NATIONAL ABORIGINES WEEK

The Wollongong activities this year will commence on the 3rd September. There will be displays at the University and Wollongong City Art Gallery. The Illawarra Historical Society will also be presenting a display of its recent Aboriginal exhibition in the foyer of the new Council Chambers, Burelli Street, Wollongong. All three displays are highly recommended.

WET MELON SEEDS IN A DRY LAND

Stuart Piggin Presented a paper to the IHS on the 1st August, 1990 on the ‘Writing of Religious History in Australia’. His paper and conclusions (which we reprint below) provoked vigorous discussion.

"To command the notice of the profession today - and all history is written for today - Christian historians must as professionals accept as far as possible those current values of the profession which do not conflict with and indeed may be ultimately be traced to, the Christian faith:

to capture the affections and convictions of people not only through study of their social interactions;

to write history from below and to go beyond the writings of the elite to recreate the world as experienced by the inarticulate and the powerless - by women as well as by men; by blacks as well as whites; by workers as well as bosses; by country people as well as city people; by Westralians and Tasmanians, as well as New South Welshmen and Victorians; by adherents of sects as well as denominations; by laity as well as clergy;

to write wholistically rather than sectionally about the church and Christians in their total social environment.

Perhaps the problem of how to write the history of evangelicalism may be obviated by a simple proposition which would be acceptable to all members of the profession, Christian or not, viz:

God, if there is a God, makes history through history.

The historical process is the only legitimate focus of all historians, and the ‘means’ beloved of the evangelicals - the proclamation of the Gospel, prayer, Bible distribution, revival - are admissible as historical factors insofar as they shape and are shaped by the historical process."

Stuart Piggin

THIRROUL HOLIDAYS – 1913 & BEYOND

Our holidays at Thirroul started with a train trip from Sydney which included a stop at Waterfall station whilst a character walked up and down with a basket on his arm selling peanuts, blocks of chocolate etc. but calling out, "Slipstone bananas and fried icecream!" which we children thought marvellous. We were also
encouraged to ask him the time and from inside his coat pocket he would bring out a Westclox Big Ben on a string. Its face would be at least 5" diameter.

On arrival at Thirroul we would step out and assemble the luggage and then get into the horse-drawn vehicle, we sitting inside facing each other. The roads of course were dirt. The name of the house we used to rent for the school holidays was ‘Wybalena’.

Next door to ‘Wybalena’ was a vacant block in which grew long paspalum grass. Of course we played near this and regularly got ticks. One of the looked for activities was collecting blackberries. We used to pick enough for blackberry pies, blackberry jam and of course to eat fresh. The best ones were always a little further than you could reach.

Over the railway line there was a coalmine and the coal skips used to come from that, across the railway line and go down towards the Bellambi coal jetty.

As was the custom a maid was taken down and was a great help in preparing food and looking after the children. Our Ethel was a Salvation Army girl and on Sundays used to put on her bonnet and navy blue uniform and off she would go to play the tambourine and sing. As children we used to enjoy this immensely.

Next door to ‘Wybalena’ the Aspinall family (of legal fame) came down and we enjoyed being with their daughter Ailsa. They also brought down with them Nancy Alvarez and her son Jack. I have a very vivid picture of my mother and Nancy Alvarez, each in their neck-to-knee costumes and my mother with a wide-brimmed, floppy hat, holding each other’s hands, up to their knees in waves, bobbing up and down to let the bigger waves break over them. I do not remember any ladies shooting the breakers.

Before we four children were allowed to go into the sea Father always painted us with his coconut oil as we all had fair skins. This was to stop us from burning. I do remember on one trip that the back of our legs got so sunburnt that my brother and I had to stay in bed for a few days until the excessive swelling had gone down. In order to cover up from the burning sun all the family wore dressing-gowns from the house down to the beach. When we played on the beach we took down our buckets and spades which was obligatory in those days.

We always enjoyed a visit from an uncle who used to take us for a walk on the ‘Money Beach’. He used to arm himself beforehand with a bag of small coins, draw our attention to something and then throw one or two of them ahead so we could pick them up. He would repeat this process until he had scattered all the coins.

We used to get up early in the mornings and played busily all day and went to bed early at night. The children all slept in rows on the verandah. On the eve of Christmas we would put pillow-slips at the end of the bed and get up early in the morning to see what Santa Claus had brought us. Christmas Day dinner was a hot meal. On one of our visits we had a live goose and it was kept in a small yard. It was a great trouble to catch as the goose would peck hard and could give a nasty wound. The goose lost and also lost its head.

The puddings were always made ahead in a floured cloth and brought down from Sydney with us. One year a pudding was hung in the laundry and my brother and I found that by standing on a chair we could reach it, take a generous mouthful
of the cloth, munch and then pull hard and get a lovely flavour of currants etc. Mother was not pleased!

The Post Office was near the railway station and opposite was the general store. They sold everything from a needle to a bathing cap and also icecreams. These were quite a novelty in those days. The store used to deliver any goods that we requested. The fishermen used to come round early in the morning offering their catch and the garfish given to the children - good flavour but very small bones which had to be carefully removed.

My sister remembers Nancy Alvarez crocheting a small handbag for her with the name DOT embroidered inside for her. This was a great thrill.

That is about all I remember of the pre-World War I visits to Thirroul. Later I used to go down and stayed with the Wilkinsons, who used to take a house and the Friend family took one nearby. Not far away was Laurie Le Gay Brereton from Sydney University English Department. The Wilkinson family were a delight. Father was one of the very early importers of radio parts and they had a radio with a horn loudspeaker in their home at Wairoonga. The children were Kenneth and Joy. The Wilkinsons used to have very happy dances in their home and Mrs Wilkinson would give us lavish suppers afterwards and we thought that just fine.

The Friend family were associated with the W S Friend Hardware Warehouse in York Street, Sydney, right behind the Queen Victoria Building.

I am sorry we do not have any family photographs of our holidays in Thirroul. I am afraid these days were so long ago that most of the people we knew and played with have now died.

The Le Gay Breretons had a house down between Austinmer and Thirroul, which I think they used as a beach house throughout the year. The Wilkinsons certainly leased their house and it was not always the same one.

Well after the War I became a member of the Sydney Bush Walkers and most weekends were spent away walking and camping up and down the New South Wales coast and also in Victoria. My social life tended to veer away from the ordinary life of visits to Thirroul and Austinmer.

I hope that these memories may be of some value in your search for a picture of life in those times.

REMINISCENCES OF JOHN DEVITT

My Family,

The first born of Thomas Patrick Devitt and Mildred Rose Devitt (Todd). I was born at the Oaks on 12 December, 1917 and christened John Michael after my two grandfathers by Fr. Arthur Hogan in St.Aloyisus Church on the top of the hill overlooking the Oaks.

Grandfather Michael Devitt had with his brother John and sister Mary come out from Ireland in the second potato famine in the 1860's. He married a Mary Canavan and settled in the Oaks out Oakdale way, hacking out a dairy farm from the virgin bush. They had a family of six boys and two girls who all grew up on the farm.

Two of the boys, Jack and Jim, became carpenters. Of the two Jim was the better tradesman in fact he became a master joiner, but lacked the drive and business acumen of Jack who branched out as a contractor, building many public building, churches, schools, and Post Offices throughout the State, including the old Corrimal Convent.