826 to 4 February 1830, apart from 6 months during 1828 when he was replaced by a Major D’Arcy.]

This brings me on to the year 1830, in which year many small settlers began to locate themselves in various parts of the district. A Mr. G. Tate selected what is now called Spring Hill; a person named Mathew Ryan selected near the Fig-tree; and the late Gregory Blaxland selected Keelogues, to grow tobacco, but as Mr. Blaxland failed in accomplishing his object, the place remained unoccupied until it was purchased by Mr. Plunkett, who, in Sir George Gipps’ time, sold to Colonel Breton for a large sum of money.

The next Commandant was a Mr. Sleeman (31), a very pious, good man who remained only a short time in the district. The government at that time being overstocked with convicts it was decided to make a road down Mount Keira, and accordingly Mr. Otway (32) was sent down to superintend the convicts while engaged in making it. He located himself at the back of Mr. H. Marr’s present residence (33), but unfortunately, one fine morning he shot himself, and then, the late Mr. Sheaffe was sent down to take charge of the men and roads (34). A Captain Allman was about this time appointed a police magistrate (35), but he was soon relieved by a Mr. Gray (36), whose services being required at Port Macquarie, a Mr. Alfred Holden was appointed to the office and remained some two years in the district (37). Finally he married one of Dr. Alick Osborne’s daughters and was sent to Brisbane Water. Captain Plunkett then got the appointment, and he was the last Police Magistrate at Wollongong (38).

(31) [George Sleeman was resident Magistrate at Illawarra from 4 February 1830 to 5 September 1832.]
(32) [Lieutenant Henry Maxwell Otway of the 50th Regiment was appointed Superintendent of the Illawarra Road Gangs and Iron Gangs on 1 May 1835. He committed suicide at the Crossroads Stockade on 10 April 1836.]
(33) [Refers to the stockade buildings located near the Crossroad, West Wollongong, at the junction of present-day Crown Street, Mount Keira Road, and Dapto Road.]
(34) [Lieutenant William Sheaffe officially replaced Lt. Otway on 1 April 1836, and remained in the position until 16 August 1837.]
(35) [Captain Francis Allman, retired, as resident Magistrate at Illawarra from 5 September 1832 to 7 April 1834, when he was transferred to Goulburn following complaints to Governor Bourke by local residents such as Henry Osborne regarding his lenient treatment of the convicts.]
(36) [William Nairn Gray was resident Magistrate at Illawarra from 7 April 1834 to 1 August 1836.]
(37) [Alfred Holden was resident Magistrate at Illawarra from 1 August 1836 to 1 December 1837.]
(38) [Captain Patrick Plunkett was resident Magistrate at Illawarra from 1 December 1837 to about 1850.]

The first place of worship that was erected at Wollongong was the Roman Catholic Church by the Rev. Father Therry. It was built on the site of the present school-house, and stands to this day a monument of their christian zeal. I made them a present of the land. For the instruction of Church of England people Archdeacon Broughton sent down a catechist who for some twelve months or so read the church services to any disposed to hear him, his audiences generally being very small, and after this the Archdeacon rented a barn of mine, converted it into a sort of church, and sent down the Rev. F. Wilkinson who also went once a month to Shoalhaven. After Mr. Wilkinson had been located here a short time Sir Richard Bourke, Major Mitchell, Colonel Barney, and Mr. G. K. Holden, paid a visit to the district, and during the course of their stay, drew out the plan of the present basin and of the town, and shortly after their return to Sydney about 300 convicts, accompanied by a guard of soldiers, were sent down to construct the basin (39). They erected a stockade on the point now called Flagstaff Hill; and from that period the town of Wollongong took its rise and I had a great demand for town lots.

(39) [The convicts worked on construction of the basin and breakwater at Wollongong harbour from 1837 to 1844.]

Now that the Government has undertaken the enlargement of the harbour, while two tramways from our coal mines are in active operation (40), it is hard to say what Wollongong may become in the next 20 years. Perhaps it may be the centre of a large manufacturing district, and certainly it will be the chief port for a large and growing trade in coal. Even at the present time some of the shops in the town would bear comparison with man in Sydney. I need hardly remind you that we have steam communication with Sydney almost daily; the overland route to Sydney is traversed twice a week by four-horsed coaches; the telgraph is an established fact; the town is incorporated; water works are contemplated; the harbour is being improved, deepened, and enlarged; a number of coal mines have recently been opened; all these facts and a number of other facts of an analogous nature show what a vast improvement has taken place within the last 20 years, and render it impossible for me to predict the mighty strides we may take during the coming twenty.

(40) [These two tramways ran from the Mount Pleasant and Mount Keira mines.]

In noticing the price of land in this district 35 years since, I may mention that the celebrated Garden Hill Farm, containing 640 acres which was selected by me for a Captain Thompson, was sold to the late Dr. John Osborne, for the sum of 100 pounds, and when the road was made through the land towards the mountain, the Doctor tendered for the fencing of it, and obtained more from the Government for the fencing on each side of the road, than the first cost of the land. You are
all aware that we have now a great number of licensed public houses in the district. Some of you however, may not be aware of the fact that the first licensed public house that ever was in the district is now standing on the flat to the South of the Scotch Church; and is at the present time occupied by Mr. Baxter. This house was built and was occupied for years, by the late Mr. George Browne of Mullet Creek Dapto.

The first steam flour mill was built near the bridge at Para Creek, by the Messrs. Peek and Palmer, and was subsequently burnt down, and afterwards rebuilt by Mr. Edward Palmer, and stands to this day. Mr. Palmer sold it about seven years since, and it is now idle. The second mill that was built in the district was erected by the late George Browne at Mullet Creek. Then the mill now known as Alderman Lott’s Mill was built by the late Henry Osborne of Marshall Mount, and Mr. Graham’s Mill next to it, forms the fourth of our mills. The erection of the latter will be in the recollection of most persons here.

The first school that was built was in Market Street; in fact it was the present Church of England school. The site on which the National School now stands, with the adjoining land, two acres, was set apart for a Protestant burial ground, and one interment did actually take place in it, for the wife of Dr. Grover was laid there, but was afterwards removed to the Protestant burial ground. I may mention that Dr. Grover was residing on the Berkeley estate, near the Lake, and that old Michael McDonnel was a servant of the Doctor’s.

I have already told you that the first place of worship built was the Roman Catholic Church. The present school house was erected in Market Street for the Protestants. The Rev. J. Tait subsequently of the Free Church of Scotland ministered to the Presbyterians in the old Court House, and whilst he resided here the present Presbyterian Church was erected on land given by myself to that body. After Mr. Tait had joined the Free Church, the Rev. Mr. Atcheson was sent down, and has remained in the district ever since - now a period of nearly twenty-one years. The site on which the Episcopalian Church is built was purchased from me by the Government in Sir Richard Bourke’s time, and I may tell you that before the present church was built, there were two foundations laid, both of which were condemned by the Colonial Architect.

About this time, that is in Sir Thomas Brisbane’s time, the Government was selling land at five shillings per acre, and sending the convicts in gangs of 20 men with an overseer to clear land in the country of Cumberland in lieu of five bushels per acre being paid into the commissariat stores at different parts of the county. Hence the number of estates that are cleared of stumps in the County of Cumberland. This five shillings per acre plan was not in operation long, but amongst those who availed themselves of the system was a gardener from the neighborhood of Campbelltown who purchased what is now called Herne Farm and after having cleared a portion of it, and grown a fine crop of potatoes on it, he was on his way to Sydney in a small coaster which foundered at sea and all hands on board of which were lost (41). This was the end of Mr. Barrett.

(41) [This refers to the loss of the Foxhound off Coalcliff in July 1829. For a description of the circumstances of the death of Thomas Barrett and Henry Cullen in this shipwreck see Illawarra Branches, Number 7, June 1986, pp 2-3.]
After Barrett’s death the land was occupied by a Mr. Richardson a Sydney draper who married a Miss Oaks, better known by the name of the Maid of Oaks, the Chief Constable of Parramatta’s daughter. He soon got tired of bush life and sold to Mr. Shoobert, who cleared the land, and after a few years went to the Mount Keira estate, a portion of which he purchased from the representatives of the late Colonel Leahey (42), who had purchased the land from a Mr. Spearing (43), who was the first to commence clearing land in that part of the district. I may here mention the fact that Mr. James Shoobert was the first person who brought the coal of Illawarra into the market (44).

(42) [Colonel John Thomas Leahy.]
(44) [This occurred on 27 August 1849 when coal was brought from the Mount Keira mine down Crown Street to Wollongong Harbour, and loaded aboard the steamer William Iv.]

I have omitted to state, in reference to Spring Hill, that Mr. George Tate, who came to the colony expressly to superintend Mr. Oxley’s farm at Camden, remained with Mr. Oxley, on the celebrated Kirkham estate, and then came into this district where after remaining a few years, he had the misfortune to lose his wife. He married again, left the district, and opened a public house at Campbelltown called the Forbes Hotel (45). He let the farm to a Mr. Charles Innis, who bungled his affairs, got into debt, and left the district again. After Innis left, the place was purchased by Captain Waldron who died there (46). Captain Waldron’s widow is still alive, and has a large grown up family.

(45) [George Tate was killed at Haymarket, Sydney, on 27 December 1835.]
(46) [Refer W. G. McDonald, In the Matter of Captain Waldron, Deceased, Illawarra Historical Society, 1972.]

I should have told you that when Merchant Browne sent his stock to the Lake, his nephew, Mr. Cornelius O’Brien (47), superintended the stock. This Mr. O’Brien discovered another pass down the mountain, a short distance south of the present Mount Keira Road, and it was called O’Brien’s Road, and is known to this day. Mr. O’Brien reported that he had found a better road to the Five Islands, and the Government gave him some convicts to mark the track [in 1822], and the river at Appin was crossed at a place known as Jordan’s Pass. For many years that road was used, in fact until the Mount Keira Road was made.

(47) [Refer N. S. King, Cornelius O’Brien - Pioneer of Bulli, Illawarra Historical Society, 1966.]

About this period, a Mr. John Wylie from Ayrshire came to the colony, and brought with him an order from the Home Government for 2000 acres of land. Mr. Wylie imported the first Ayrshire cattle; he brought out a fine cow and bull; and on his arrival, engaged Mr. Oxley at Kirkham, after Mr. Tate had left, where he remained for about twelve months and then came to this district, and selected where Mr. D. W. Irving’s house now stands. But somehow or other, Mr. Wylie was not a good manager, and soon got into great difficulties, and then he engaged himself to Mr. Alexander Berry, of Shoalhaven as an overseer. Afterwards his land
got into the hands of Dr. Lang and Mr. Samuel Terry, who sold it to a Mr. Carruth, who resided upon it for some time, and then left for New Zealand. Mr. Carruth disposed of the land to Gerard Gerard Esq, who, I believe, sold it to Mr. Robert Haworth.

I may here mention that the Commandants Butler and Sleeman had once a month to hold a court at Shoalhaven for the purpose of causing unruly convicts to be flogged. A very singular circumstance occurred with each of these officer's servants. There was a pretty girl, a neighbour of mine, residing in the district, and who at that time was in full bloom of youthfull beauty. Mr. Butler's servant fell desperately in love with her, but she rejected his suit, and so one day, whilst the Commandant was absent at Shoalhaven holding a Court, the despairing lover dressed himself in full uniform, and then proceeding towards the coast, jumped off the rocks, on the south side of the point, and drowned himself. Singularly enough when Mr. Butler's detachment was relieved by another detachment under the command of Mr. Sleeman [in February 1830], the servant of the latter also formed an attachment for the same pretty girl, and was also refused by her. One day when the Commandant had departed for Shoalhaven, this second despairing lover drowned himself at the very same place where the former one had committed suicide. His body drifted to near Tom Thumb Lagoon, and was brought from there and interred with military honours on the Sand Bank, opposite Mr. Curr's residence.

There is not telling the amount of mischief which this pretty girl might have accomplished amongst soldiers and civilians if she remained single much longer, but fortunately she got married and so was removed by force of arms out of the way of doing further harm. Indeed this is the punishment which I would inflict upon all pretty women, just by way of preventing them from causing the Lords of creation to hand and drown themselves.

A personal misfortune happened to myself in the month of October 1837, which probably ought to be mentioned among these reminiscences. In that year my house was burned down, the timber of it having become ignited by some sparks from a dead tree that was on fire. A fearfully hot wind from the West or North west was blowing at the time; and had been blowing for some days previously, and hence everything was dry and easily ignited. I recovered the loss however, and soon had another roof over my head(48).

(48) [C. T. Smith built three houses during his residence at Wollongong. The first - constructed of wood around 1823 and facing Harbour Street near Brighton Beach - burnt down in 1837; the second was built of brick in a similar location; the third, also of brick and called Bustle Hall, was built on Smith's Hill.]

I have told you the names of the Police Magistrates that have been here, but have omitted to inform you who they had for clerks. The first was Mr. Echlin (49); then Mr. James O'Brien Croker, a rather celebrated man, who was also the first postmaster, filled the office (50). That gentleman was relieved by a Mr. Jackson (51), and this Mr. Jackson was relieved by a Mr. William Taylor (52), a facetious gentleman, who stayed in the office so long that he was pensioned off, his place was taken by the present Clerk of Petty Sessions.

(49) [According to the New South Wales Government Blue Books, the first Clerk to the Bench of Magistrates at Illawarra was appointed in 1830 and was un-named. On 11 November 1832 Henry Anthony Burlton Bennett was appointed to the position, and also that of Deputy Postmaster. He remained
in office until his dismissal for drunkeness, and replacement by James O'Brien Crocker, on 3 November 1834.]

(50) [James O'Brien Crocker was Clerk to the Bench and Deputy Postmaster from 3 November 1834 to 14 May 1838.]

(51) [Peter Jackson was Clerk to the Bench from 14 May 1838 to 1 February 1839.]

(52) [William Taylor became Clerk to the Bench on 1 February 1839.]

After Messrs. Oxley and Allan left the Five Islands Run, it was purchased by Mr. Wentworth, who let the run to Wilson and Bellingham who proposed to themselves to make a fortune by breeding pigs, but somehow or other, they made a mistake and were eventually obliged to take what in those days was called the Burton dose, or in other words, became insolvent.

The first store of any note established in Wollongong was Wilson and Brothers, in Harbour Street (53). They were succeeded by Captain Croft. The next store was opened in Corrimal Street, in the premises occupied by Mr. Andrew Herd, the painter. The first country store was opened at Dapto, near the site of Mr. Barrett's house, by the celebrated Mr. Hargraves, the reputed discoverer of the goldfields of this colony, and who left Illawarra for California (54).

(53) [Smith also had his own bond store at Wollongong Harbour, known as Waterloo Stores, and later expanded into the Brighton Hotel.]

(54) [Refers to Edward Hammond Hargraves, the so-called discoverer of gold in Australia.]

The country thus gradually settled was - as may be imagined even by persons who have seen it only in later years - very heavily timbered in the early days, with fine trees intertwined with creepers, and underwood, so as to be almost impassable. Where my house now stands [on Smiths Hill, Wollongong] was densely timbered; and so was the site of Wollongong, except a portion towards Tom Thumb Lagoon, which is of a swampy nature, and partly clear. There were very few other places naturally clear except the headlands, and about the Macquarie River, at Johnston's and Terry's Meadows - in the vicinity of which there were large clumps of cabbage trees, that looked very picturesque.

The timber generally was of very good quality; and there was abundance of cedar and sassafras in the gullies. There were also blackbutt, ironbark, box, and stringybark, swamp and forest oaks; and cabbage trees and the bangalow grew wherever the soil was rich. In former years there was a considerable trade in timber from this district - and there was great waste of timber with the early settlers, which, if now standing, would be valuable.

In conclusion, I may state that the civilisation of Illawarra has progressed considerably since the introduction of the press. I do not recollect the date when the "Mercury" was first published (55), but I know that at that time the second town in Australia, namely, Parramatta, could not boast of having a free press. Now, we have two respectably conducted newspapers, just as respectably conducted as any other journals in the colony, and the support which these receive may be taken as one mark of our advancing civilisation.

(55) [The Illawarra Mercury was first published at the beginning of October 1855, though no copies survive of issues from the first three months.]

I have thus, Ladies and Gentlemen, sketched a few facts connected with the settlement and progress of Illawarra, and hope that while doing so, I have not been trespassing to much upon your attention. As the incidents I have related were spread over a period of forty two years, my account of them must necessarily appear more of less unconnected and fragmentary. I have however, done my best, and must trust to your generosity to excuse all defects. Hoping that the district may progress more rapidly in the future than ever it has done in the past.

I now ladies and gentlemen shall wish you all goodnight."