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# Nineteenth-Century Dapto

W. G. McDonald

*Illawarra Historical Society*

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# Nineteenth-Century Dapto

**Description**

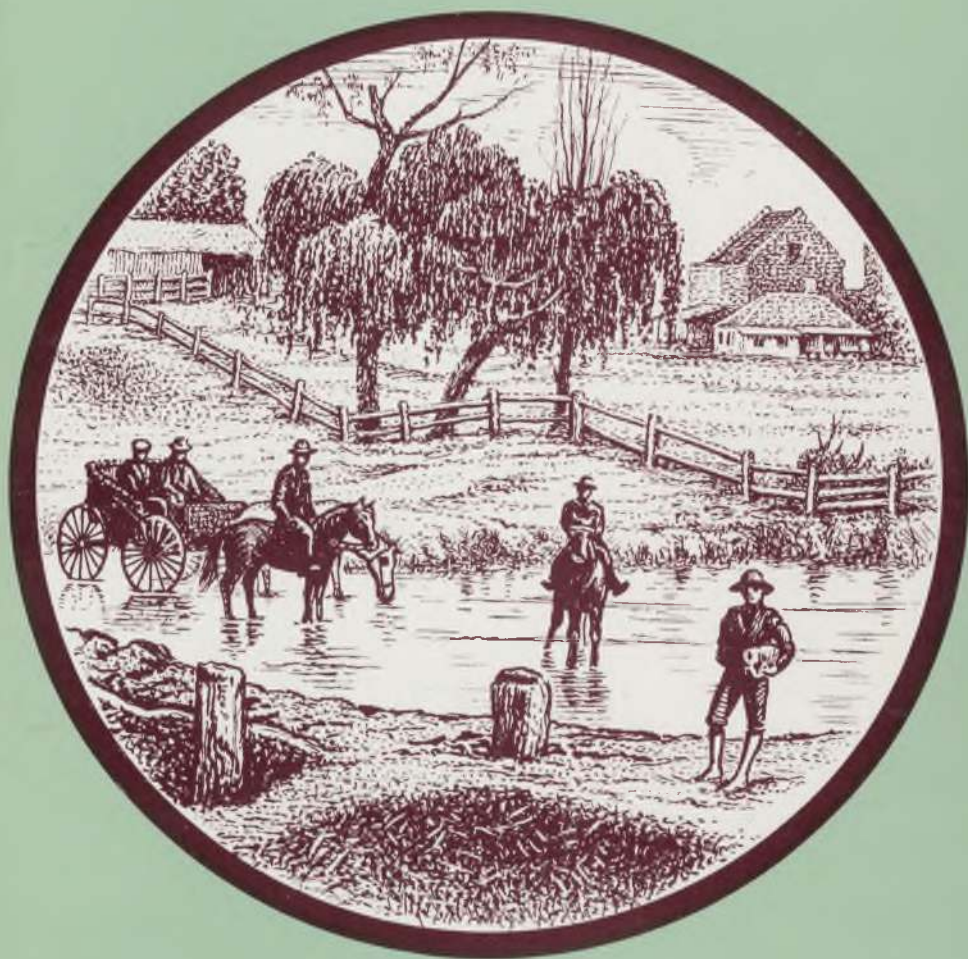
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NINETEENTH-CENTURY

# DAPTO



W. G. McDONALD

ILLAWARRA HISTORICAL SOCIETY



## THE ILLAWARRA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Society's objects are the advancement and study of the history of Australia in general and of the Illawarra district in particular, by the holding of regular and special meetings; the collection of documentary material and artefacts; excursions to places of historic interest; publication of a monthly Bulletin and local historical booklets; and maintenance of an Illawarra folk museum.

Regular monthly meetings are held at the small Meeting Room, Town Hall, Crown Street, Wollongong at 7.45 p.m. on the first Thursday of each month except January.

The Society's Museum at 11 Market Street, Wollongong, is open from 2 to 5 p.m. on Wednesdays, Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays (except Christmas Day and Good Friday) and daily during school holidays.

Visits by schools and societies at other times may be arranged.

Visitors are welcome at all Society functions.

Enquiries regarding membership are invited to Box 241 P.O.,  
Wollongong East, N.S.W. 2500.



**"PUMPKIN COTTAGE"**

The first home of Henry and Sarah Osborne  
From a sketch by Robert Hoddle (1832)  
(By permission of the Mitchell Library)

**NINETEENTH-CENTURY**

**DAPTO**

**Notes on the History of  
Dapto and its Neighbourhood**

**W.G. McDONALD**



**ILLAWARRA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
WOLLONGONG**

**1976**

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

These notes, put together over a period of several years from many different sources, embody the substance of talks given to the Illawarra Historical Society on 5th April and 3rd May 1973 and 4th September 1975. I am conscious that they are disjointed and that there are large gaps in the story. It is only too probable that there are errors of fact, my sources being of varying reliability. Some subjects and persons, on whom I had no, or not enough, information have not been dealt with, or have not been covered as fully as they deserve: others, where information has been available, perhaps in too much detail. Since, however, I have not been compiling an officially-commissioned history or an M.A. thesis, I have felt free to include not only whatever seemed significant in itself or illustrative of the times, but also bits and pieces which seemed merely odd or entertaining.

My title is to some extent a misnomer; but it seemed better to carry the story a few years into the twentieth century to the closing of the Smelting Works, which marked the end of a chapter and a turning-point in the history of Dapto, rather than to break off in the middle of an episode.

I had hoped that before these notes came to be published it would be possible to work them into a more coherent and balanced account. However, there have always been, and probably always would be, gaps which needed filling and loose ends which needed to be tied up; and the Council of the Society has now decided to publish the notes as they stand. It is my expectation and hope that their publication will elicit additional material and lead to the correction of errors.

To avoid cluttering the text, and to assist in keeping down publication costs, references have generally been omitted. A few notes have, however, been added to refer the reader to sources of further information, or to amplify doubtful or disputed points.

In putting these notes into circulation, I should acknowledge the value of the work of previous writers on the subject, particularly the writings, both published and unpublished, of the late Mr. A. A. Armstrong and the late Mr. D. L. Denniss, Mr. J. F. R. Browne's "A History of William 'Merchant' Browne of Abbotsbury and Appin", Mr. A. Gilchrist's "John Dunmore Lang of Mullet Creek"; Miss G. Nesta Griffith's "Some Southern Homes of New South Wales" and Rev. Bro. J. P. O'Malley's "The Old Dapto Smelting Works"; the help received from the late Miss L. Denniss, Mrs. M. M. Evans, Mrs. A. E. Irwin, Miss M. McDonald, Mrs. R. Pearson, the late Mr. A. P. Fleming, the late Mr. H. J. McDonnell, the Rev. D. G. Duchesne, Messrs. W. A. Bayley, E. Beale, J. L. McPhail, E. Smith, S. Thomas and J.S.G. Worland, and other Illawarra Historical Society members and Dapto residents who have provided material and information; and above all the assistance given by the late Mr. D. L. Denniss, who freely shared with me his encyclopaedic knowledge, extending far beyond his published articles, of the history of the district. No incomer of a younger generation can hope to match the full and



comprehensive history of the district which Mr. Denniss could have written.

Thanks are due to Mr. J. F. R. Browne and the Mitchell Library for permission to quote from letters of William Browne to Margaret Lindsay and from J. C. Campbell to William Browne, and from "A History of William 'Merchant' Browne of Abbot'sbury and Appin"; to the Mitchell Library for permission to quote from the letters of John Leverett; and to Cassell Australia Limited for permission to quote from Professor J. M. Freeland's "Architect Extraordinary".

Thanks are also due to the Mitchell Library and the City of Wollongong Public Library for permission to reproduce copyright illustrations.

Once again I am deeply indebted to Mr. A. W. R. Macdonald for the maps and the cover design.

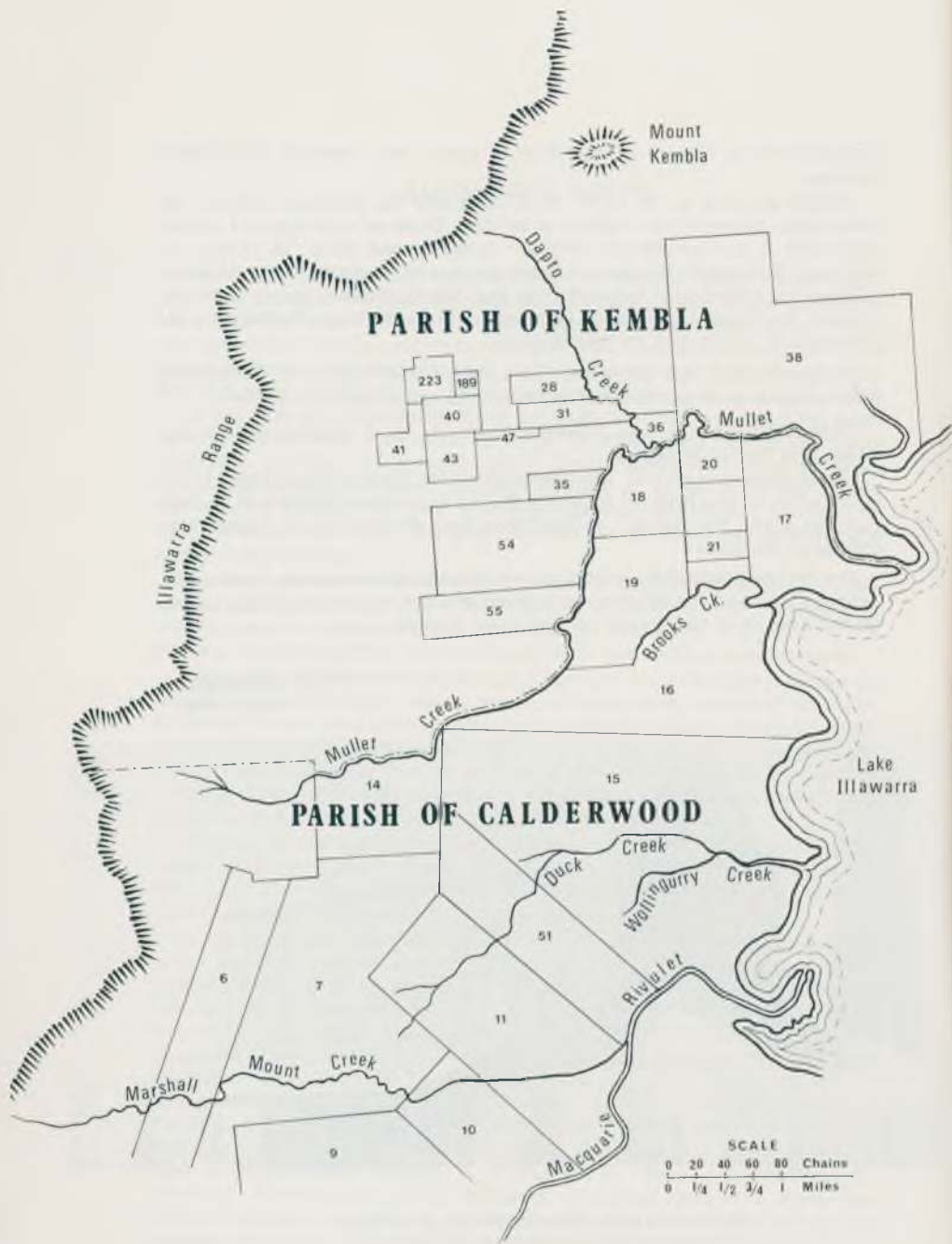
The Society, and myself, are also grateful for financial assistance in the publication of this booklet from the Royal Australian Historical Society cultural grant, the Isabel Lee Memorial Bequest and the Elizabeth Hay Memorial Bequest.

For the use made of the material and information obtained, I am solely responsible; and the opinions expressed are not necessarily those of my informants or of the Illawarra Historical Society.

**W. G. McDonald,  
July, 1976.**



**BROWN'S MILL, BROWNSVILLE, c. 1890**  
(Illawarra Historical Society collection)



## *Dapto and District*

SHOWING LAND GRANTS  
MENTIONED IN TEXT

**LAND GRANTS  
MENTIONED IN TEXT**

**PARISH OF KEMBLA**

<b>Portion Number</b>	<b>Area (acres)</b>	<b>Name of Property</b>	<b>Grantee</b>
28	100		James Mitchell
31	100		Elizabeth Cray
35	100		John Robins
36	100		John McKelly
38	2000	Dunlop Vale	Andrew Lang
40	100	Hussar Farm	William Keevers
41	100	Stream Hill	Joseph Harris
43	100		James Fraser
47	23		Episcopal School
54	500	Horsley	(Augusta Brooks and Elizabeth Weston)
55	300	Reed Park	Edward Robert Stack
189	25		Joseph Marceau
223	83		George McPhail

**PARISH OF CALDERWOOD**

<b>Portion Number</b>	<b>Area (acres)</b>	<b>Name of Property</b>	<b>Grantee</b>
6	1280	Calderwood	Charles Throsby Smith
7	2560	Marshall Mount	Henry Osborne
9	700 ]	Johnston's Meadows Macquarie Gift	David Johnston
10	600 ]		George Johnston
11	1500 ]		
14	600	Avondale	Alfred Elyard
15	3000	Athanlin	
51	800	(later Yallah)	William Browne
16	1300	Exmouth	Richard Brooks
17	600		Henry Brooks
18	300 ]	Mullet Creek Farm	George Brown (I)
20	100 ]		George Brown (II)
19	500 ]		
21	60	Daisy Bank	James Neale

## Contents

1. "A Cattle Station by the Yallah-Lake": Some Early Grants and Grantees.....	9
2. "A Numerous Class of Small Settlers": Clearing-Leases and Mixed Farming.....	27
3. "The Bridge Across the Crick": A Digression on Roads and Bridges.....	34
4. "One Unpretentious Pub": The Beginnings of the Township.....	44
5. "Cow": The Change to Dairying.....	51
6. "The Most Stragglng Village in Illawarra": The Township from 1860 to 1887.....	59
7. "The City Surpassing Newcastle": The New Township and the Smelting-Works Boom.....	67
Appendix I: The Name of Dapto.....	74
Appendix II: Buildings Included in National Trust of Australia (N.S.W.) Register of Historic Buildings.....	76

## "A Cattle-station by the Yalla-Lake" Some Early Grants and Grantees

There appears to be no authenticated record of the first visit of white men to Dapto. The shipwrecked crew of the "Sydney Cove", trekking up the coast from Gippsland in 1797, probably, and George William Evans on his journey from Jervis Bay to Appin in 1812 almost certainly, passed up the narrow peninsulas between Lake Illawarra and the ocean. It has been suggested that Mount Brown, at the south end of Dapto, takes its name from Flinders' botanist Robert Brown, who is said to have visited the district during the first few years of the nineteenth century. But there is no record in Brown's journal, or any other reliable evidence, of such a visit. McCaffrey states it as a fact without quoting his authority; but at the date he gives Brown was twelve thousand miles away. Mr. David Denniss, without committing himself to a particular date, was sure that the visit took place - basing himself on the traditions of a local family named Brown, said to be descended from Robert Brown's son William. Unfortunately Robert was a lifelong bachelor. That would not have been an insuperable objection in a colony where John Macarthur was looked at askance by his fellow-officers of the Rum Corps because he was openly and notoriously living with his own wife; but all who knew Robert Brown attest that he was a somewhat strait-laced, even puritanical, young man, blamelessly wedded to botany.

"And everyone would say  
As he walked his flowery way,  
'If he's content with a vegetable love which would certainly not suit  
me,  
Why, what a most particularly pure young man this pure young man  
must be!'"

In any event, from recent researches \*t now seems possible to state definitely that Robert Brown did not visit Illawarra, though someone connected with him (possibly his convict servant Joseph Wild, who later became Illawarra's first constable) may have done so.

In any case, the site of Dapto was undoubtedly known by 1816, whether discovered by Brown or Wild or by some unremembered cedar-getter, for Surveyor Meehan refers to Mullet Creek in his field-book towards the end of that year. But the name of the district was not yet Dapto, and the origin and meaning of the name are among the most obscure points in Illawarra history. (See Appendix I)

"Exmouth": Richard Brooks. When the first grantees of land in Illawarra met Meehan and Surveyor-General Oxley at Throsby's

stockman's hut, the first grant of all was of 1300 acres, marked out by Meehan on 5th December 1816 and afterwards known as "Exmouth", with a frontage to Lake Illawarra from Brooks Creek to near Tallawarra, extending west to Mullet Creek.

Richard Brooks, the first grantee, was a sea captain, a former East India Company officer, who after making a number of trading voyages to Sydney purchased "Denham Court", near Ingleburn, from Richard Atkins, the alcoholic Judge-Advocate who was the original remittance-man. There Brooks built a stately mansion, which is still standing, and lived with his wife and family in considerable style, the guests on state occasions rolling up in carriages with liveried postillions. Like most of the early large grantees, he did not live on his Illawarra property - an unfortunate thing for this district, which has few of the fine old homes which are a feature of some other early-settled areas. "Exmouth" was managed by two men named Neale and Cream. In later years Cream discovered the Butter Track from Marshall Mount to Kangaroo Valley. Neale received a small grant of sixty acres in the eastern part of the present town.

Richard Brooks was fatally gored by a bull at "Denham Court" in 1833. He and his wife were buried in a vault on the estate, and when the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, which contains memorial windows to Brooks and his wife, was erected in the late 1830's it was built so as to enclose the vault.

Brooks had two sons, both associated with the Dapto district. Henry had a grant of 600 acres, marked out in 1825 by Surveyor James McBrien, on Lake Illawarra north of Brooks Creek - roughly the Kanahooka Point area. Richard, who had been one of the first squatters in Monaro, where he took up Jindabyne Station, married Augusta Weston of "West Horsley", where he died in 1855.

"West Horsley" and "Horsley". "West Horsley" had been so named after his native place in Surrey, by Lieutenant William Frederick Weston, to whom a grant of 500 acres had been promised. He did not live long to enjoy his property, dying there on 25th April, 1826 aged only 33. The grant finally issued in 1842 to his daughters Elizabeth Weston, who next year married Andrew Thompson, and Augusta Brooks. By a deed of partition of 1848 the Brookses took the eastern half (confusingly named "West Horsley") and the Thompsons the western half (named simply "Horsley"). The front elevation of the house built by the Thompsons very closely resembles "Horsley Park", Smithfield (also the property of William Frederick Weston) and is thought to have been modelled on it. The bricks were made and burnt on the property and all the woodwork, including the roof battens, is cedar - an example of the lavishness with which this timber was used in the early days.

In 1876 "Horsley" came into the possession of John Lindsay who five years later bought "West Horsley" also; but after his death the properties were again divided, "Horsley" going to his son George and "West Horsley" to his son John.

**The Browns and Brownes.** The chronicler of early Dapto is compassed about by so great a cloud of Browns as to despair of ever clearing the air. Robert Brown the botanist has already been mentioned. William Brown settled in West Dapto. The family afterwards moved to Sherbrooke, but, when they were flooded out by the building of Cataract Dam returned to the Dapto district and established themselves at “Wollingurry” Yallah.

“**Athanlin**”: **William Browne.** Another William Browne (generally known as Merchant Browne) - this time spelt with an “e”, - had received two grants of 3000 acres and 800 acres, also in the Yallah district, which he called “Athanlin”.

Merchant Browne’s life-story, as related by one of his descendants, was strange indeed. He was the son of an Irish officer in the East India Company’s service and “a Persian woman of high degree, the widow of a Persian merchant prince”. His father took him back to Europe, and died soon after. William’s relatives, ignorant of his mother’s rank and wealth, apprenticed him to a grocer. Having completed his apprenticeship, he was earning a modest living selling tea and kitchen utensils from door to door when, by a coincidence too improbable for fiction, he was recognised by a General Shawe, the sole European witness to his parents’ wedding. Having satisfied himself of William’s identity, General Shawe paid the young man’s passage back to his mother in India, where, backed by her “untold” wealth and the General’s influence, he prospered as a merchant, married, and raised a family in his “handsome and commodious” residence near Calcutta. But as time went on he found the climate of Bengal agreed ill with him: “I was often dangerously ill, seldom tolerably well, and never strong or hearty”. On a trading voyage to New South Wales in 1809-10 he was impressed by “the uncommon salubrity of this country...The fevers and agues so frequently (sic) in India are wholly unknown here. Even the immoderate use of ardent spirits (he arrived during the Rum Corps regime) seems unable to produce sickness or debility here”

So he bought 2000 acres at “Abbotsbury” near Cabramatta, and made plans to wind up his affairs in India and remove his household, including his aged Persian mother, to New South Wales. This proved a long job, and it was not until April 1816 that Browne finally arrived to settle here.

He came with recommendations from the Secretary of State, and nearly £20,000 with which “to embark in Mercantile and Farming Concerns in the Colony”. On 27th April 1816 J. F. Campbell, the Colonial Secretary, wrote promising Browne a grant of 3000 acres (according to Meehan’s evidence before Commissioner Bigge, the largest grant ever given by Macquarie to any one person) together with “an eligible Town Allotment” and the services of “Eight Govt. men to be victualled from the King’s Stores for the term of Eighteen Months”

Browne was not entirely happy with his grant: “It is a newly discovered tract near the Sea, called Five Islands, a little south from

2

Botany Bay, said to be far superior in fertility, and less incumbered with timber, than any of the old districts, except those on the banks of the Hawkesbury, and not (like) them, subject to sudden inundations. I would prefer inferior land near my old estate, but all the lands within many miles of it have already been granted or appropriated for Govt. uses”.

However, he set to work to develop it, mainly through the agency of three nephews, Henry, Thomas and Cornelius O'Brien. By 1820 he was writing that, because both “Abbotsbury” and “Athanlin” were overstocked, he must thenceforward send “a certain number annually” to “the unoccupied Country beyond the Blue Mountains, about 200 miles from Sydney”. Browne's eldest son and Thomas O'Brien went with them.

Cornelius O'Brien remained at “Athanlin” for a time. When Macquarie visited Illawarra in January 1822, he was one of those who acted as guide to the Governor, who spent the night of 15th January at “Mr. Brown's establishment situated on the western bank of the lake”, commenting that “the lands we travelled over from Mr. Allan's at Red Point to Mr. Brown's were chiefly open forest land of good quality, and well wooded and watered”. Next day Macquarie's party “set out from Mr. Brown's... to explore the country to the southward and westward; having first sent off our servants and baggage towards the mountain over which the new road from Illawarra to Appin has recently been made by Mr. O'Brien. We proceeded through a very rich country in a southerly direction for two miles till we arrived on the left bank of the Macquarie-River, a very pretty stream of fresh water about 20 yards in breadth, which falls into the lake, and is full of fish, with cedar and other good timber growing on its bank”.

“Mr. Brown” himself, it appears, was not present. He had fallen out with Macquarie over “39 Asiatic servants” whom Browne had brought to the colony. They had complained of “cruel usage and illfare” at Browne's hands; the Bench of Magistrates had upheld their complaints; the Governor had had them repatriated, and had unsuccessfully sued Browne for their passage-money. Browne had allied himself with the Governor's opponents.

So far there seems to be no evidence that any of the Indians worked at “Athanlin”; though it is on record that Cornelius O'Brien, many years later, supported a move to bring Indian labourers to New South Wales - possibly as a result of personal experience.

Before long Cornelius secured a grant at Bulli, and later migrated to Yass; but the development of “Athanlin” (also often referred to as “Yallah”) went on.

In the early 1830's Alexander Harris visited a cattle-station on the border of the “Yalla-Lake” (probably either “Exmouth” or “Athanlin”, but which is not clear), where he enjoyed “a good dinner of hot-beef-steaks, bread and tea”. He described in “Settlers and Convicts” the system on which these runs were worked and its results.

“In New South Wales large settlers possess some thousands of



horned cattle....Each is branded, generally before six months old; and is then suffered to ramble at large over the run assigned to the herd it belongs to; and these runs are enclosed.....It is an unavoidable incident of the system that some get lost....Hence it is impossible to make stockmen accountable for every beast; especially in some of the mountainous or mountain-bordered runs; one of which last was that we had arrived at. It will readily be understood what strong temptation was thus put in the way of men whose honesty had been subverted by a thief's life from infancy upwards, to sell an odd beast or two when they considered they could do so without detection;....Thus sometimes a bullock was turned over to the travelling cattle-jobber: sometimes three or four young calves were driven away before branding into a snug bight of the mountain and never brought to light till they were branded with a false brand....Sometimes the brands were obliterated by branding with fresh brands; and sometimes the beast has been thrown and the branded section of the hide actually flayed off....This game, it was afterwards known, was going on pretty smartly at the stations on the Yalla Lake, where we had arrived.”

The Cattle-Stealing Prevention Association, formed in September 1827 by several large Illawarra landholders (including Brooks and William Browne) had, it appears, laboured in vain.

Although Harris says that the convict stockman was “kept by his master without wages and often most miserably fed and clad”, his temporary host at the station by the Yalla Lake was evidently better off:

“I did not even suspect him to be a prisoner of the crown. He was well dressed, had plenty of money, had a good horse at the door, and seemed quite his own master. As we came in sight of the hut the dogs gave the alarm, and the stockman belonging to the station came out and kept the dogs off while we got into the hut. It appeared in the course of a few minutes that we had disturbed them at a game at cards for a shilling a game a head. They were all, as I learned afterwards, still prisoners. On my mate telling them, with reference to me, that it was “all right”, the cards were brought to light again, and the game went on”.

Browne himself does not appear to have spent much time at “Athanlin”, though apparently it was there that he died, on 6th October 1833, the Paulsgrove Diarist noting, “Tuesday 8....Mr. Brown (Merchant) buried at Woolongon, died Sunday night.”

His descendant and biographer, Mr. J.F.R. Browne, describes the view that “Browne played no large part in opening up the Five Islands Districts” as “a myth”. He says: “Without Browne and his nephews that part of the Colony would have been made into smaller grants, instead of one large estate, where these men made it into a payable and prosperous country, to clear it and make it a well established concern for others who were to follow them”.

One family at least of those who followed left a permanent mark on the district. Out of the “Athanlin” grants another property was carved

which became the home of one of the best-known and longest-established of local farming families.

**“Penrose”:** E. R. Evans. Evan Robert Evans, who arrived in the mid 1830's, was not, as anyone might think, a Welshman, but a Cornishman; demonstrating the racial, and ancient linguistic, affinity of Cornwall and Wales. By 1841 he had started farming at “Penrose”, where his descendants lived until 1973. He traded in cattle in conjunction with Henry Osborne. His son extended his operations to the tablelands, and in 1872 bought 2030 acres at Sutton Forest for 15 shillings per acre. McCaffrey severely castigates the early Evanses for their failure to keep an accurate record of the love-lives of their bulls; but despite this reprehensible failure to fulfil the chief end of man in McCaffrey's catechism, they were generally well esteemed, and played a notable part in the development of the A.I.S. breed which has been so important in local history.

E.R. Evans had purchased the property in 1847. A few years later he decided to build himself a new house. Hearing that a stonemason named William James from his home town, Penzance, was emigrating to Australia, Evans went to Sydney, met James, and arranged for him, as his first job in Australia, to build “Penrose”. The foundations are of stone, the walls of bricks believed to have been made and burnt on the property, the roof of slate and the internal woodwork of cedar. The kitchen, originally, like many farm kitchens of the period, a detached building at the rear, was built on to the house early this century, and inside a few walls have been removed; but otherwise “Penrose” was little changed from its original form as long as the Evanses lived there. “The house as it stands to-day,” said a writer in 1968, “is a tribute to the skill of the builder and the care and attention that the family have given it.”

**“Avondale”:** 600 acres known as “Avondale” went to Alfred Elyard, Chief Clerk of the Supreme Court in the 1840's, and a member of a family who had large holdings on the Shoalhaven, where he died in 1879; but his connection with Dapto was neither close nor long. He receives one brief and dishonourable mention in the Paulsgrove Diary: “Mr. Elyard D.M. (whatever that signifies) call'd in the evening drunk, having lost his way and slept”.

**“Mullet Creek Farm”:** George Brown. (George I) and **“Daisybank”:** George Brown (George II). George Brown in 1833 received a grant of 300 acres covering the Brownsville area. For convenience he will be referred to as George I, though no defamation of the honest man by imputing any resemblance to the wee, wee German lairdie in character, habits, manners or morals is intended. The George Brown who received a grant of 500 acres (afterwards named “Daisybank”) further south was not the same man, and will be referred to (with the same disclaimer) as George II. According to “The Garden of New South Wales” he was a cousin of George I, though McCaffrey in his “History of Illawarra” calls this cousin William. \*

George I's two sons, John and George William (George III), and "little George" Brown (George IV) will appear later, making at least seven, probably eight, and possibly nine Browns or Brownes to be distinguished and sorted into place.

**Dr. Alick Osborne:** George II's grant had been promised by Governor Brisbane in 1823, but ten years elapsed before it actually issued, on 1st May 1833. Six months earlier George had sold to Richard Brooks (defeating a condition against alienation for five years). From Richard Brooks the grant passed first to his widow, then to his son Henry, then to Henry Osborne; and in 1839 the latter sold to his brother Alick for £250.

The Osborne brothers, John, Alick and Henry, were three of the ten children of Archibald Osborne of Dirnaseer in County Tyrone. John and Alick became naval surgeons, came to Australia in charge of convicts, and liked what they saw. John obtained a grant ("Glen Glosch") in what is now the western part of Wollongong, and built his home on Garden Hill, now better known as Hospital Hill.

Alick Osborne, unlike his predecessors in title, resided on his acquisition "for a period of twenty years uninterruptedly". By his will (dated 26th January 1855) "my estate of Daisy Bank Dapto" was bequeathed to his daughter Anne, wife of Robert Marshall, "said property not to be under the control of her husband as I desire her to be free from any unreasonable caprice to which he might be subject". He died the next year, and Anne and Robert Marshall took over. Anne died in 1888. Soon afterwards part of the property was subdivided, but "Daisy Bank" house itself remained in the hands of the family for many years afterwards.

**Henry and Sarah Osborne - the story of their marriage.** The two doctors had sent to their father for their youngest brother to join them in the promised land. Henry, before sailing, asked the Rev. Benjamin Marshall, the rector of the parish, for the hand of his daughter Sarah, but was refused.

So Henry sailed from Liverpool in the *Pyramus* - a name of ill omen for a disconsolate lover - carrying with him a draft for £1,000 to start him in the new land.

A great gale sprang up, and storm damage forced the *Pyramus* into Belfast. Henry, "convinced that the elements were fighting for him", once again pressed his suit. When chorused Nature bade him, like Strephon, take his love, was he to reply, "Nay, but a certain Rector forbids it"? No affidavit from a thunderstorm, no words on oath from a heavy shower, could have been more persuasive. With evidence before him that chorused Nature had interested herself in the matter, the Rector yielded. All the ladies of the parish set to work on Sarah's trousseau. Within a week she was fitted out, and the wedding took place on 11th September 1828.

Then the bride and bridegroom left for Belfast, to await the sailing of the *Pyramus*. While there Henry left his overcoat, with the draft for £1,000 in the pocket, hanging on a peg at their hotel. He rushed back to

find coat and draft intact; but the fright he had received convinced him that he could not risk carrying all his wealth in that form. He converted the draft into linen and bolts of cloth.

“Marshall Mount”. The Osbornes reached Sydney on 9th May 1829. Henry sold his linen and cloth to advantage, and made application for the free grant which an immigrant bringing capital into the country could still expect. He received 2560 acres in the Dapto district, “an irregularly-shaped piece of land fitting like a jig saw puzzle” between other properties previously taken up. Calling it “Marshall Mount” after Sarah’s maiden name, the Osbornes settled there, living at first in “Pumpkin Cottage”, under fairly primitive conditions but apparently happily - Alick Osborne wrote in April 1833, “Henry and family are all in excellent health and spirits, Sally finds the climate agrees with her”. “Thus happily settled on one of the richest and most favoured spots in the colony”, said a writer in the *Empire*, “Mr. Osborne would have been a man of the most perverse understanding if he had not set lustily to work to improve his good fortune. Being naturally of a resolute character, he brought his energies at once to bear upon the capability of his newly-acquired property.” Before long his holdings had increased to 5000 acres; but farming on this scale “not holding out a prospect of full employment to a man of his activity, he determined on extending his operations by seeking lands beyond the boundaries of location”. He became a squatter on a grand scale in the Riverina, where his holdings included the huge “Brookong” station.

In December 1839 he set out from Dapto, with one free settler, three convicts and three aborigines, to drive a mob of cattle, sheep and horses to Adelaide. The party were four months on the way, but brought 855 cattle, 800 sheep and 62 horses safely through. Captain (afterwards Sir) George Grey, the Governor of South Australia, referred to Osborne as “a remarkable man”, saying the Overlanders “have overcome difficulties of no ordinary kind, which have made the more timid and weak-hearted quail, and relinquish the enterprises in which they were engaged; whilst the resolute and undaunted have persevered, and the reward they have obtained is wealth, self-confidence in difficulties and dangers, and a fund of accurate information in many interesting points”.

In Illawarra Henry Osborne went on adding to his estates “Imbued with a genius for annexing earlier grants in the Dapto district”, in the forties he secured Charles Throsby Smith’s “Calderwood”, Elyard’s “Avondale”, William Browne’s “Athlanlin”, Brooks’ “Exmouth”, and numerous smaller grants “at prices varying from £1 to £20 or even £30 an acre”. His Central Illawarra estate extended from Mullet Creek To Macquarie Rivulet, and from Lake Illawarra to the mountains; and he had further large holdings on the mountain slopes south of Jamberoo, at Jerrara, and in Kangaroo Valley.

“Marshall Mount” remained his base of operations. There Sarah brought up their many children, managed her large household, and ran



**SARAH AND HENRY OSBORNE**

**"DAISY BANK"**

The home of Dr. Alick Osborne, and afterwards of Robert and Anne Marshall

From a sketch in Wilkes's "Narrative of the U.S. Exploring Expedition"  
(By permission of the Mitchell Library)



her own Sunday School (she is said to have rewarded the best child with bread and honey).

In front of "Pumpkin Cottage" the Osbornes built first a single storey wooden house, then a two-storey brick and stone mansion, fitted throughout with cedar - one of the finest houses in Illawarra, surrounded by a wide variety of English trees. Nearby were six acres of orchard, and further up the hill a vineyard.

Henry Osborne was a Justice of the Peace, and took a prominent part in all public affairs in Illawarra. He and his brothers in 1843 held in Wollongong a private show of high-grade cattle they had imported and of farm produce, "thus giving an incentive to establish the first Illawarra Agricultural Association". He was elected president, but other duties prevented his acceptance. In 1851 he was elected to the Legislative Council as member for East Camden, and represented the same constituency in the first Legislative Assembly (1856). "In politics he was a sincere and consistent supporter of the squatter party", manifesting, according to the *Empire*, "a visible horror at the disturbing efforts of those who have not yet 'ample room' in this 'happy land'". Even his obituarist said that "he displayed few qualifications as a parliamentary politician", but claimed for him "one great merit...he would not allow faction to smother the dictates of reason and his sense of justice....In and out of the political arena he was kind and courteous to all".

He died on 26th March 1859, aged 56, leaving "property estimated at nearly half a million of money, with collieries, the prospective value of which it is almost impossible to compute". His estates were divided among his family, his eldest son Henry Hill Osborne taking "Avondale". Sarah soon afterwards returned to England, where she died in 1873. \* "Marshall Mount" became "The heritage of one of the younger sons whose interests were elsewhere".

In 1879 the property was still being "wrought as a cattle run with a small flock of sheep, which latter, upon the whole are not found to succeed well in Illawarra. The tenantry and the small farming proprietors so generally met with in other parts are consequently wanting here. This circumstance seems to be a subject of regret with the neighbours, inasmuch as the station system in the squatter's sense of the term is reckoned a pioneer enterprise, and its continuation in the present day is considered an anachronism in Illawarra". But, perhaps because of that anachronism, "the passion for indiscriminate clearing, which was noted as a characteristic of other parts, has been wisely avoided in the Marshall Mount estate. A more judicious process has evidently been carried out, according to a preconceived plan in which beauty and utility have been aimed at as a combined result". However, even then the Marshall Mount homestead had "become a relic of bygone days...fast falling into decay, and...inhabited only by servants belonging to the establishment."

The "anachronism" persisted until 1890, when the estate was

subdivided into twenty-two farms. For one of these "the upkeep of a large house became too great a burden". \*

"Lakelands": Henry's second son, Patrick Hill Osborne, inherited the Lakelands Estate, more or less corresponding to "Exmouth". He was "a shrewd man of business, especially in the stock and station domain". He was a member for Illawarra in 1864-66 - like his father a sound Tory, supporting State aid to religion and denominational schools. None the less, a few years later he gave the site for the first Public School in Dapto. In his later years he lived elsewhere, mainly at "Currandooley" near Lake George, where he died in 1902; but he had retained "Lakelands" until about 1890, when he sold it to the Lake Illawarra Harbour and Land Corporation for £50,000. His last public act in the district was the gift of the valuable showground site to the Dapto A. & H. Society, on condition that a show was held annually.

Yet another son, George Osborne, inherited property at Yallah. He too had his main interests elsewhere (at "Foxlow" near Bungendore) but until his death he retained the Yallah property - the last Osborne holding in the Dapto district.

"Macquarie Gift": Just on the Dapto side of Marshall Mount, George Johnston's 1500 acres ran north-west from Macquarie Rivulet to straddle the future line of Marshall Mount Road from Marshall Mount School almost to the Yallah Road junction.

George Johnston was none other than the former Major Johnston, the bemused front-man of the Rum Rebellion. He had been shipped back to England for court-martial, promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel by seniority while awaiting trial, then convicted of mutiny. For that he might have had his neck stretched; but on the day sentence was to be passed a providential illness struck down a senior member of the court, the fierce old martinet Sir David Baird, who later told Macquarie that Johnston's guilt was "without the least palliation that was in my mind worthy of consideration".

The rest of the court judged him less harshly, perhaps discerning a stronger and more cunning hand pulling the strings. They took his buttons off and cut his stripes away, but instead of hanging Colonel Johnston in the morning they contented themselves with cashiering him. The Prince Regent was moved to express his royal displeasure at their leniency, but the case could not be reopened. All that could be done was to consign Johnston back to New South Wales, with instructions to Macquarie to treat him as he would "any other ordinary Settler".

This Macquarie did. Johnston had been for many years the "protector" of a certain Esther Abrahams, alias Julian, whom he had met on shipboard on her way to Botany Bay for seven years for attempting to steal lace valued at fifty shillings. To have made an honest woman of her while he held His Majesty's Commission would no doubt have been deemed scandalous conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman. Cashiered and disgraced, he was free to heed the "strictures and warnings" of Macquarie, who was using both the stick

and the carrot to get his reluctant subjects to the altar. On 12th November 1814 Johnston and Esther were married by the Reverend Samuel Marsden.

It was part of Macquarie's policy to confer favours and benefits on reformed characters. Johnston, in his declining years a pillar of law and order and, however belatedly, of domestic respectability, was one of the beneficiaries. On 16th November 1816 the Colonial Secretary informed Surveyor-General Oxley that "the Governor has no objection to the Lands promised to George Johnston Esqre. Senr. being located for him at or near to the Macquarie River on its Western side in the said District of Illawarra". They were located accordingly, and the grateful Johnston named the property "Macquarie Gift".

Macquarie visited the property in 1822, writing in his journal, "This farm is a very fine one, well watered, and contains some very extensive beautiful meadows, bordering on the lake and river". In fact it appears from the parish map that Johnston's grant did not extend to the lake, but in 1822 there was probably nothing to prevent him from occupying the intervening land. Johnston himself was another absentee, but some of his descendants figured in Illawarra history.

David Johnston, who was one of Macquarie's companions on his Illawarra journey, inherited "Macquarie Gift", (he also received two grants further to the south-west, in later years known as "Johnston's Meadows"; but except for one small corner the latter were outside the area covered by these notes).

From him "Macquarie Gift" passed in 1860 to his daughter Esther, and through her to the Weston family.

Blanche Johnston, George's youngest daughter, had married Captain George Edward Nicholas Weston (brother of William Frederick Weston of "Horsley"). Their eldest son Edward married his cousin Esther. Although so close to "Marshall Mount", "Macquarie Gift" (also known in later years as "Weston's Meadows") was one of the few properties thereabouts which eluded Henry Osborne's take-over bids. It was worked by Edward Weston as a dairying and racehorse-breeding estate until 1900, and remained the property of the Weston family (much of it let to tenant farmers) till the early 1920's. \*The family themselves were however more closely associated with Albion Park than with Dapto. 6.

**Kembla Grange:** Kembla Grange was an ill-starred area. Its first recorded "owner", an aboriginal chief known as Charlie Hooka, came to a sticky end when he was murdered and decapitated by two blacks of the Pigeon House Tribe. \*Most of its white owners were little more fortunate. 7

**"Dunlop Vale": J. D. Wyllie.** The first major landholder, John Dunlop Wyllie (or Wylie), a native of Dalry in Ayrshire, arrived in the colony in 1824, bringing with him some purebred Ayrshire cattle. He received from Governor Brisbane, another Ayrshire man, a promise of



1,000 acres, which he selected on the north side of Mullet Creek. The property, at first known as "Shoran Vale," was by 1829 "Dunlop Vale", Dunlop being not only Wyllie's middle name, but the place where the Ayrshire breed (once known as Dunlops) had originated. Getting into financial difficulties, Wyllie left the property and became an employee on Berry's Shoalhaven estates.

Some of Wyllie's borrowings had been guaranteed by yet another Ayrshire man, that turbulent priest - for when it came to turbulence, new presbyter, as Milton observed, was but old priest writ large - the Reverend John Dunmore Lang.

**John Dunmore Lang's proposed Presbyterian Settlement:** Wyllie, obtaining a promise of a further 1,000 acres, transferred the whole 2,000 acres to Lang in 1830, but apparently with some private understanding that he would retain some rights in the property. Lang proposed to divide it into small farms for Scottish settlers who were to be selected by himself and to migrate "under the pastoral superintendence of a minister of the Church of Scotland" (Lang, the arch-disrupter, being as yet within the fold of the Auld Kirk).

"Of all sad words of tongue or pen,  
The saddest are these: 'It might have been!'"

A miniature Otago, uncorrupted by gold, a new Lewis, might have arisen on the banks of Mullet Creek. Lang's flock might have followed him faithfully as he disrupted the Disruption, and split the Kirk into ever smaller splinters. Having become the weest and freest of Kirks, they might have remained the sternest and wildest of Wee Frees, lying across the highway to block traffic on the Sabbath, or singing, seated and unaccompanied save for the precentor's tuning-fork:

"In chariots some put confidence,  
Some horses trust upon,  
But we remember will the name  
Of our Lord God alone...  
An horse for preservation  
Is a deceitful thing,  
And by the greatness of his strength  
Can no deliv'rance bring".

**Diabolis aliter visum.** Dunlop Vale was destined to (almost) total depravity, its sole otherwise redeeming feature, the golf club, a hotbed of sabbath-breaking and one-armed banditry. One can imagine the fiery eloquence with which Lang would take up his testimony against Kembla Grange as it is:

“He waled a maist judeecious text,  
An', launchin' into his prelections,  
Swoopt, wi' a skirl, on a' defections...  
Nae shauchlin' testimony here,  
We were a' domned, an' that was clear  
I owned, wi' gratitude an' wonder  
He was a pleasure to sit under!”\*

**Robert and William Carruth:** The elect Presbyterians did not come to Illawarra. “There was then”, said Lang, “a favourable prospect of Wyllie being comfortably settled on one half of his grant, including all his previous cultivation, in company with two young Scotch farmers, relatives of his then recently arrived”. These were Robert and William Carruth, who arrived in Sydney in 1835. Shortly afterwards Lang reconveyed to Wyllie and the Carruths the portion of the property west of the Great South Road.

But this turn of fortune had come too late for Wyllie. Already ill when the Carruths arrived, he died on 27th September of the same year. The Carruths worked the property till the great drought of 1838, when they sold out to Gerard Gerard and went to New Zealand.

John Dunmore Lang in the same year sold the eastern section to his brother Andrew for £2,400. On 30th March, 1840 the grant finally issued to Andrew Lang, in trust as to one moiety for Andrew Lang and as to the other for Gerard Gerard. Less than two months later Andrew Lang offered his section, subdivided into 34 farms of from 6 to 70 acres, for sale by auction. “The sale brought a total of £6,876 4s. 6d., the price per acre varying from £5 to £14 10s.” \*

**Gerard Gerard:** Gerard Gerard, when he bought the Carruths' property, was not long out from his native France. He was a member of the first Illawarra District Council appointed on 24th August 1843, was a shareholder in the Illawarra Steam Packet Company, and was on the committee of the Illawarra Agricultural Association and a successful exhibitor at local shows. He was said to have been the first farmer in Illawarra to milk the cows without the calves.

**The name “Kembla Grange”.** Apparently it was Gerard who named the property “Kembla Grange”. The name was of course taken from Mount Kembla, which is said to be a corruption of the aboriginal D'jembla and to mean “Plenty of game” or “Plenty of wild fowl about”.

**“Newton”:** **D. W. Irving.** Gerard sold part of the property to David Williamson Irving, the youngest son of an Edinburgh Writer to the Signet who had been a schoolboy friend of Sir Walter Scott. Irving had been agent to William Howe of “Glenlee”, Campbelltown, had married his employer's daughter Jane, and had previously farmed at Terara on the Shoalhaven and at Sutton Forest. He named his Kembla Grange property “Newton” after the Lanarkshire seat of his uncle Lord Newton, a Lord of Session in Scotland. On it he built in 1845 the house which is still standing. He lived there till 1862, when he accepted an

appointment as Police Magistrate at Forbes - which suggests that he had not been particularly successful as a farmer.

**Robert Haworth of "Kembla Grange":** In 1853 Gerard sold the residue of the property - 471 acres - to Robert Haworth (in some contemporary references Howarth, but on his tombstone Haworth, like the Brontes' village, which is also pronounced Howarth).

Haworth had risen from humble beginnings - he is said by McCaffrey in his "History" to have fed pigs and calves for the Carruths on "Dunlop Vale", while, being a shoemaker by trade, he made boots for the settlers in his own time. Elsewhere McCaffrey says that Haworth, a native of Bury in Lancashire, got into trouble through horse-racing, cock-fighting and gambling, and tried to get out of it by forgery; that he was detected and in 1834 transported for seven years; and that on arrival in Australia he was assigned to Carruths. At "Dunlop Vale" he looked after the pigs and calves by day, and made boots and shoes at night and on Sunday evenings. He forswore sport and gambling in every form, saved every penny, and when he had served his time brought his wife and family out to Wollongong.

No one should be convicted on McCaffrey's uncorroborated evidence, but in this case there may be some corroboration. The 1828 census records "Robert Howarth, 26, Government Servant (i.e. convict), Florentia, 1828, 7 years; Protestant; labourer to John Heaps, Portland Head". The age corresponds with that stated on Haworth's tombstone and the sentence with McCaffrey's story. The date of arrival does not, nor does the entry tally with McCaffrey's implication that immediately on arrival Haworth was assigned to the Carruths. But it is an uncommon name, and it could be the same man; an old resident adds that in her young days the Haworth family were not considered socially acceptable by Illawarra gentlefolk.

Whether he had entered Carruths' employment voluntarily or involuntarily, Haworth prospered after leaving it. He had a tannery in Wollongong somewhere near the site of the railway station. According to McCaffrey his title was defective, and Mrs. Osborne, widow of Dr. John Osborne of "Garden Hill", claimed the land as "her dowry". Haworth walked to Sydney to borrow £33 6s. 8d. to settle her claim. (McCaffrey's account is not particularly lucid; but as £33 6s. 8d. is exactly one-third of £100, possibly he confused the bride's "dowry" with the widow's "dower" - the widow's right at common law to a life-interest in one-third of her husband's lands).

The tannery was a success, and Haworth was able to buy "Kembla Grange", where, according to McCaffrey, he built a fine residence - the ruins were still visible west of the railway in the 1950's - and the lodge on the highway, often mistakenly described as a toll-house, which survived into the 1960's. He was member for Illawarra from 1860 to 1864, and for a time was a shining example of the self-help beloved of the Victorians - parents could point him out to their children and say, 'You can be like Mr. Haworth, if you work hard, save your pennies, and practise your handwriting.'

Then something went wrong. McCaffrey says that Haworth came to grief through "going surety to the Government for Patrick Laiffe (sic) who had the contract of constructing the Wollongong harbour - the amount was £10,000 and Haworth had to complete the work which cost him £4,000". (Presumably this refers to the construction of Belmore Basin, though there is no reference to it in C.W. Gardiner-Garden's "Port of Wollongong").

£1,000 should not have spelt ruin for the squire of "Kembla Grange", and possibly it did not, for he evidently remained in the district, and, after all his ups and downs was buried under a fairly elaborate monument in St. Luke's Churchyard. His vicissitudes might be worth further study.

**The Veterans' Grants.** Another series of grants was unique in the Illawarra District. In 1829 Surveyor Knapp was instructed to survey ten 100-acre lots for veterans on Dapto Creek (this being the first recorded use of the name Dapto), to select dry situations for the huts and to point them out to the commandant at Wollongong, Lieutenant Butler, who was to have a hut built on each grant by working parties. Each veteran was to be supplied with food for a year and to have a convict labourer assigned to him.

These grantees were members of the Veteran Company (also and confusingly called the New South Wales Corps, but not to be confounded with the original Rum Corps) formed a few years earlier for service in New South Wales, where the first contingent arrived in 1826. The unit's existence was brief; it was disbanded after only three years.

For once the Government tried to provide generously for its old soldiers, but not for the first or last time a soldier settlement scheme went wrong. In those days veteran meant veteran - men enlisted for twenty-one years, and these veterans must have been rather long in the tooth for pioneering. They were probably not cut out for farming in any case. The Duke of Wellington's description of his army as "the scum of the earth, enlisted for drink", has often been quoted; less often, for some reason, his next remark, "It is really wonderful that we should have been able to make them the fine fellows they are". But the Duke, who was nothing if not a realist, would have been the first to admit that, though the old British Army may have been a thin red line of heroes when the drums began to roll, single men in barracks don't grow into plaster saints. The qualities which enabled them to charge into the cannon's mouth in the breach of Badajoz, or die unflinchingly in square at Waterloo, did not guarantee success in civil life - especially a civil life which involved long hours of monotonous and lonely toil in the bush. \* In the upshot only three of the veterans; John McKelly, John Robins and James Mitchell, actually received their grants. Another, Richard Mallon, settled on his land, but died before receiving his grant, which went to Elizabeth his widow, by that time Mrs. Cray. It was she who gave four acres at West Dapto as the site for a Roman Catholic Church and for the cemetery in which Richard Mallon lies buried.

**Joseph Harris.** The veterans on Dapto Creek were not the only old soldiers to receive grants in the area.

Joseph Harris had served in the 39th Regiment, where he had been batman to a young officer named Charles Sturt. When the 39th came to Australia, and Sturt went off exploring in the unknown interior, Harris, who, Sturt says, "had shared my wanderings and had continued in my service for eighteen years", accompanied him on both the 1828 expedition, which discovered the Darling, and the 1829-30 expedition, which traced the Murrumbidgee to the Murray and the Murray to the sea. On the latter expedition he won Sturt's special commendation by foiling an attempt by blacks to rob the boat - "I was much pleased", wrote Sturt, "by the coolness of my servant as well as by his consideration". He went with Sturt to Norfolk Island, where his eldest son was born; then in 1832, in recognition of his services on the two expeditions, he received a grant of 100 acres at West Dapto. In 1834 he was apparently living at Wollongong - it seems probable that he was the "old soldier named Harris" whose dwelling, across the proposed line of Harbour Street, was the *casus belli* in a memorable row, described by Alexander Stewart, between Major Mitchell and Charles Throsby Smith. By 1836 he was living on his grant.

An adjoining block of 100 acres was granted to James Fraser, another ex-soldier who had accompanied Sturt on his expeditions; but Fraser soon sold out to Harris.

In 1839 Mr. Joseph Harris (Anastasia his wife joining in the conveyance to bar dower) conveyed his grant to William Sheaffe Esquire - a nice distinction between the ex-ranker and the officer and gentleman: Sheaffe was a captain in the 50th Regiment of Foot, otherwise known as the Dirty Half Hundred, who had first come to Illawarra in command of the guard of the convict gangs working on Mitchell's road.

Settling at West Dapto, he became one of the first trustees of St. Luke's Church of England, and a churchwarden. He died in 1860, and is buried in the churchyard. \*

Fraser's grant was not included in the conveyance to Sheaffe. Perhaps it was the "Struggle Farm" which Joseph Harris when he died in 1862 devised (subject to an annuity to his daughter Mary Alexander) to his son William for life and William's sons after him. Anastasia was not mentioned - probably she had predeceased him. Joseph's goods and chattels (probate did not then affect realty) were sworn at under £200 - little enough for a man who, as soldier and pioneer, had done so much for his country.

William evidently struggled to some purpose, for in 1877 he was able to buy back the original grant from Sheaffe's widow (who had returned to England) and her sons. It has remained ever since in the hands of Joseph Harris's descendants, one of whom, Mr. Douglas Haug, is the present owner.

**The Hussar of Hussar Farm.** Another old soldier, Sergeant William

Keevers (spelt Keevors on the Parish Map) had served in the Inniskilling Dragoons and the 18th Hussars in the Peninsula and at Waterloo. His wife too had soldiered with his regiment, and is said to have served as a nurse at Waterloo - there were no trained and commissioned nurses then, but no doubt the soldier's wives who were on the strength turned to and did what they could in an emergency.

After an appointment as drill instructor to the first troop of New South Wales Mounted Police, Sergeant Keevers received a grant of 100 acres at West Dapto (Portion 40, Parish of Kembla, including the West Dapto Public School site) which he called "Hussar Farm". This he later sold, settling near Woodstock Mills at Jamberoo. He died at a ripe age in November, 1871, two days after being presented to the Governor, Lord Belmore, and was buried with military honours in the Anglican cemetery at Jamberoo, where his tombstone records his presence at Waterloo.

The purchaser of his grant was George McPhail, the grantee of Portion 223, which adjoined it on the north. Born at Inverness in 1832, he came to Australia at the age of seven with his parents John and Margaret McPhail. John was for a time the schoolmaster at Charcoal (Unanderra), then settled in Dapto, where he was the tenant of various farms. George married Corporal James Smith's daughter Elizabeth. He gave the land for West Dapto Public School, and was one of the first elders of the Dapto-Albion Park Presbyterian Church. His descendants still live at West Dapto.

In an angle formed by the boundaries of McPhail's and Keevers' grants is a 25-acre grant to Joseph Marceau, a French-Canadian "Patriote" transported after the rebellion of 1837. As a rebellion it was almost as much a fiasco as the Eureka Stockade, but it had dire consequences for the rebels. Twenty-nine were executed, and over a hundred and fifty were transported. Those from Upper Canada (Ontario) went to Van Diemen's Land. The relatively more fortunate French Canadians from Lower Canada went to the stockade at Longbottom (Concord, where they are commemorated in the names of France, Canada and Exile Bays), to work by day in the quarries cutting stone for the Parramatta Road, and to steal out at night to collect firewood and shells for lime-making, and sell them to passing boatmen.

After two hard years in government service, and a few months as assigned servants, they received tickets of leave. Later they were pardoned, and all eventually returned to Quebec except for three who died in Sydney, and Marceau. He married an Australian girl, Mary Barrett, and settled at Dapto, where he died in 1883, aged 76. His grave is in the Catholic cemetery at West Dapto - the inscription on the headstone discreetly brief and unenlightening.

## "A Numerous Class of Small Settlers": Clearing-leases and Mixed Farming

There were other early settlers who received no grants, started with little in their favour, but left their mark on the district.

The detachment of the 50th who came to Illawarra to guard the road gangs included James Smith, a Scotsman who had served in Ireland and had been promoted to Corporal not long before coming to Australia. With him came his wife Mary, and their eldest child was born at "Stockade, Wollongong" in 1836. On being discharged James Smith settled at West Dapto, lived there till his death, and was buried at Brownsville, leaving a large family. One son, born at West Dapto in 1845, bought from the Barrett family in 1900 the "Coral Vale" property at Wongawilli, still the home of James Smith's grandson Mr. E. L. Smith, from whom much information incorporated in this narrative has been obtained.

**William Thomas.** The barque Westminster brought to Australia in 1838 three families - the Dennisses, the Pipers and the Thomases - who were to be well known in Illawarra. On arrival in Sydney, William Thomas, a carpenter, was engaged by Henry Osborne to work on Marshall Mount House, where he built the cedar staircase; then, transformed into a gardener, set up the orchard and gardens. Later he took up a farm at Log Bridge on the Marshall Mount Road, where his son Henry lived on until 1920; but the later history of the family, most adequately covered by Mr. Stan Thomas in his book, "One hundred and Thirty Years" belongs more to Albion Park than Dapto.

**Richard Denniss.** Richard Denniss, his wife Sarah and their three eldest children settled at "Gate Farm" nearby in a more offhand way. The Dennisses travelled down to Wollongong by the steamer **William the Fourth**, bought bullocks and a wagon, and headed out in the direction of Marshall Mount. On arriving at a point on the west side of Marshall Mount Road, about opposite the end of Yallah Road, Richard decided it looked a promising spot, thrust his spade into the ground and gave himself livery of seisin, without leave, licence or investigation of title - a free selector before his time. Here, over the next few years, he established a good farm, fathered ten more children, and backslid. He and his wife Sarah had been married in the Baptist chapel at Dymchurch in Kent; but now, no longer a good Baptist (if he ever had been), he embraced horses, rum and Anglicanism. The first parish



**"GOLDENA COTTAGE"**  
The home of the Denniss family at Marshall Mount  
(Illawarra Historical Society collection)

**J. FITZGERALD'S HOUSE AT WEST DAPTO**  
A typical farmhouse of the late nineteenth century  
(Weber collection)





register of St. Luke's, Brownsville, records the christening of five Denniss children en masse in December, 1847, and more kept coming along for several years thereafter. Incidentally, the children's names seemed to have some connection with Richard's fall from grace. Sarah, Adam, Ruth, Reuben, Jacob, Naomi, Rachel and Abraham (probably the products of his Baptist period) were followed by William, Andrew, George, Jeffrey and Alfred, who sounded more like little Episcopalians. As for the horses and the rum, his great-granddaughter related that when Richard had finished his new house, embellished with the first brass doorknobs seen in the district, he celebrated; then, filled with sinful pride and rum, he insisted on bringing his favourite mare Black Bess in to admire the doorknobs. Trying to turn round in the narrow hallway, Bess bent one of the doorknobs, and it remained bent for as long as the house lasted.

Richard built fine stables and outbuildings also - when Miss Lillian Denniss saw them in 1916 an Indian hawker had driven his covered wagon and pair of horses into the barn, and there was a loft above that.

But Richard's pride had a sad fall. The lawful owner of the land turned up before Richard's possessory title had matured, and out he went. The house stood for many years and in its later years was occupied by the Reen family. A fig tree planted by Richard Denniss is all that remains to mark the spot.

Before Richard and Sarah's contributions to the St. Lukes baptismal register had ended, Adam's had begun. Just to help in confusing the issue, his wife was also named Sarah. On 30th March, 1856 the eldest son, Henry William, was baptised.

**Martin and Catherine Moran.** Martin and Catherine Moran came with their six sons and a daughter, from Rossmore, County Galway, to settle in 1840 at Tallawarra Bay (now the site of Tallawarra Power Station), near two swamps famous for wild ducks and, under the name of Moran's Swamps, a favourite resort of shooters until they were filled in when the power station was being built. A grandson, John Moran, later purchased ten acres and an old house on the eastern side of the main road, between the old Public School and Reid's Hotel. There he later built a new house in which his youngest daughter Mrs. Irwin (the source of my information on the family) still resides. Other members of the family settled on the Upper Cordeaux (before the Water Board took over) and at Calderwood.

Martin and Catherine Moran, and four generations of their descendants, are buried in the West Dapto Catholic Cemetery, to which, by her own express wish, Catherine's body was carried on a bier from Tallawarra by her six sons.

**Effects of Cessation of Transportation.** One of the greatest problems the early landowner had to solve was that of getting his land cleared; for when the cedar had been cut out, the timber remaining in the brushes was of little value. While there were convicts to be assigned,

the job could be done; but with the cessation of transportation in 1840 the flow of convicts shrank to a trickle, and soon to nothing, as those remaining died or worked out their time.

Even in the forties free labour was expensive - it cost from £10 to £15 an acre to clear by contract. In the gold-rush days of the fifties it became prohibitive. "Men are getting from 25 to 35 Pounds par year," John Leverett wrote from West Dapto in 1857 to his parents in England, "Single Girls such as get 5 or 6 Pounds par year at home and thinke it good wagers Will get from 20 to 25 Pounds par year and Marred Cuples get from 40 to 50 Pounds par year and thare Rashers if a man goote werke by the week he get 1 Pound or 1 Pound 5 and Rashings 10 Pounds of Beef 10 of flower and 4 of Shager and half Lb. of Tea and it is So with all Except with those that Live with thare Marster and Berd at his table there is no house rent rates or tith to pay here or Wood or Cles to By for the fire all of them are free for this is a free and Plentyful Country".

High wages of course meant high prices for things which could not be produced locally. "Tea and Shogar they say is very deer for tea is 2s and 6 pence par pound and Shogar 7 pence par pound parke and Mutton A Bout 6 pence and Beef from 2 pence to 3 pence par pound and all wareing Aparl are as chape as at home But hats and Beets are very deer Boots are 17s per Pare."

**Clearing Leases.** To cope with the clearing problem most of the larger owners resorted to the clearing-lease system. "In this district", wrote Joseph Phipps Townsend, a visitor to Illawarra in the late 1840's, "is to be found a numerous class of small settlers called 'clearing-lease men'. They take a small piece of uncleared land (each about thirty acres) on condition of having it rent-free for six years, and form on it a kind of shanty, much in the style of a gipsy's tent; being often nothing more than a bark roof placed on the ground. Under this they live whilst they clear and improve their little holding; though ultimately they run up very decent huts. By the time their original tenancy expires, they have generally got on pretty well in the world, and can afford to pay about ten pounds a-year for their now reclaimed land. Most of these men have a dairy cow and a mare, which get their own living under the mountains; and the sale of their butter and their crops, and the money they occasionally earn from the other settlers and labourers, keep the pot boiling. I have seen some of them give six guineas for a dairy cow; which is a large price in a country so abounding with cattle. Butcher's meat is generally very cheap; and I have known rounds of fresh beef to be carted from a boiling-down establishment in this district, and delivered at a distance of fifteen miles at one penny a pound. (This, of course, was before the inflation brought about by the gold rush). 'What' said one of them, 'Do you think I'd consent to be banished down to Holy Dollar (Ulladulla)? What could I do there, I wonder?' A clearing-lease man must have some experience in the colony before he can with prudence commence operations, and he must have capital enough to support himself and family for one year. In

fact, he must lay in supplies as if he were bound on a voyage of discovery, and twelve months were to elapse before he could hope joyfully to exclaim, ‘Land! Ho!!’ I believe that most of the settlers in Illawarra, of whatever grade, are comfortable and happy.” Any comfort was relative only - their conditions as described by Cousins do not sound particularly comfortable to modern ears:

“They had first to improvise some shelter in which to live until the first small part of the brush was felled and burnt off. The felling itself was very tough work. At first, the vines and undergrowth had to be removed sufficiently to secure a proper fall. The use of an axe from daylight to dark by one unused to such work meant blistered hands and hard sore muscles. Their living conditions were very simple, slab or cabbage-tree huts with bark or cabbage-tree roofs, earth floor, no windows, large wooden fireplace stretching the whole width of the room and protected by stones. The fires were of great logs over which hung the pots and camp oven above and suspended from an iron cross bar.

The camp oven was a broad rather shallow pot and in it the women made delightful bread. The light was a home-made candle. The food was porridge, colonial oven bread, beef or pork, generally boiled and mostly corned with poultry and a plentiful supply of game, together with potatoes, pumpkins, turnips, and whatever green vegetables could be grown. The women soon learnt to make hats from the fans of the cabbage palm - hats worn by practically every man and boy in Illawarra.

As soon as a small area was burned off it was planted with wheat, maize, potatoes and turnips. When possible the wheat was sent to a mill, but often the settlers had to be satisfied with meal ground on the farm.”

**John Leverett on Clearing Leases.** John Leverett, in the early days of his clearing-lease, seems to have been content and hopeful. “I have Now Begon the wurd I have taken 30 Akers of Boosh Land to Clare and fence it in, I have got it for 8 years free of Exspence. I have Biled Myself a house and firnished it. I am now Clareing a peace of Land for Whate I Shall Not have A Nuff money to cary all the year but My Marster has promised to Stand My frend so I see no fare But I shall Get on very well after a year or So With the helpe of God and My Marster for this is a good Cuntery all may do well that will”. Three months later he was writing: “Our Spring is now Set in and very warm and dry it is now and it sute me firs rat for I and Another man Are Burning of we hae got 20 Akers of Bush ground to Clare for Corne Indy Corne it is what is Called mays it grow from 8 to 12 feet high and the hed of it the Cob we call it grow as Big as my Arm and from 9 to 15 inches long....We expect to Bee Bissy in Harvest at Christmus When you will Bee Set over the fire and telling Sum Old tale....here thay grow Onley 2 Crops and then thay lay it down for grass we have got A Bout 100 and 50 Akers of grass ground and it is Better than Cultivation for Butter have Been 2 Shillings par pound in Sydney we send Our

Butter to Sydney 3 times a week and Our Milk we give Calfs and pigs and fat them and them we send Sydney....

I am in hopes Wen our year is up Wee Shall have 20 or 25 pounds of Clare Money and I have a Calf that will Bee Warth 2 pounds and we got A set of fowls....

This is a very fine Cuntary and I should like to see you all here”.

**John Leverett on Cabbage-Tree Hats.** He had had something to say, too about the cabbage-tree hats. Asking William (his brother?) who was “Mared and Satled in the Big Sitty,” to send him “A flash Coat,” he promised, “I will Send Him a Cabbage tre hat in return and then He will Bee A very Flash Gent for in Sidney Cabbage tre hats from 15 Shillings to 15 Pounds Ach the Cabbage Three is thought a grate deel of in this Cuntary and in deed it is a vary fine plant for it grow from 40 to 50 feet high and it is not more than 15 or 18 inches through the but of them thay grow as nare like a runaway Cabbage as passable that have neitha lafe nor branch from bottom to the top of them the lafe grow like A lades fan and as thay grow old thay spreed open and at A distances thay look like A sun shade....we get the young lavs and Scalds them and Bleech them and then we Split them as Straws are split for hats at hoom I have made my Self 2 and my Sun 1 and very nise ones thay are we trimm them with a Black riband and let the ends hang down Behind it is 2 inches Wide and we ware White trousers and Blew shirts at our werk and on Sunday wee ware White trousers and A gay Shart wee donet Often ware A coat for the wether is so warm that wee doo not want them nor weskeet for wee werk in our Shurt Sleeves all the winter exsept in wet wether and then we donet werke attall. But milk our Cows night and marning”.

**Adam Denniss.** More cautious than his father, Adam Denniss had taken a clearing lease on the Westons' property (originally part of Colonel Johnston's “Macquarie Gift”) about half way between the spot where Richard had squatted and Marshall Mount House. As late as 1881 he was still covenanting to properly clear and take out all stumps on not less than ten acres per year, though he was also paying a cash rent of £40 per year for his seventy-seven acres, which, if he had duly fulfilled his covenants, would by then have been cleared three times over. Some of the farm buildings erected by Adam Denniss survived until 1968; then, when his grandson Mr. David Denniss retired, the property was sold to an adjoining owner, Mr. Bill Finch, who decided to demolish the old cottage and farm buildings. He gave the Illawarra Historical Society a free hand to salvage materials, and a demolition squad from the Society went to work. In spite of a pronounced list and a generally precarious appearance the old farm buildings - a storeroom, dairy and forge - were far from easy to wreck, and the products of pioneer building methods proved far more solid than they looked.

**A Sample of Pioneer Architecture.** Massive hardwood posts, roughly squared with an adze, had been set upright in the ground at each

corner, and squared hardwood beams nailed across the tops to the front, the rear, and each end. Triangular frameworks of saplings, rising above these beams at each end, supported another sapling which served as a ridgepole, this in turn being joined to the front and back beams by sapling rafters. The external walls consisted of vertical hardwood slabs, set in the ground and nailed at the top to the beams with square hand-forged nails. Horizontal laths split from cabbage-palms were nailed to the inside of the slabs. The interstices were filled, and the inside surfaces plastered, with clayey mud, which was worked to a smooth finish and whitewashed. (One local recipe for the whitewash was a mixture of white wood-ash and skimmed milk).

The roof was of cedar shingles nailed to horizontal battens. The ridge-capping - galvanised iron beaten more or less flat, then bent to make an inverted V - was obviously not original, and we surmised that the first ridge-capping consisted of long sheets of bark bent over the ridge of the roof and overlapping the uppermost shingles. Under the shingle roof of the dairy, timbers had been laid across from the front to the back beams, and a ceiling of whitewashed hessian nailed to their undersides.

The original floor probably consisted of earth and creek-gravel, rammed hard. Later the dairy had been cemented, and the store-room floored with conventional boards on adzed sapling joists. A tree-trunk had been planted upright in the floor of the dairy - Miss Denniss said as a stand for the large flat pan in which, before separators, milk stood until the cream rose to the top and could be skimmed off.

One of the window-frames of this building contained the remains of a remarkable anticipation of the Cooper louvre, carried out in wood instead of glass and metal, which has been ingeniously re-created for the Society's Museum by Mr. E. B. Bradford of Jamberoo. From another old building, also being demolished, on the same property, came another ingenious bush architect's device - forked sticks nailed to the slab walls at intervals to support the guttering. The slabs and shingles salvaged from these buildings were used in the blacksmith's shop erected at the rear of the Museum in Market Street, Wollongong.

## “The Bridge Across the Crick”: A Digression on Roads and Bridges

**The First Wollongong - Dapto Road.** Meanwhile communications were being opened up and the township developing. According to Alexander Stewart, (speaking in 1894) the first road to Dapto started from Brighton Beach, ran diagonally through the present Market Square, across Crown Street, near George Brown's Hotel (in what is now MacCabe Park), then “through the Glebe...and on through the new R. C. Burying ground, till it came out across the Blind Creek, now called Mount St. Thomas. Then it crossed over Spring Hill, through Tate's flats, and came out near Heron Farm, where it crossed Allan's Creek. From there it went on to near the coke works at Unanaderra, where it ran to the right of Charcoal Creek (the present railway being on the right of the old road) through the Berkeley Estate, and across the Charcoal Creek near Unanderra railway station. Then it went at the back of Mr. George Lindsay's store, and joined the new road (afterwards) to the south west of the Farmer's Arms, a slab and bark inn on the slope of the hill going down to Kembla Grange. It then ran through Wyllie's flats till it crossed Mullet Creek by a ford near the present Showground (now Beach Park). From Mullet Creek to Macquarie River the old track and the present Main South Coast Road are practically the same, the duck holes that were there then being there still. The West Dapto Road branched off the old Dapto Road where Kembla Grange station now stands, and ran through the veterans' grants. The present West Dapto Road is practically the same”. (It must, of course, be borne in mind that by “present” Stewart meant “In 1894”).

**A Primitive Footbridge.** At the crossing of Mullet Creek special facilities for pedestrians were provided, as Alexander Harris found in the early 1830's.

“Some of the creeks we had to pass”, he said, “were rather queer-looking places to be crossed by such bridges as alone offered themselves. The Mullet Creek where we passed it must have been nearly five and thirty feet wide and the bridge was one of those slender cabbage trees grown on the Bank and flung by some bushman or black across the creek with his axe, either with a view to using it as a bridge or for the sake of the interior part of the head which is very similar when dressed to cabbage and is a favourite article of food with many. I confess that it was with no slight trepidation that I made my first

attemp to walk betwixt 30 and 40 feet upon a small round surface, the middle of which was curved down nearly to water's edge with its own weight merely, and with the weight of the passenger was actually under water two or three inches and which all the while kept springing and splashing the water every step that was taken. But as my guide, who was used to these feats, as I also soon became, made his way across without expressing any doubt about my nerve, I scarcely had any alternative but to follow him. Again pulling off my boots and stockings, I began to urge myself slowly across sideways, but I quickly found that would never do; I was nearly gone, when the thought struck me to imagine myself walking along the joist of an unboarded house, which I was pretty well used to, and following the thought by the practice I turned face forward and stepped carelessly and firmly along. I found I could do it this way very well, only the spot that was under water in the middle rather balked me. However, it was but a single step and that over I felt myself so bold that I did the remainder with the utmost assurance. The agility and ease with which the blacks went across these cabbage tree bridges is quite astonishing; even the gins, (women) with their pickaninnies on their backs seemed to cross quite at their ease.”

**Major Mitchell's South Coast Road.** When Major Mitchell, the Surveyor-General, in 1834 came to mark out the roads through Illawarra, he preferred a different route: “The road southward leaving the Keera Road about two miles west of Wollongong is continued in nearly a straight line across ‘Charcoal Creek’ (where a good bridge will be required before the road can be of much use) and across a very favourable hollow in the brush hill east of Ryan's land, keeping the same direction until it cuts the present road a short distance from ‘Mullet Creek’, crossing that creek one hundred yards lower than the present ford, (at a place where also a substantial bridge is necessary), it is continued in a perfectly straight direction and across level ground, so as again to fall in with the present road at a mile and a half beyond Mullet Creek; the line is then marked along some rising ground nearly in the same direction as the present road, until a cut of two miles is made through the lands of William Brown (sic), thus avoiding a considerable detour in the present road, and a bad swamp crossing this near its head, where it is very narrow.”

Mitchell's map of Illawarra in 1834 shows both lines of road, and while it is not possible to reconcile Alexander Stewart's description of the old road with the map in every detail, the general picture is clear enough.

Stewart had something to say also of the making of Major Mitchell's road: “In 1835, whilst one gang of Crown prisoners....were making the dam and the streets of Wollongong, another gang was brought down and stationed at what became Geard's corner (the Cross Roads).... There were a good many men in this second gang, and some 10 or 12 soldiers....There was a stockade at Geard's corner, and the prisoners

were locked up in boxes there for the night....This gang had the making of the road from Geard's corner, which then belonged to Colonel Leahy, to Mullet Creek. They only just formed the road. They cut the watertables and threw the dirt into the middle of the road, to raise it there. They also made the bridges, but they were very rough ones, the decking being slabs and rough sleepers. The rails were the only sawn part of them. They did not cut down the hills, nor did they put metal on the roads....When the road had been made from the Cross Roads to Figtree, the stockade was removed to Ryan's paddock at Figtree, and located on the flat opposite the old post office there, between Hickman's Hotel and the creek below".

**The bridging of Mullet Creek.** A few years after Alexander Harris passed that way, the Governor, Sir George Gipps, visited Dapto. It has been said that for his visit a bridge was built over Mullet Creek; but according to a memorial presented to the Government by Dapto residents in 1858, good intentions were frustrated by Sir George himself - "the said Bridge was actually commenced; but on the occasion of the late Sir George Gipps visiting this district whilst the work was in progress, he caused the persons employed on it to be removed to assist in the completion of the Charcoal Bridge, from whence they were removed out of the district altogether".

The memorial continued: "Since that time the public have been compelled to cross the Creek at a crossing-place roughly constructed by laying logs and stones on the bed of the creek which are disturbed or washed away every time the creek rises, and which have to be repaired or replaced by the inhabitants of the immediate vicinity at their own cost.

"That, even in dry weather, great inconvenience is felt...from the steepness of the descent from either bank, and from the very uneven surface of the crossing-place.

"That, in times of heavy rain, the waters of the creek rise suddenly to such a height and run with such velocity as to render it perfectly impossible to cross by any means except in a boat, which can only be used by passengers."

Because of the lack of a bridge over Mullet Creek, the memorial pointed out, the bridge "recently constructed at a large expense over the Macquarie River" would be of little advantage to anyone: The *Illawarra Mercury*, in support claimed that during the floods of the previous winter, "the inhabitants of that large tract of country between the creek and Macquarie River were cut off from Wollongong by the impossibility of crossing the creek for days together"; not even the mails could get through, "this causing incalculable loss and disappointment to the public in general".

Apparently the Government did not act; but after the establishment of the Central Illawarra Council in the following year, things began to move. On 9th October 1860 the *Mercury* informed its readers that the Council had "secured the services of Mr. Weaver, the well-known



architect", who "after a very careful and protracted survey of the Mullet Creek...selected the high banks close to the Dapto mill as the most eligible site. For the last twenty years the river banks at this place have suffered little change, and they are full ten feet higher than any site that could be chosen below the dam. To approach the bridge, at the site proposed, the road will have to diverge to the right through property belonging to the Osborne family, thus Avoiding the low broken ground, and the two ana branches of the river, by which the dam is at present approached."

In August the following year the bridge was triumphantly opened. This time the site was described as being "a short distance to the left of the old crossing-place" - confusing, but perhaps this time the reporter was looking at it from the other side; in any case, the mill was upstream from the ford whose remains are still visible. The bridge was built entirely of local timber, was twenty feet wide, and "it is confidently calculated that it will withstand any flood likely to visit that portion of the district." The occasion was celebrated by "a most sumptuous dinner, prepared by Mons. Lannoy, of the Illawarra Hotel, at the instance of the contractors". (Messrs. Moore and Vaughan), at which numerous toasts, accompanied by the inevitable speeches, were drunk, concluding with "Prosperity to the Municipality, and permanence to the Mullet Creek Bridge."

Apparently those hopes were not fulfilled - photographs dating from the seventies and eighties shows the ford in use again, and still another bridge was in course of construction in 1890.

**Mr. Smith is Bugged Down.** The main South Coast Road remained primitive for many years. In 1859 the *Mercury* reported "a most dangerous slough" at the foot of Evans' Hill. "C. T. Smith Esq., and lady, on the way to Shellharbour in a gig, were placed in great peril at this place...Mr. Smith, seeing a track through the slough, made an attempt to cross it, but had not proceeded far before the horse sank up to its shoulders, and the vehicle became embedded. Both Mr. and Mrs. S. had to get out of the gig and make the best of their way through the mire, and it was only with considerable exertion that the horse extricated the vehicle".

In 1876 the Central Illawarra Council was asking the Colonial Secretary to relieve it of the maintenance of the road, but many years were to pass before the Main Roads Board came to the rescue. In the meantime travellers continued to suffer. According to the *Town and Country Journal* reporter of 1879 the road, after passing along a rough ridge, descended a steep hill called Mount Brown. "The ridge being past, the *facilis descensus* \* on the face of the hill leads the traveller, in wet weather especially, into something far worse - the miserable crossing known under the name of Duck Holes - one which, in flood weather, can be safely attempted only by the ducks".

**Routes to the Tablelands.** The other major road of early days was that which led to Bong Bong Pass. As far back as 1820 Charles Throsby

had written to Macquarie: "I have fully established the practicability of a short communication between the coast, at the District of Illawarra, and the new country, in the County of Camden, by a pass in the mountains, several miles to the southward of the original road behind Bulli, discovered and made by me, where I have succeeded a few days since in Driving a herd of my cattle in the short space of one Day, having been at some expense in cutting bush, and etc., to clear a sufficient road, by the same route and direction I passed in Fbry 1817." According to James Jervis, "this track evidently lay north of the dense brush on the volcanic country about Burrawang and Robertson, and reached the coastal district behind Dapto."

In 1831 Surveyor Jacques described the "Pass" between Wollongong and Bong Bong (near Moss Vale), as being "on a very narrow shelf, on the precipitous side of the Mountain, the acclivity being so very steep as not to be made suitable for Drays without tunneling so that it must be always dangerous even for Horses and Cattle"; but next year the "Sydney Monitor" called it "a well beaten path which might be improved".

**Alley's Line.** The construction of a road from Dapto to Bong Bong was much discussed locally in 1842. At a meeting in September that year George Underwood Alley reported that a bridle road could be made to the top of the mountain for £150; W. P. Faithfull and W. W. Jenkins capped this with an estimate of £1000 to make a good road; and the meeting resolved that "the pass pointed out by Mr. Alley having been examined and found capable of being made into a good dray road, measures be taken for its construction."

The advocates of the scheme followed this meeting up with a dinner at the top of the mountain, when all present were invited to subscribe to a fund for building the road. No casualties were reported; but if it was like most dinners of the time, the special providence that watches over lunatics and drunks must have worked overtime to bring all the diners safely down. In December it was reported that £490 had been subscribed towards the construction of the road; but an official report next year indicated that both estimates of cost put forward at the meeting had been wildly optimistic.

**Surveyor Burke's Report (1843).** In 1843 Surveyor Burke reported to his chief, Sir Thomas Mitchell, that he had surveyed "the line of communication from Dapto to Berrima...marked by Mr. Alley...a Bridle Track is in progress of formation. It commences at Mr. George Brown's Inn at Dapto, and ....joins Mr. H. Osborne's Cattle Track at 10<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> miles from Brown's Inn."

Burke expressed the opinion that Alley's line and Osborne's track were the "only two passes by which a road can be taken over the Illawarra Range in this direction", though he was not over-enthusiastic about either. Alley's line was, he thought, the best "natural road" for a horse track (meaning by "natural road", he explained, one which

required very little artificial making to render it passable, and which could be kept in repair for rough traffic at trifling expense). But the grades of Alley's line were “such as to prevent the transport of goods in drays or even the safe passage of wheeled vehicles, “the greatest being 1 in 2, which is much too steep for use”. (He could say that again, for it is nearly twice as steep as Huntley Hill or the low-gear pinch on Mount Keira); but once over the pass it was “the best that can be found, and has no serious difficulty in the way of a horse-track.”

Osborne's cattle track would have been more promising, if more funds had been available. The ruling gradient would have been no more than 1 in 8, which “would give a tolerable dray road”, but its formation would require much more labour and expense, particularly on the last half-mile to the summit. Burke estimated the cost at £3602.10.0, as against £655.12.0 for a horse track along Alley's line; therefore “the £1000 proposed to be raised by the parties would form only a small portion of the the expense of making the best road, but would be sufficient to make a natural road for a bridle track”.

**Surveyor Shone's Report (1851).** Eight years later Surveyor Shone reported unfavourably on “the line of road from Dapto to Berrima, commonly known as ‘Alley's line’”, saying “I do not consider that this route or any other from Dapto to Berrima, which must traverse a broken line of country, can be made available as a road for traffic from the Southern Country to Illawarra - The mountain ascent is exceedingly difficult and abrupt....I cannot....see the utility of laying out a few hundred pounds on this line of road, when some thousands would be required to render it safe, and practicable even for limited traffic.” Astonishingly, he added that “during the early part of the year 1849 I also made a preliminary survey and examination in the same direction for the proposed Eastern line of Railway towards Goulburn”: for, though part of the Unanderra - Moss Vale line follows Alley's line, considering it as a Sydney - Goulburn (and in the fulness of time a Sydney - Melbourne) route one can only say with Bertie Wooster: “I inspected the imagination. It boggled.”

Some of the statements quoted above, however, are at variance with John Brown's reported remarks in 1897 when a party of Dapto residents, with Mr. Archibald Campbell, M.P., ascended Bong Bong Pass to the “Table Rock”, a short distance south of the summit: “The route was discovered by his late father, Government subsequently granting gangs of men to clear and form it, as far as such was done, and the settlers of the district providing the men with rations....On the completion of the Pass road in 1843 his father gave a luncheon to a considerable number of the inhabitants of Illawarra on the very rock on which they were assembled”.

According to John Brown, “the Pass was intended to be a road by which produce from the southern interior, including wool, would be conveyed down the mountain....and shipped at Wollongong. It was actually used to a very considerable extent as a stock route”. Mr.

James Swan added that "he had taken drays up and down the Pass many times in the distant past, and had seen others do likewise, until within about the last thirty years."

**Supersession of Bong Bong Pass.** In 1860 the Bong Bong Road was said to be in a dangerous state because of the increased traffic over it, and a subscription was opened to repair it. John Brown in 1873 referred to the Bong Bong Road (then apparently under the control of a special Trust) as having "fallen into a most wretched state", but in 1888 he refers to it as "still in use", although "Jack White's Mountain Pass" (so far not identified) was then "impassable".

As late as 1897 efforts were being made to make the Pass trafficable again, the object of the exercise mentioned above being "to bring under the notice of the member for the district the necessity for the Pass they had travelled being improved to such an extent that vehicular traffic could take place over it and with safety". Mr. Campbell "expressed himself deeply impressed with the representations made to him, and promised to do all that might be in his power in the direction indicated". But he proved fair and false; and the making of a respectable road, by contemporary standards, up Macquarie Pass in 1897-98 caused Bong Bong Pass to be finally written off as a main road. (According to David Denniss, Carl Weber, the well-known Wollongong surveyor, had been put on to the job on Macquarie Pass "with a plain hint that the discovery of a practicable route was not really desired. However, he could not conscientiously say a practicable route could not be found and reported in favour and the road was constructed". It is said that Weber marked out his route on the principle of never sacrificing any height once gained, whatever the cost in curvature - a perfectly reasonable method for the horse traffic of his day, whatever later generations of motorists may have thought of him).

**Alpacas on Bong Bong Pass.** Of all the travellers who used the Bong Bong Road, none could have been more exotic than the fourteen alpacas who came that way in 1866. Although the export of alpacas was forbidden by the Peruvian Government, Charles Ledger, an English resident in Peru, managed in 1858 to bring a small flock - "smuggled to New South Wales at great risk and expense" - to Sydney, where they were bought by the New South Wales Government for £15000, and kept successively in the Domain, at Liverpool and at Wingello. But, the alpaca's natural habitat being far higher and even colder than Wingello, acclimatisation proved difficult, and in 1866 the flock was sold to private landowners. Fourteen were purchased by one of the Osbornes, (according to the *Mercury* of 6th July 1866 "Mr. P. Osborne," but according to that of 24th August "H. H. Osborne Esqu.," the latter in view of the later reference to Avondale, being probably correct.) The *Mercury* reported their arrival at Marshall Mount, having come by the Bong Bong Road, and seven weeks later that they

were "now depasturing at Avondale, and apparently doing very well". But, if they had not flourished at Wingello, it was more than optimistic to expect them to do so at Avondale. According to the "Australian Encyclopaedia", the purchasers "found that the alpaca needed more attention than merino sheep, and was less profitable. Gradually the flocks waned, and by 1880 all traces of the importations had gone."

**Marshall Mount Road.** Marshall Mount Road, "formerly a bye-road used by Henry Osborne by Weston's permission, for which Osborne used to write annually" was by 1886 a public road and a bone of contention between Central Illawarra and Shellharbour Councils - the contention being no' to own, but to disown the creek crossing at the municipal boundary, said to be "extremely difficult and dangerous", more than one fatal accident having occurred there.

The road from Marshall Mount to Yallah was an afterthought, a by-product of the building in 1887 of a railway platform (originally called Albion Park) at the South Coast Road level crossing.

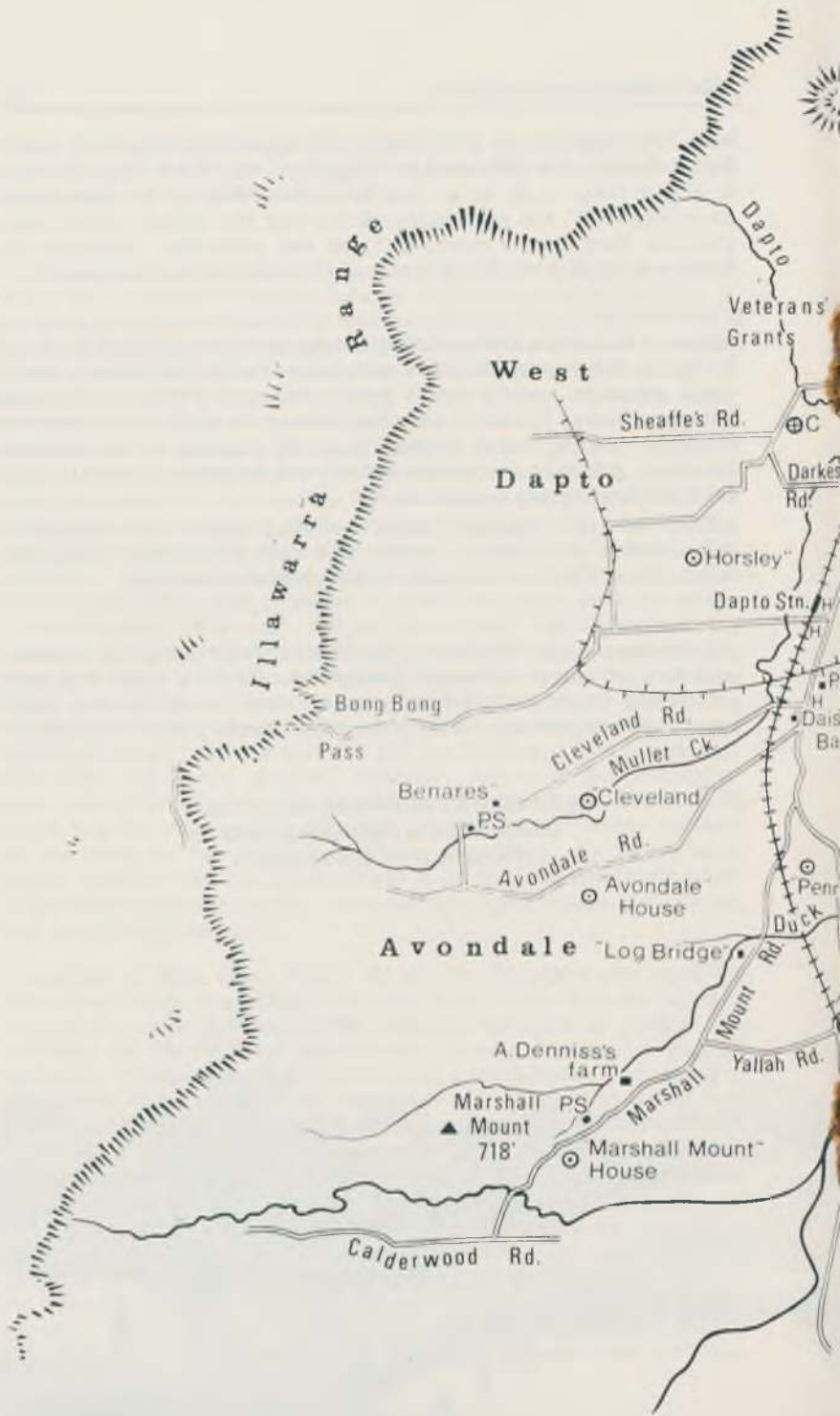
**Kanahooka Road.** A road to Kanahooka Point along the southern boundary of George Brown's (George I's) 300 acre grant had been proclaimed in 1861, but evidently never used. In 1882 a new road, apparently along the line of the present Kanahooka Road, was notified.

**THE FORD AT BROWNSVILLE, c. 1890**

**Brown's Mill in right background**

**(Photo by G. G. Wensemius)**







Mount  
Kembla  
1752'

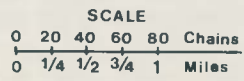


L a k e

I l l a w a r r a

**DAPTO  
AND DISTRICT**

- ==== Roads
- ++++ Illawarra Railway (N.S.W.G.R.)
- Illawarra Harbour & Land Corporation & Smelting Co. of Australia Ltd. Railways
- ⊙ denotes a building listed by the National Trust
- ⊕ Church or site of church
- H Hotel or site of hotel



## “One Unpretentious Pub”: The Beginnings of the Township

“In fact the township, all in all,  
“Is just one unpretentious pub.”

- A. B. Paterson,  
“The Wargeilah Handicap”

**George Brown: the “Ship Inn” and Brown’s Mill.** The original town of Dapto owed its beginning, at the place now known as Brownsville, to that George Brown (George I) previously mentioned among the early grantees. A native of the Kingdom of Fife, he arrived in New South Wales in 1822 and settled at Liverpool, where he had an inn. The 1828 census gives his address as Illawarra, where he had a man employed making salt on the beach near the present Wollongong. He owned 460 cattle and 626 sheep. But before long he was back behind the bar. In 1831 he opened the Ship Inn at Wollongong, and three years later transferred the licence to a house of the same name at Mullet Creek. In 1839 he built a windmill, where according to tradition he would, if the wind was favourable, grind your grain while you waited, taking a percentage as his fee. Milling must have been a profitable sideline; before long he had opened a steam flour-mill, which was the scene of a curious celebration during the 1844 drought, when he invited the gentlemen of Illawarra “to witness the experiment of steaming down a bullock in his large and excellent steam mill....309 lbs. of tallow was obtained. After the boiling-down the company was entertained at the hotel....Dr. Alex Osborne being chairman with C. T. Smith Esq., J. P. at the foot of the table.” Speeches and champagne followed till 4 p.m. - no bullock could ever before or since have had such a wake.

In yet another role, Brown in 1841 began a thrice-weekly coach service between Dapto and Wollongong. The trip took an hour, and cost four shillings.

George Brown died on 5th August, 1850, aged 56. He is buried in St. Luke’s churchyard (for which he gave the land) and is commemorated by the lych-gate of the church. He left two sons, John (of whom more later) who inherited the mill and the unofficial mayoralty of Dapto, and George William who carried on the inn.

By this time a town had begun to develop around the inn and mill. The original inn building was burnt down after a few years and a new building, afterwards known as the Lake Illawarra or Illawarra Hotel, took its place.

There was also a store kept by a certain Edward Hammond



Hargraves, afterwards famous as the discoverer of gold (or at any rate the man who got the reward for the discovery of gold) in Australia.

**Church of England.** In 1841 it was reported that an Anglican Church would be erected "after three years of manoeuvring", George Brown having offered two acres of land for the purpose. The first trustees were Gerard Gerard, Sheaffe and Arthur Marshall, a Dapto store-keeper; Henry Osborne and William Jenkins were added to the list in 1843, in which year it was reported that the foundations had been laid. The Church was so far finished in February 1845 that services could be performed and it was licensed by the Bishop of Australia. J. P. Townsend wrote four years later, "A neat church has been erected at 'Dunlop Vale' but is, as some think disfigured by a cross, which is stuck over the entrance, and certainly looks rather forlorn. Some of the settlers are as much as scandalised by its presence as if it were a crucifix, and thinking it savours of popery, refuse to subscribe." (Dunlop Vale was Kembla Grange, but as no other reference to any church there has been found Townsend must have been referring to the church just across Mullet Creek).

**The First Register of St. Luke's.** The first register of St. Luke's, recording baptisms to 1865, marriages to 1856 and burials to 1874, is still in existence. Dapto was until 1852 (when it became a separate parish under the Rev. William West Simpson) part of the parish of Wollongong, whose rector, the Rev. Matthew Devenish Meares, was no dealer in euphemisms. In his book there were no de facto relationships or ex-nuptial children; as the occasion required he bluntly noted in the register "Living in adultery" or "Fornication"; or, in the case of belated relics of "the System": "Holding ticket of leave" or "Bond, per 'Alice,' 1816.

Of the 28 bridal couples listed, 12 bridegrooms and 14 brides were illiterate. Of the 212 burials, 81 were of children under ten - 32 of them less than a year old.

The occupations of just on 400 of those concerned - the father, the bridegroom or the deceased - are given. By far the commonest, as might be expected, were those of farmer, settler, clearing lessee, etc. The higher and lower rural strata - gentleman, gentleman settler, landed proprietor, etc. and farm servant, labourer, etc. brought the total of agricultural occupations to 338 - well over eighty percent of the whole. The only other occupation to reach double figures was that of surgeon or medical practitioner - both Dr. George Underwood Alley and Dr. John Gerard contributed notably to the tally of baptisms. Among other occupations listed were schoolmaster, blacksmith, wheelwright, carpenter, mason, shoemaker, sawyer, waterman, pilot, fisherman, licensed victualler, and even "gold seeker" and "gold

digger" - though there is no record of anyone seriously seeking, let alone finding, gold in Illawarra.

Many well-known Dapto names keep recurring in the register - Osbornes, Marshalls, MacCabes, Swans, Dennisses, Thompsons, Evanses, Westons, Duleys, Lindsays, over and over again. Among the more unusual entries are those of the baptisms of "Mary Hopkins an aboriginal girl of the Illawarra tribe aged about 15 years, four years in the service of Captain Hopkins of Dapto" (12th November 1854); of "John Chin Chi a Chinese in the service of Henry Osborne Esq. of Marshall Mount aged about 28 years" (3rd September 1854) and of "John Chi a native of Amoy in China aged about 28 years" (27 May 1860); of the wedding of "John Chin Chi of this parish Bachelor to Lena Leslie of this parish Spinster" (21st March 1854); and the burial of "Henry Frahlig called Felix...a German Musician in Ashton's Equestrian Circus", who died, aged only 21, on 9th July 1856.

**Roman Catholic Church and School.** While the Anglicans had been manoeuvring, they had been outflanked. Father Rigney, the pioneer priest at Wollongong, had established a Roman Catholic school with 25 pupils, and payment of J. Hayes as its teacher was authorised in December 1839. The school building is believed to have served also as a chapel. In later years a church and convent were built on the church property adjoining the cemetery at West Dapto.

**Presbyterian School and Church.** The Presbyterians also had their school. When their "neatly-built brick school room" was opened in 1851, the cost amounting to £86.6s.2d had been met by the moneys collected, though a small sum was still due for the woodwork.

It would seem, however, that Presbyterian services had been held for at least ten years before 1851, since Dapto is listed among the preaching centres served by the Rev. John Tait, the first settled minister in Wollongong (1837-41), whose charge extended as far as Shoalhaven in one direction and "probably Appin" in the other. Dapto appears to have remained part of the Wollongong charge till 1888, and Presbyterian services were held fairly regularly; but not regularly enough for George McPhail, who, when there was no service in Dapto, used to walk into Wollongong and back rather than forgo his Sabbath enjoyment.

**Methodist Church** The history of the Methodist Church is particularly well documented, thanks to the labours of the late Mr. A. A. Armstrong. It owed its beginning to "a devout layman" named John

Graham. (The bearer of that illustrious name seems as out of place in that fold as Angus Alexander Armstrong himself.) This strayed sheep arrived from Northern Ireland in 1844 to settle with his wife and family on the Marshall Mount Estate. There, with other Methodists, he established regular services in a building made available by Henry Osborne, who later presented the allotment on which the first Marshall Mount Wesleyan Chapel was built and opened on 5th December, 1856. It was burnt down in 1879, and when the church was re-erected it was on another site. The original site is now occupied by the school residence.

Before this occurred John Graham had moved to Avondale and initiated Methodist work in Dapto itself, where Henry Osborne again provided a site for church, on a farm then occupied by George Somerville, on the north side of Mullet Creek, nearly opposite Brown's mill. The church was opened in November 1848 by the Rev. W. H. Hayes, General Superintendent of the Wesleyan Church in the colonies.

Within a few years erosion was threatening the building, and in 1861 a safer site was presented by Councillor (John) Brown, a quarter of an acre "fronting the road near the crown of the hill, a little to the north-west (sic - qu. south-west?) of the Episcopalian church." The building, being constructed of weatherboard, was removed from the old site to the new. "It was reopened with two sermons and a tea-meeting," attended by over 500 people, followed by a public meeting, at which seven "appropriate addresses" were delivered, plus three votes of thanks. "An efficient choir, accompanied by a harmonium", gave "several chants, and other pieces of music...., between the speeches, which had a very pleasing effect."; all inspired by, and endured on, nothing more than tea.

**Other Schools.** In addition to the church schools, there was a short-lived Government school for a few months in 1852, and in the sixties ladies named Armitage conducted a private school at West Dapto, on the south side of Dapto Creek.

**Literary and Mutual Instruction Society.** Nor were intellectual interests neglected. A *Mercury* of 1856 reports a meeting of the Dapto Literary and Mutual Instruction Society to debate the question: "Was Cromwell Guiltless of His Country's Blood?" "The speakers in favour of Cromwell were 5 to 1," but even in that heyday of Carlyle and Macaulay, there was in Dapto one of the honest party who was not to be overawed by the weight of numbers or authority. "The cause of Charles was well advocated by Mr. William Wilson", and the silent majority of Dapto, its heart in the right place, resolved "that Cromwell was guilty of the blood of Charles the I."

**The First Dapto Show.** 1857 was memorable in Dapto's history as the year of the Dapto Agricultural Society's first show. The formation of a separate society caused some heartburnings in the Illawarra Agricult-

ural Society, especially when the new body fixed their show date ahead of Wollongong's. "It became a question", said C. T. Smith, the President of the Illawarra Society, "whether an amalgamation should not be sought for." "Mr. Smith said, if the interests of the agriculturists of the district would be promoted by such a course, he would not stand in the way but would forego his feelings in the matter; for the formation of the Dapto Society did appear to him, at the first blush, in the character of an opposition; but he was willing to believe better motives influenced the originators of it. The general feeling of the gentlemen present was, that the objects sought by societies of this nature would be best attained by having but one Society for the whole of the district; but it would be a very unseemly proceeding for the present society of the district, in this the thirteenth year of its existence, to give way to one of so recent formation."

So the upstart Dapto Society went its separate way and on 4th February 1857 presumptuously anticipated the Illawarra Society's show. The show "took place at Brown's Dapto", where "Mr. J. Brown gave up a large portion of his mill to the exhibition and also, most gallantly, afforded the ladies a couple of rooms to retire in". Arrangements had been somewhat rushed, "the society having been organised but a few weeks", and the judges were appointed only on the morning of the show. "The great quantity of articles exhibited, and the large body of persons who came to look at them, rendered the space devoted to the show of poultry, grain, fruit and flowers quite inadequate"; worse still, the committee had neglected "to station persons to prevent the fruit being taken away....In a short time almost all the fruit was eaten up....How can anyone judge of the productions of the district, when the best articles have been carried off or eaten?"

The Mercury reporter spoke highly of the exhibits of grain ("wheat, malting barley, oats and maize), and of "horned cattle", which, strange to say, included "horse<sup>s</sup> 4, colts 3, mares 9, fillies 2" (unicorns?) and "boars 4, sows 6." He was less enthusiastic about the butter ("The season of the year is not well chosen for a good display....There were eleven large kegs of salt, and a much larger number of dishes of fresh butter....the butter would look more attractive to the eye if it were made up into pounds for exhibition." For the fruit (except for "some apples very large and good, but not ripe, and four or five peaches the sight of which would have made an alderman's teeth water") and the flowers he had little good to say. "The show of vegetables was not large, but good"; this section included honey and cheese - "she's a rum 'un is Natur", especially at Dapto in 1857. The more unusual exhibits included "a small bundle of Sorghaum Saccharatum or Chinese sugar plant" - evidently so much of a novelty that the reporter had to explain its nature at some length - and two bottles, one containing a cochineal insect and the other a sample of dye made from the insects. Both these novelties were exhibited by a Mr. Malbon, who had obtained his sorghum seed from the Governor, Sir William Denison.

Five days earlier a ploughing match, also organised by the Agricultural Society, had been held in Mr. Armstrong's paddock at Kembla Grange. “There were no entrances for the ploughing with horse teams, which may be accounted for by the fact that that mode of ploughing is but seldom adopted by our farmers. For the ploughing with bullocks, however, there were five entrances, comprising all those reputed as the best ploughmen in the district.”

Each competitor was required to plough “2 lands 12 feet wide and 35 roods long; the furrows to be 5 inches deep and 9 in width. The ploughing commenced at about 12 o'clock, and continued till near six.” First prize (£5) went to Stephen Lynch, and second (£3) to Adam Denniss; whereupon “most of the parties assembled adjourned to the Illawarra Hotel,” where George Brown and Evan Evans shot off a pigeon match for £10 a side. Brown won and afterwards entertained “several gentlemen present....in such a manner as only he can do such things.”

Mr. Brown was called on to exercise his talents for entertainment on a grander scale at the Agricultural Society's dinner, when “about forty gentlemen took their seats at the table.....The room was very appropriately and tastefully decorated with festoons of flowers and ever-greens fixed against the walls. On the table, were many beautiful bouquets, surpassing by far those exhibited at the show....Everything was there that could be obtained to tempt and gratify the palate, it was prepared and put on the table in the most approved and finished manner, and of all there was a profusion. Under the direction of the host, the table was attended excellently....Even after thus fully depicting the materials of the feast and its concomitants, need we say, that those invited to partake of it did so with indescribable vigour, determination and relish. Course after course was placed upon the board, attacked, and demolished, with the greatest possible celerity.”

Notwithstanding that celerity, the proceedings lasted from 6 p.m. till the early hours of the morning, possibly because one of the concomitants of the feast was an orgy of oratory. Sixteen toasts were proposed, most of them seconded, “drank (sic) with all the honours” (a band playing more or less appropriate tunes) and all responded to, in some cases more than once. Even when “The Army and Navy” found no representative of either service present to respond, the President flung himself into the breach and responded, on the strength of having a brother in each service, and a grandfather who had been one of the casualties of that somewhat less than glorious expedition (not so described by Mr. Irving) to Holland which immortalised “The Grand Old Duke of York.”

More importantly, Mr. Irving attributed the formation of the Dapto Society to the failure of the Illawarra Society to honour an understanding that its show should be held at different centres in rotation; instead, it had been constantly held in Wollongong “to the neglect and detriment of Dapto and Kiama....However, so prosperous had been the Dapto Society, that should a union between it and the Illawarra Society

hereafter be deemed advisable, it would be in the possession, not only of beauty and strength, but also of a rich dowry."

(A century later, when the author was for a time Secretary of the Wollongong Show Society, the union was still being talked of, was generally deemed advisable - and has still not eventuated).

**Municipality of Central Illawarra.** The seal was set on Dapto's establishment as a township when the Municipality of Central Illawarra was incorporated - according to John Brown, against the wishes of the large landowners, who "as a whole, were against municipal government, objecting to the taxes." In the first election, on 16th August 1859, John Brown, Evan Robert Evans and Henry Hill Osborne were elected for Ward III - Brown serving as an alderman, except for a break of one year, for over half a century. The new Council established its headquarters at Dapto.



**GEORGE LINDSAY (left)  
and JOHN BROWN (right)  
at the Dapto Jubilee  
Show, 1907  
(City of Wollongong  
Public Library collection)**

## Cow: The Change to Dairying

"Sell your 'orses, sell your 'arrers, and' your reapers, an' your plough;  
If you want your land to pay you, sacrifice your life to Cow."

C. J. Denniss,  
"Cow".

**The End of Wheat Growing in Dapto.** Even before the Dapto Agricultural Society held its ploughing-match the writing was on the wall for Dapto as a wheat-growing area. In December 1856 the *Mercury* had reported not only that "a considerable quantity of forward wheat in the vicinity of Marshall Mount and Terry's Meadows" had been destroyed by a hailstorm, but, more ominously, "rust has destroyed a considerable quantity in some localities."

By 1865 it was being reported that "ordinary wheat" at Marshall Mount was "so infected as to be not worth reaping", although an acre of "giant wheat" grown by Mr. James Pearson was free from rust. But something must have gone wrong with the giant wheat too; in the next few years one farmer after another went over to dairying, and wheatgrowing in Dapto was finished.

Adam Denniss, "reputed as one of the best ploughmen in the district", was one of the last to surrender. Finally, after crop after crop had been ruined by rust, one of his daughters, while on active service in the field, threw down her reaping-hook and declared "I'll reap no more!" - irresistibly recalling the Tommy who, when ordered to fall in, threw down his musket and said, "I'll soldier no more, you may do what you please!" All he achieved was immortality in the *Manual of Military Law* ("Specimen Charges: Disobeying, in such a manner as to show a wilful defiance of authority, a lawful command given personally by his superior officer in the execution of his office"); but Miss Denniss apparently convinced the old man that Marshall Mount was finished as wheat country. Like the rest, they went over to dairying; but they continued to grow fruit, peas and pumpkins as a sideline.

With the general change to dairying, the flour-mill fell on evil days. John Brown's letter-book for 1873 shows the mill still operating intermittently, apparently mainly grinding maize; but it contains also a letter to T. H. Mort offering the mill for experiments in refrigerating milk, another to one J. L. Melly, offering to let it for soap boiling, and

sundry others revealing Brown's anxiety to get the white elephant off his hands.

**Brown's Mill as a Cheese Factory.** A few years later the mill got a fresh start as a cheese factory. According to George Lindsay, "in 1878 \* 13 my uncle James Wilson and his brother came over from Victoria and opened a cheese factory at Brownsville. The milk supply from Kembla Park (his father's property) was taken there for cheese making at first by bullocks and dray afterwards by lorry and two horses.... Butter at that time was only 6d. lb. and they bought milk at 3½d. per gallon. For some time afterwards butter rose in price to one shilling per pound. The farmers failed to supply milk when butter advanced and the factory was closed. My uncle and his brother then returned to Victoria. The writer took charge of the Cheese until they were all sold....

"My father purchased the cheese plant at Brownsville and we brought it to Horsley and started making cheese and butter alternatively with success, obtaining prizes for both at local shows and a first prize for cheese at the Royal Show in Sydney."

**Dairying in the Seventies.** Judge McFarland, in his "Illawarra and Manaro" gave a spirited description of dairy farming as practised in the seventies. After severely criticising the slovenly and wasteful standards of farming in Illawarra generally he said, "The neatness of Russell Vale and the true farming of Kembla Grange are examples that have not been generally followed. About Dapto and Avondale... there prevails a better state of things; such of the land as has been cultivated appears to have been properly cared for and managed; the fences are good, the pasturage is excellent and the homesteads trim and orderly. But there, as elsewhere throughout the entire district, the cultivated land bears a very small proportion to the pastoral. Heaven has given the grass and there is little occasion for man's labour - Butter, Butter! is the one thing needful. At half a crown or two shillings a pound it was very remunerative, and it must still suffice for Illawarra's wants when the price is 6d. or 3d., especially as the women and children can make it and the farmer is only expected to drive in the cows morning and evening; jog to the seaport on the old mare, once a week or fortnight, and drive before him a pack-horse laden with a keg or two of the precious material. In fact, as the pig is to the Irishman, so is butter to the Illawarra men, and the long frieze-looking coats that some of them wear are the connecting link.

"These are the general class of dairy farmers; and the farms of many of them are kept as slovenly and unproductive as well can be - wile some of their dairies are far from cleanly. But there are others of a different class, men who work early and late, if not with their hands at least with their heads, and have true-hearted assistance from their wives and children - many intent upon improving the quality of the grass and the breed of the cattle, keeping all things neat and orderly, raising butter in large quantities, sending it to the wharf in dray loads,



and exporting it to Melbourne and England occasionally as well as Sydney - though the ventures to the mother country have not been remunerative heretofore, owing to the carelessness of shipping agents and the dishonesty of the knavish traders, who have forwarded to London worthless compounds as Australian butter and thus damaged the sale of the genuine article. The number of cows milked by the dairy farmers varies of course according to the size of the farms and the season of the year, say from 5 and 6 up to 70 or 80; generally the cows are milked every morning and evening but some dairymen, lazy ones usually, only milk in the morning. Milking with its accompanying labours begins or ought to begin with daylight and at four or five o'clock in the afternoon and when the establishment is on a large scale may last for three or four hours. The driving of the cows from the paddocks into the yards, the bailing, the milking, and the turning of them loose again, the carrying of the pails to the dairy and the collecting of their contents into butts that are borne to it on a tram - all this occupies time and is a source of some interest. Nor are the cows unprotected; the old bull attending in solemn pride to watch over the safety of his herd; and the calves clustering in the adjoining yard; while the pigs are gathering about to await what the dairy may provide for them. Men, women and children are employed in milking and an expert hand will milk nine cows in an hour. A dairy with upwards perhaps of 120 or 130 pans of milk ranged in order and raised tier upon tier is a sight worth seeing and not by any means unusual in Illawarra.

"On the smaller farms churning is done by manual labour, sometimes in a long round old-fashioned churn but more frequently in a box churn, and in the larger establishments horse power is used." This was done by putting a horse in a treadmill, according to Cousins, who added some further details: "Though the dairies were generally well kept the milking yards left much to be desired. The milk sheds were generally badly paved, either with split slabs or large flat stones and such a thing as lime wash was generally unknown, while the yards themselves were deep quagmires in wet weather and for some time after. Every farmer kept pigs and the pigsties too were badly paved either with slabs or with cobble stones. There was no health control over dairying, everyone being a law to himself.

The butter was sent to Sydney in kegs, which held from about 50 to about 90 lb, and were made locally by coopers in every small dairying centre. The kegs were used again and again until they fell to bits. The returned empties were collected by the owners at the wharves, each identifying his own kegs by the brand on them. The farmers from Dapto, Avondale and Marshall Mount and the vicinity sent to Wollongong, which had a steam service twice or three times a week from the early forties; but the service depended upon the weather, and the farmers sometimes had to wait a fortnight to get their butter, calves, pigs and poultry away. Up to the eighties no steamer trading to Illawarra had more than one deck apart from the hold. So a good deal of the butter was stowed on the deck amidships, with pigs and calves in pens forward and passengers amidships and aft.

Those farmers who could afford them had carts in which they took to town not only butter but also pigs, calves and members of the family going in for the weekly shopping. Some used pack-horses, balancing their keg of butter by putting a bag of earth or stones on the other side of the pack saddle (or, it is said, sometimes a keg of moonshine). Some used bullock drays. In the early days some dairymen carried the butter on their backs from farm to wharf.

The ports "were crowded on market days with a heterogeneous throng of vehicles horses and packhorses racing to the wharf to deliver their goods and collect their empties". At Wollongong and Kiama "on such days there would be an influx of 500 or more country folk".

**Improvement of Breeding of Dairy Cattle.** With the general switch to dairying went the improvement of dairy cattle, and in particular the development of the Australian Illawarra Shorthorn breed. This somewhat controversial subject, on which the author is totally unqualified to enter, is discussed at length in McCaffrey's "History of Illawarra" and Cousins' "The Garden of New South Wales". Among those who contributed much to this improvement were the Evanses of "Penrose", who bred "Robin Hood", a notable sire....and a constant winner at the Kiama Show and also the Sydney Show", and the legendary bull "Major" - the only officer for whom McCaffrey ever had a good word; the Browns, who near the end of our period (1902) established at "Wollingurry" a noted Jersey stud; and the Lindsays at "Horsely". In 1878 John Lindsay bought for £100 (which "many Illawarra farmers considered as foolish extravagance") and brought from Victoria "a fine Ayrshire bull, 'The Earl of Beaconsfield' " - named after the British Prime Minister of the Day, better known as Benjamin Disraeli. (If any innuendo was intended, Dizzy would probably not have resented it - he took himself less seriously than most Victorian public men). One of the Earl's daughters was "Honeycomb, a great show cow....(and) a super cow in production", of whom George Grey of Greyleigh said, "It was Honeycomb's performance that became fixed in the minds of dairymen as the type of cow to aim at breeding for their herds." From such aristocrats the improved qualities worked down through the district herds, on the smaller farms as well as the larger.

In 1887, the year the railway opened, a butter factory was established - Brown's old mill transformed yet again - and the Country Milk Company sent down two separators - massive contraptions worked by horse power, too massive for anywhere but factories and the very largest properties. Three years later the local farmers gathered at Reids Hotel to hear representatives of the Fresh Food and Ice Company expound plans for a different system - a milk depot adjoining Dapto station where the cream would be separated and sent to be made into butter in Sydney. If the farmers stuck hard and fast to the company, said its spokesman, it would promise not to reduce the price of milk below fivepence a gallon (Cheers).

By October next year the *Mercury* reported that "the rapidly increasing quantity of milk received daily (at the depot) has rendered necessary the fixing up of additional machinery. The cream is sent to Sydney daily".

By the beginning of 1892 there were two up milk trains daily, but their running was far from satisfying the embattled farmers who met at Reid's Hotel to complain about the railways' unpunctuality throughout the summer months, and particularly over the holidays. On Christmas Day nearly 3000 gallons of milk had gone sour through delays along the line. It was bad enough that the railway authorities "considered the pleasure of a few passengers in preference to the milk trains" - the irate speakers would have joined Rachel Henning in deploring the railway's bringing down "on holidays and so forth, all the rag-tag and bobtail of Sydney to invade our beautiful hills and valleys". It was worse when milk trains were held up for ballast trains. But, worst of all, a Milk Company representative said that his company "received their milk from the southern line fairly regular". We were always "the Cinderella line of the State".

**Breaking-up of Large Estates.** Landlordism in the Dapto district had never been as overpowering as in the vast Berry dominion further south:

"I went to Illawarra, where my brother's got a farm;  
He has to ask his landlord's leave before he lifts his arm;  
The landlord owns the countryside - man, woman, dog and cat;  
They haven't the cheek to dare to speak without they touch their hat".

But such as it was, it was on the way out. In June 1890 Hamilton Osborne sold off the remaining 3300 acres of "Marshall Mount", in twenty-two lots of from 86 to 290 acres, at prices varying from £4 15s 0d to £20 10s 0d per acre. Among the purchasers were William Pearson, John Pearson, Henry Timbs, G. Timbs, and James Dawes. While, according to a local journalist, "it might have caused a pang of regret to some at seeing one of the earliest homesteads in the Illawarra district broken up and parcelled out to a score of purchasers, the decimation of the tenure cannot bear other than highly beneficial results to the district at large". (Actually what was being broken up and parcelled out was the mere rump of what Marshall Mount had been in its great days).

The stars in their courses fought against Henry Hill Osborne's executors when they put up the "Avondale" farms for sale in the depression year of 1893. The suspension of payments by the E. S. & A. Chartered Bank, announced the previous day, "affected the sale almost as a very severe earthquake would affect a city on the surface about the disturbance....Most of the people in the Albion Park and Capto (sic) districts....dealt with the bank, and, like the bank, were temporarily suspended and placed in a position of such uncertainty that all were

practically paralysed." A thunderstorm and a downpour whose drumming on the iron roof of the hall frequently drowned the voice of the auctioneer were the last straws.

Several lots were passed in; and though most were sold at an average price of £14 per acre, this was only done by allowing extended terms and accepting E. S. & A. cheques for the deposits - the contracts to be cancelled if the cheques were not met by the following July. Purchasers included Thomas Armstrong, C. Heininger, George Thomas, James Dawes and E. R. Evans. Feelings ran high; several of the purchasers were loudly cheered, particularly when a tenant bought his holding; and when a tenant was outbid, "many boo-hooed at the fall of the hammer". The harassed auctioneer was reported as saying that "there never was a sale put through in the district under more adverse circumstances...those who had purchased knew they had bought their properties dashed cheap" (probably a censored version of his actual remarks).

"Lakelands" and Daisy Bank" as will appear later, met a different fate, but they too were finished as large estates. The original Macquarie Gift grant, at this time owned by the Weston family, was not sold off till about 1920, but it was an exception. By the end of the century owner-occupation was the rule in the district.

The cow-cookies were not exactly the aristocracy of rural Australia. In Banjo Paterson's story "White-when-he's-wanted" the old Scots station-manager could think of no more annihilating retort to the flash boundary-rider than, "Ye're a cattleman - so ye say - dommed if ah believe it. Ah believe ye-re a dairrry-farrmin' body frae Illawarra. Ye ken neither horrrse nor cattle".

It was in some ways a hard life, but probably no harder, and less precarious, than most farmers' lives then. The worst thing about it was monotony. Quite a number did moderately well, and could boast with C.J. Dennis's cocky:

"Cow, cow -  
I'm a capitalist now,  
Though I once was poor an' lonely an' a waster, I'll allow;  
Now I've 'ands that I can 'ector  
I'm an Upper 'Ouse elector  
An' the sanitary inspector is an interferin' cow!"

(Though the interfering sanitary inspector was a relatively late arrival on the scene).

The hands of the cocky hectored had a harder life still. Mr. David Denniss preserved in his collection a newspaper cutting (unfortunately undated) which purported to set out what an Illawarra farmhand used to do for six bob a week and keep. (But the editor said the writer "surely exaggerates somewhat", and no doubt it should be taken with a fair-sized pinch of salt):

"He 'turns out' at 5 a.m., makes fire, gropes around gullies after

cows, which are yarded at six. Then milks for two hours, and has hardly sat down to breakfast before he is hurried away to separate the milk, Separates, feeds pigs and poddies, catches and harnesses moke, and away with milk to catch train. Back with 'empties' at 11, washes cans, and off to dig spuds, after which yokes up bullocks, and fetches load or two of wood from ranges. After dinner, cuts couple of waggon loads of greenstuff, and distributes it about paddocks for cows: ploughs a bit, and rides two miles to P. O. Then again after cows, which are 'in' at five. Sweeps milking-shed, milks till 7, and separates till 8. Then cleans separator - an hour's graft; and feeds poddies and pigs once more. Then supper and after helps make tallow-candles until 10.30 and attends 'family prayers' till 11. Then to bunk, from which he is called in his shirt, on an average three times nightly to 'sool' dog on bull in sorghum-crop, or chase native-cats from hen-roost. 'Between times' he is expected to 'set' hens, and run down bandicoots and hares for dogs' feed. What sort of boss should he make?"

Some of the farmers exploited their own children pretty ruthlessly - "Put yer wife an' fam'ly in it Work 'em every wakin' minute."

Old time teachers often used to tell of children falling asleep in class because they had done a day's work before coming to school. The size of cow-cookies' families before the invention of milking machines was proverbial. A farmer who had failed to provide a sufficient labour force by his own exertions might obtain it by taking "State Boys", from the Child Welfare authorities, and sometimes might treat them pretty badly - something so notorious that even a new chum like Martin Smith, the perambulating Pommie who recorded in his diary his impressions of Illawarra over the New Year holiday of 1893, had heard of it. Speaking of Albion Park at a slightly later period, Mr. Weston said "Possibly as the sole opportunity of breaking away from an uninviting future, it is significant that more State Boys than farmer's sons enlisted from the district in World War I".

After a few years in an Illawarra coveyard, the mud of Passchendaele held no terrors.

Still, it would be a mistake to paint too gloomy a picture. As Mr. Weston's reminiscences of Albion Park + demonstrate, cow-cookies, and cow-cocky communities, managed to get a fair amount of enjoyment out of life. If their pleasures were unsophisticated, they could not have cared less. And, of course, the activities and organisations in the township depended on the farmers and their families as much as, or more than, on the townspeople.



**BROWNSVILLE HOUSE**

Home of John Brown, South Coast Road (now Prince Edward Drive),  
Brownsville. Demolished c 1963  
(City of Wollongong Public Library collection)

**ST. LUKE'S (OSBORNE MEMORIAL) CHURCH, BROWNSVILLE**

The first church building (1845) is on the left. The wall and lych-gate  
are a memorial to George Brown (George I)  
(City of Wollongong Public Library collection)



## "The Most Straggling Village in Illawarra": The Township from 1860 to 1887

Throughout this period Dapto remained by later, if not by contemporary, standards isolated from the outside world; John Brown in 1873 advised a visitor: "I think your best plan would be to come over land - you would take the train to Campbelltown on any day except Sunday, thence immediately by the mail coach to Wollongong, thence to Brown's arriving at the Illawarra Hotel...about half past 4 o'clock in the morning." The alternative was the twice-weekly steamer to Wollongong.

The township was still scattered along the highway for a couple of miles. A "Town and Country Journal" correspondent's description in 1879 has often been quoted: "Dapto is the most straggling village in Illawarra. The traveller scarcely knows when he enters it; he is never sure when he is in it, and he is equally uncertain when he leaves it. The few inhabitants must have had a strong propensity for dispersion and each one has succeeded in getting to a respectable distance from his neighbour."

John Brown - not, of course, a completely unbiased witness - had written in 1873: "Brown's is situated about two miles nearer Wollongong than the Dapto Post Office, it is all called Dapto; in fact Brown's is the village of Dapto, there is no township," but according to the T.C.J. correspondent, although "the hotel and two or three adjacent houses have perhaps the best claim to be considered the nucleus of the place," there was "another cluster of dwellings of not much less importance lying a long way farther south".

But in the seventies "Brown's" still had the main buildings. According to John Brown, in 1873 there were on the allotments adjoining the store "the Illawarra Hotel, the Central Illawarra Council Chambers, a butcher's shop and a smithy, Church of England and Wesleyan Chapel and other buildings and police station." The store buildings, offered for lease at ten shillings per week, comprised "the shop about 18x15 and three other rooms, also an outbuilding containing a sitting and bed rooms." There was no water on the premises, but Brown assured a prospective tenant that "the creek is about 100 yards distant where there is enough water to supply a city." The business of the store was "partly done in farm produce such as poultry, eggs, butter, hides, etc. - partly by cash and partly by credit accounts of three months." The storekeeper "needed to keep a horse and spring cart to take the produce to the steamer at Wollongong twice a week

and to cart out goods." The last storekeeper, Brown thought, "judging from appearance....must have netted at least £300 per annum during the time he was in business here" - not at all a bad income in the 1870's.

**George Osborne's Encounter with the Missing Link.** The Illawarra (or Lake Illawarra) Hotel had then been for some years conducted by one George Osborne - no relation, it is understood, to the Osbornes of Marshall Mount and Daisy Bank. According to local tradition, the Illawarra supplied not only orthodox tipples, but also moonshine of the highest quality and potency, manufactured in the gullies under the Illawarra Range. Possibly, on a certain night in 1871, when George Osborne went up into the mountains behind Avondale to take the census, he also took the opportunity to visit his suppliers and test a few samples. In his own account (which must be true - it was in the *Mercury*) George Osborne deposed:

"On my way from Mr. Matthew Reen's, coming down a range about half a mile behind Mr. John Graham's residence at Avondale, after sunset, my horse was startled by seeing an animal coming down a tree which I thought at the moment to be an aboriginal: When it got within about 8 feet of the ground it lost its grip and fell....Although my horse was restless, I endeavoured to get a good glimpse of the animal as it retreated unhurt in the gully. It somewhat resembled the shape of a man and height about five feet, slender proportion, arms long, legs like a human being and feet about eighteen inches long, and shaped like an iguana with long toes....the front and face projected forward with monkey features, every particle of the body except the feet and the face was covered with black hair with a taw-coloured streak from the neck to the abdomen...it walked quadruped fashion, but at every few paces it would turn around and look at me following supporting the body with the two legs and one arm, while the other arm was placed across the hip. It had no tail. It appears that two children named Summers saw the same animal or one similar in the same locality about two years ago, but they say it was then only the size of a boy about 13 or 14 years of age. Perhaps this is the same animal which Mr. B. Rixon saw at the Cordeaux River about five or six years ago."

Whether the party of the second part - missing link, abominable snowman, or alien from outer space - is to be numbered among the founding fathers of Dapto has been a matter of some conjecture; there have been residents in whom their friends and neighbours thought some of its lineaments were discernible - no names, no pack-drill.

Mr. Osborne remained at Dapto till 1873, when he moved to the Brighton at Wollongong ("where I don't think he will do much good," said John Brown), and the Illawarra was taken over by "little George" Brown. The versatile Mr. Osborne made ends meet by combining the businesses of publican and undertaker.

**Schools:** The district was well provided with schools. Inspector Huffer's report in 1872 mentions public schools at Avondale, with 29



pupils, and Marshall Mount with 42. (At the latter, he said, "The discipline is satisfactory except as regards the attendance of pupils during the harvest time", so evidently something was still being grown there on a big enough scale to disrupt the education system). Both Avondale and Marshall Mount had begun as "National Schools", Marshall Mount in 1859, Avondale at some date before 1861, when at a public meeting, making an evidently successful protest against a proposed change of name to Benares, it was stated that there had been a "non-vested" National School for some years on the Avondale estate, and that "Avondale, as the name of a locality, is well known through all the district".

In Dapto itself, according to Mr. Huffer, there were three "certified schools" - Church of England, Roman Catholic, and Presbyterian. He made it pretty clear that in his opinion one school, "well placed", would be enough.

Nevertheless, at least two of these schools were outside the town of Dapto. The R. C. church in those days adjoined the old cemetery in West Dapto road. The convent and school were nearby, just on the Kembala Grange side of Dapto Creek. On the parish map a block on the south side of Sheaffe's Road near its eastern end is marked "Episcopalian School". (The Church of England had been infiltrated - the master was Mr. Alexander Campbell, who may have been responsible for the description, the Episcopalian Church perhaps being in his eyes a nonconformist body of which the Church of England was a subsidiary).

The Presbyterian school seems to be forgotten in Dapto - some old hands were prepared to swear it had never existed - but the contemporary evidence for it is irrefutable. Such information as is available suggests that it was on the main road near Cleveland Road. It was the only one of the three Dapto schools on which Mr. Huffer reported in detail - a "5½ out of 10 - could do better" sort of report ending, "The proficiency ranges from tolerable to fair".

Whether as a result of Mr. Huffer's strictures or not, a branch of the Public School League was formed, and by November 1874 was agitating vigorously for a public school in Dapto.

The Presbyterian School's certificate was withdrawn, as from 31 December 1874, "on account of want of attendance". There may have been some collusion; at a meeting of the Public School League the previous month the Rev. J. A. Stuart had referred to another school where the Presbyterians had "done their utmost to get it converted into a Public School, for which purpose they had, as a last desperate resort, taken their children away from it".

If the "want of attendance" was a put-up job, it was not immediately successful. The early months of 1875 were filled with meetings, petitions and agitation. The trustees of the Presbyterian School offered to hand it over for conversion into a Public School; the Council of Education declined. John Brown offered a site at Brownsville; Patrick Hill Osborne offered one "on the south side of the main road, about

midway between the Church of England parsonage and the Post office' (then near Cleveland Road). After many contradictory resolutions, amendments and rescissions, a public meeting on 28th May resolved "that the matter of deciding a site....be left in the hands of the Council of Education". The Council's choice was the site offered by Osborne (now the site of the Technical College), but it was nearly two years before the school went up. In the meantime, classes were conducted in the Presbyterian school hall under Joseph Bayliss; but the Education Department's records do not show the actual date when the school commenced.

On 24th September 1875 the *Mercury* announced the appointment of a local School Board. The members were K. Mackenzie, R. J. Marshall, C. Heininger, John Bovard, Duncan Macrae and Evan R. Evans. Four weeks later the Board inserted an advertisement calling for tenders for the building. According to the *Mercury* the plan was for a "very neat and commodious" school house, designed to accommodate 54 pupils, and teacher's residence.

Finally the new school building was opened on 2nd April 1877. It had cost £1,492. The inspection report for that year stated:

"The buildings are of brick, recently erected and well furnished. The school grounds have been planted with ornamental trees. All the subjects presented by the Council are taught. The schoolroom is clean and well ventilated, and the general discipline is fairly satisfactory in most respects."

Ultimately the "Episcopalian" school folded up, but Mr. Campbell and most of his pupils moved along the road to the new West Dapto Public School which opened in 1882. The Roman Catholic school carried on as before. So, after all Mr. Huffer's huffing and puffing, there were still three schools where he had thought three were: two too many.

For the adults the town boasted a parliamentary debating class, and the Literary Association, which had established a circulating library. The Show, after lapsing for some years, had been revived in 1867 and was being held regularly, Dapto contributed its quota to the Wollongong Volunteer Rifles - more volunteers than rifles, for John Brown had written to William Lindsay at Charcoal asking for the use of the Henry rifle given by Captain Owen for the Charcoal and Dapto members of the corps. Regattas on Lake Illawarra were a regular attraction; and in the early eighties Dapto was put on the map, not only of Australia, but of the world by the village blacksmith.

**Bill Beach, Champion Sculler of the World.** William Beach, born in Surrey in 1850, came with his parents in 1853 to Dapto, where his father set up as a veterinary surgeon and farrier. While still a child, William is said to have begun his sculling career on Macquarie Rivulet, rowing himself in a wooden tub with a broom. He became a blacksmith, and an amateur oarsman, winning local fame in memorable races against Tom Clifford on Mullet Creek and Lake Illawarra.

Encouraged by John Brown, the unofficial Mayor of Dapto, he set his sights on more distant targets. From 1881 onwards he rowed, with

ever-increasing success, in professional races in Sydney, where the sport had then a large following. In the “Punch Trophy” race of 1883 he was beaten by half a length by Mick Rush, who at the paying-over of the stakes was inspired to prophesy: “The man I beat to-day in one year will be Champion of Australia and in two years will be Champion of the World.”

Next year Beach won the Australian championship against Trickett. The world champion at the time was a Canadian named Edward Hanlan. “It became a matter of national importance”, said Banjo Paterson, “that we should find a man to beat this Canadian. The man was “a blacksmith named Beach who hailed from the South Coast...sometimes known as Gipsy Beach...His face was the face of Bismarck, the man of blood and iron; his frame was knotted with muscles built up by years of swinging the sledgehammer...Dr. Fortescue, a leading surgeon in Sydney...said of all the thousands of men he had examined in his life none could compare with Beach... ‘There never was a man like this. He’ll beat Hanlan’.”

On 16th August 1884 Beach met Hanlan on the Parramatta River, over a course of three miles 330 yards from the bridge at Ryde (sc. the railway bridge at Meadowbank) to “The Brothers” Inn. “The Canadian made a fine showing, deciding to beat the challenger over the first mile, but it was not to be. Beach of Illawarra hung close to his rear and at the first mile was but a few short lengths behind. At the second mile the race was over. Beach coming with the strength of a lion with his strokes in perfect unison while the Canadian, though fighting gamely, was done...The time for the race was 20 minutes 28½ seconds, the fastest time on record to that date. The excitement in Sydney was tremendous, but the excitement of Illawarra surpassed all.”

Beach went home to Illawarra by the I.S.N. Steamer “Bega”. Never before had Wollongong seen such a crowd. The crowd covered the wharf right up to the old Brighton Hotel, and as the ‘Bega’ rounded the Lighthouse the band commenced to play “See the Conquering Hero Comes”.

So Rush’s prophecy was fulfilled. Six times Beach successfully defended his World Championship (twice against comeback attempts by Hanlan, and once against Tom Clifford, his old rival of the Lake Illawarra regattas). In 1887 he retired undefeated. After a period as a publican in Sydney, he returned to Dapto, where he spent the rest of his long life until his death in 1935. He was not only (inevitably) President of the Dapto Regatta Club; he was also an alderman of the Central Illawarra Council, a Trustee of the Dapto Showground and of Reed Park, and a director of the Dapto Co-operative Dairying Company, and in all ways one of the town’s most useful and respected citizens. (Martin Smith noted that Mullet Creek was “sometimes called Beach’s River”). On his popularity Banjo Paterson had the last word, when he wrote from England in 1901 to George Robertson: “These English...are quite in the dark about us and our ideas. Their one idea is that the visit of the Duke of York (afterwards King George V)

marked an epoch in the history of Australia. I longed to say 'Yes, he got nearly as big a reception as Bill Beach the sculler'."

**The Osborne Memorial Church.** During this period Dapto's architecturally most outstanding building was slowly taking shape. In January 1878 tenders were called for the erection of the Osborne Memorial Church of St. Luke, Brownsville; but not until July 1880 was the foundation stone laid, and not until November, 1882 was the church opened and consecrated by the Dean of Sydney, the Rev. William Cowper. Between 600 and 700 people were present at the opening; among those who were not present was the designer of the church, the eminent Sydney architect John Horbury Hunt.

In his sermon Dean Cowper "made special mention of the pleasant fact of the Osborne family having so considerably and liberally devoted a large amount of money for the two-fold commendable purpose of assisting the cause of God and doing honour to the memories of their late father and mother;" at the subsequent luncheon in the Dapto Show Pavilion (provided, by coincidence, by Osborne Bros., bakers, of Wollongong), Dean Cowper and Dean Ewing of Wollongong underlined the sermon: "the example of Christian liberality by the Osborne family was unique within the diocese of Sydney, if not throughout the whole colony."

Mr. R. J. Marshall then presented the rector, the Rev. J. Stack, with a complimentary address and a purse containing forty sovereigns. "In accepting the address and purse, Mr. Stack made feeling reference to the late Bishop Barker"; then made even more feeling reference to the absent Mr. Horbury Hunt. He dwelt at some length on the inordinate time the church had taken to build; "The architect, if he were present, could no doubt give a plausible if not a satisfactory reason for it. And, talking about architects, he did not know why such a race was sent upon earth at all, except it was for this - that men who had anything to do with them should have their patience severely tried." Hunt, when he heard of the Rector's remarks, commented, "The words of a fool who has had as much to do with the work as a child;" but Professor Freeland, in his life of Hunt, \* comments, "The blame may well have been placed on the right person because Hunt could be most difficult and unco-operative when he wished."

The building did not meet with the approval of the editor of the *Mercury*: "In appearance, the interior of the building more especially is sternly stiff and cheerless, the severe outlines of the architecture being intensified almost into cavern coldness by the subdued if not somewhat inadequate light the narrow windows with their cathedral glass afford. Of plaster, paint, colouring, or varnish, there is not a vestige to be seen. Within the building, and as if to match the net-work of naked and rustic-like beams and rafters overhead, the aisle is floored with dull coloured common bricks. However, all these features are mere matters of taste, which differs almost as much as do faces. In regard to strength, the building possesses almost that of a fortress;

and the seats, especially, are perhaps the best in the district in every respect. There being only one door, and that a somewhat narrow one, for ingress and egress by the congregation, however, is not exactly as it should be.”

Professor Freeland’s opinion is very different: “To a less jaundiced eye St. Luke’s is a most handsome building. It is these very points of adverse criticism which are the source of its strengths and virtues. The ingenuity, skill and beauty of well designed and executed brickwork and timber used consistently and uninterruptedly for every part of the building are excellent. The tower, with its brick-covered squat pyramid roof and its rich use of purpose-made bricks is a splendid architectural statement of function and material.

“St. Luke’s Dapto, is the high-point of Hunt’s developing ideas on the use of materials and ecclesiastical architecture. A full-blooded, powerful and independently minded building, it is the epitome of the standards and values of its architect.”

While on the subject of churches, one should mention that a separate Roman Catholic parish of Dapto had been established in 1870 under Father Coghlan.

And, despite the loss of its school, the Kirk also went on growing. In 1888 the Dapto Presbyterian Church was separated from the Wollongong charge, to form, with Mount Kembla and Albion Park a new charge under the Rev. Richard Miller. The elders included George McPhail and John Bovard, both of whom had previously been members of the Wollongong session. Dapto was still part of the Albion Park charge in 1905, when the “Centenary History of the Presbyterian Church” recorded that “Mr. Miller continues to minister to an attached flock. There are churches and Sabbath schools in all the centres”.

The year after St. Lukes was opened, “an influential meeting” urged the opening of a post office at Brownsville. Alderman Thompson “pointed out that a post office where stated would be a great public convenience” - which might have been more felicitously put.

The meeting resolved that a memorial be presented to the Postmaster General. The memorial, reported at length in the *Wollongong Argus*, set out:

“That Brownsville is situated on the main South Coast Road, distant about two miles north of Dapto Post Office....It is thickly populated and centrally situated, and contains a large number of buildings, including two places of worship, large hotel, black-smith’s shop, flour mill and other buildings, also police station and lock-up recently built by the Government....

“That the old Council Chambers at Dapto is a most convenient situated building for a post office....Mr. John Brown has offered to give the use of a portion of the building....for the purpose free of charge”.

In September the *Argus* reported that the agitation had been successful.

These reports are the earliest references to Brownsville, by that name, that I have seen. It was evidently something new - the *Argus*

refers to "the old Council Chambers, Dapto, now known as Brownsville", and the Mercury to Brownsville, hitherto known as "Browns's."

Note the reference to the "old" Council Chambers. Somewhere along the line Dapto had suffered one setback when the Central Illawarra Council moved its headquarters to Unanderra. Cousins says it did so in 1900, but this must be wrong - Martin Smith specifically mentions the Council Chambers at Unanderra in 1893.

Attempts to fix the date of the change were not entirely successful - worms had devoured the central part of each page of the relevant Council minute book. Still, one can get fairly close. On 22nd March 1878 the Council was meeting at Dapto. At the meeting on 27th March tenders were called for a W.C. at the new Council Chambers. On 7th May the Council, having presumably provided for the aldermen's necessities, was meeting at the Council Chambers, Charcoal; and in December Mr. John Blackman was objecting to "Charcoal" as the name of the locality in which the Council Chambers were situated, saying it was "an ugly thing of the past".

Despite this setback, Brownsville had on the whole led on points in its contest with the southern settlement. But now there appeared a new contender, to knock them both out.

**WILLIAM BEACH**  
**Champion Sculler of the world**  
 (Town and Country Journal, 27 October 1883)



## “The City Surpassing Newcastle”: The New Township and the Smelting-works Boom

**Opening of the Illawarra Railway.** The transformation of Dapto township began with the coming of the railway. By the time the isolated line between Clifton and Wollongong was officially opened in June 1887, the next section southward was far enough advanced for Dapto people to travel to the ceremony in trains of trucks drawn by the contractor's engine. Five months later, on 9th November, that section (Wollongong to North Kiama, now Bombo) was opened, and with it Dapto station. Towards the end of the following year, with the opening of the Waterfall-Clifton section, trains ran through to Sydney.

Dapto station was, and is, architecturally undistinguished - a standard type of timber station building; its importance was in its location. The ground near the crossing of Mullet Creek was considered too low, swampy and subject to flooding. Only a water tank was provided there (at the southern end of the timber viaduct) and the station was set up on firmer ground well to the south, between the two old township centres. Agitation, renewed from time to time, to secure a platform somewhere near the Darke's Road crossing, to serve the old Brownsville settlement, proved unavailing.

**The Shifting of the Town Centre.** A new town began to grow up around the station. A right of way over which, by grace and favour of Mrs. Anne Marshall (nee Osborne) of “Daisy Bank”, her cousin Patrick Hill Osborne drove his cattle to water, was transformed into Bong Bong Street, and extended westward to link up with the older Bong Bong Road from Brownsville to the pass. Soon after Mrs. Marshall's death in 1888 her trustees subdivided her land west of the South Coast Road, from Cleveland Road to Unara Street. On the eastern side of the highway, part of “Lakelands” from Byamee Street to Werowi Street, was also subdivided - a subdivision distinguished by exceptionally wide streets and back, as well as front, access to all blocks, though the blocks themselves were narrow and disproportionately long. These two subdivisions were, for all practical purposes, to be the town of Dapto for half of the twentieth century.

Meanwhile Brownsville stagnated. “The Browns”, wrote David Denniss, “while remarkably progressive in some directions were somewhat conservative in others, and one of these was a failure to recognise that if Brownsville was to continue to progress land for

subdivision must be made available for urban blocks at terms within the reach of all classes. The Browns remained independent (sic) to this requirement while the Marshalls...demonstrated their foresight by subdivisions which enabled homebuilders to acquire blocks while cottages were also erected by the Marshalls to meet the needs of those who required cottages as tenants". But, while the incurable Australian predilection for freehold which has been the despair of so many land reformers and planners may have played some part, it seems more likely that the location of the railway station created the demand and the Marshalls met it.

The new town attracted businesses and services from both the old centres. By October 1891 it was reported that "sheer force of circumstance is driving the town in the vicinity of the station. Already several new buildings are in course of erection; the local blacksmith and wheelwright have removed their establishments and the store-keeper contemplates the building of a new store".

"There not being a bakery at Dapto", wrote George Lindsay, "the writer had a large bakery erected and Frank Corr (who had previously leased Brown's old oven at Brownsville) leased the bakery and cottage and transferred his business there....The post office was at a store and hotel about a mile away (near Cleveland Road). The people wanted a post and telegraph office near the railway station. The writer went around with a petition and obtained a long list of names which was sent to Mr. A. Campbell M.P.....It was presented and sanctioned"; though it was still a non-official post office in a store ("too public an office", said Lindsay.

The churches were also moving into the new town. The site of the present Presbyterian Church was conveyed by the Marshall trustees in 1892 to George McPhail, John Bovard and Benjamin Marshall "upon trust for the erection of a church for public religious worship according to the use of the Presbyterian Church of N.S.W." Just when the church was erected is not clear - the present building dates only from 1958, but there stands behind it a modest weatherboard and corrugated iron building, apparently fairly old, which previously served as the church. Mr. J. L. McPhail of West Dapto, whose family have been connected with the kirk in Dapto from its first beginnings says that the previous church building (which was subsequently burnt down) was on the opposite side of the highway and further south, about opposite the end of Cleveland Road. As this is also the location given for Reid's Hotel, it looks as if many a dram had grace said over it in Dapto.

The foundation stone of a new convent in Jerramatta Street was laid by Cardinal Moran on 3rd November, 1899. On 9th May in the following year he laid the foundation stone of a new church. There is an old weatherboard building between them which some local people say was the original church moved in bodily from West Dapto, but so far this has not been authenticated.

The Methodists moved up from Brownsville some years later. They had had one warning against building on sand, or river silt. Not



satisfied with building on one rock, on 22nd June 1904 they laid no less than six foundation stones for their new church.

Only the Church of England remained dug in at Brownsville. St. Lukes was too new, too substantial and far too distinguished architecturally to be abandoned, though the rectory and a hall were in the new town. The old 1845 building at Brownsville also remained, and stands to this day beside St. Lukes.

Even the showground moved up to the new town. As with the school, John Brown and Patrick Hill Osborne made counter-offers. Brown offered seven acres at Brownsville on lease, to be conveyed to trustees if £200 were expended on improvements within two years; but even after the conveyance there would have been strings attached (which gives some support to Mr. Denniss's remarks quoted earlier). Osborne offered a choice of two ten-acre sites, to be conveyed outright. After some vacillation (John Brown being the president of the Society) the Committee on 18th August 1894 accepted one of Osborne's sites, George Lindsay pointing out the undeniable facts that “it consisted of three acres more ground and it was close to the railway station”. The selected site was described as “between Mr. Heininger's butcher's shop and the Rev. Mr. Stack's parsonage, having a frontage to the M.S.C. (Main South Coast), road. The ground is level, but raised, and has good drainage, which will keep it dry in the wettest of weather”. It was stated that “the residents of Dapto intend to erect a public hall....for meeting and general purposes”. Mr. Campbell M.L.A. was requested to seek “a special grant for the Dapto A. and H. Association” from the Minister of Agriculture, and the full Committee were appointed “To canvass the whole of the district in order to obtain funds.”

**The Lake Illawarra Harbour Scheme.** A great impetus to the growth of the town was given by the Lake Illawarra and smelting works schemes (Dapto's great might-have-beens, which if they had fully come off, could have made Dapto what Port Kembla now is). The story of these schemes and of the works themselves has been told elsewhere (“The Old Dapto Smelting Works” by Rev. Bro. J. P. O'Malley \* and need not be repeated at length. It began with the Illawarra Harbour and Land Corporation's scheme to carry out harbour works at Lake Illawarra and dredge a channel 23 feet deep across the lake to permit ocean-going vessels to come up to Elizabeth Point, a short distance north of Kanahooka Point, whence coal would be shipped, after having been brought by rail from a colliery, later known as Fleming's Mine, in the range behind West Dapto. The railway was about 5½ miles long. It was built at a cost of about £42,000 and some relics of it can still be seen. Fowlers Road uses part of its road bed, old rails forming part of the spur which connected it to the mainline were till recently embedded in Marshall Street, and are still in position behind the high fences on either side and old embankments, cuttings and broken viaducts can be seen at various points around Kanahooka, Bong Bong Road, Wongawilli and West Dapto. It is said that, apart from the

contractor's trains employed on the construction, the original company only ever ran one train over its whole length - that which carried the official party at the opening.

**The Smelting Works.** By the time the railway was opened the original scheme had been abandoned; but some of the promoters had lifted their sights and a new company (the Smelting Company of Australia Ltd.) had been formed, with a backing of overseas capital, to establish large smelting works in the area. Near Kanahooka Point the top was cut off one of two hills known as "The Twins", providing a series of levels to which the ores would gravitate from one stage of treatment to another, works were built, a spur railway from the Elizabeth Point Line was constructed - but the coal used came from collieries further north, not from West Dapto, and was converted into coke at the Australian Coke Company's Works near the point where the Mount Kembla Railway crossed the main line. So the greater part of the Illawarra Harbour and Land Company's railway proved a white elephant. The crossing over the main line was removed in 1902, local farmers moved in and squatted on the road bed, and only the defunct company's title to the land remained to bedevil generations of solicitors yet unborn.

The works themselves were in full swing by 1899 and for a few years prospered, treating lead, silver, zinc, copper and gold from Broken Hill, Zeehan, Mount Morgan and Western Australia. At one time they employed 500 men at a ruling rate of 6s. and 6d. a day - not too bad a wage when a four-roomed weatherboard house in Dapto could be rented for 7s. a week or built for £200. H. F. Banfield was advertising up to date tailoring with perfectly fitting suits for 42s., guaranteed quality 50s., highest grade 60s.

**A Boom Town.** The town was flourishing. It had four hotels: the old Lake Illawarra at Brownsville, where Martin Smith and his mate found "the room well furnished and scrupulously clean", the breakfast "excellent" and the host, a Mr. Carter, "genial", one close to the railway station, whose building stood till a few years ago, though the glory had departed, and it had declined into a mere boarding-house; one on the present site (but not, of course, the present building); and Reid's Hotel on the main road opposite Cleveland Road, Reid himself was a great sportsman and patron of sport, and for many years the local cricket matches were played just behind his hotel. \*

There was also the Farmers' Arms, on the slope down from Unanderra to Kembla Grange. Miss Denniss remembered it as a slab and bark building, still standing in her young days. It was not only the building that was primitive, even by the easy standards of country pubs in the nineties. Martin Smith found it a disaster area: "My bed was very damp, and George fancied he had all the livestock in the

district in his"; and when Smith asked the landlady for some milk she "took the glasses into the yard and milked it straight from the cow". It is only fair to add that Smith speaks of the kindness they received. The pub was "kept by Irish people", which evidently explained everything.

The town also had the Dapto Enterprise Band, a dramatic society, and a race-course between Kanahooka Point and Mullet Creek which was later used for live hare coursing. It had a bicycle club and a bicycle shop (on the site of Bowden's Pharmacy), which hung out a full-sized penny-farthing bicycle over the footpath as a trade sign. The *South Coast Herald*, a weekly founded at Albion Park in 1895, moved to Dapto in 1902. It was according to Mr. Armstrong, "generally a live wire town in which two police officers were stationed". One wonders whether the two would have been enough, for it is said that "half the population were living in tents, principally in the bush along the banks of Mullet Creek" and these included "fifty or sixty Woolloomooloo larrikins"; and the two officers must have been fully extended on Saturday nights trying to police four hotels and to keep the leaders of the push from tangling with the so-and-sos from the bush.

**The Dapto Court House.** Since this could not always be prevented, the town had its own Court House, even though a small one. By the time the magistrate, the prosecutor, the prisoner, his legal adviser and a witness or two had been fitted in, justice may have been done, but it could scarcely have been seen to be done, for nobody else would have got in to see it. The building, about the size of two average country conveniences, stood till quite recently, with the faded legend "Court House" on one of its windows, on Fairleys' land at the corner of the main road and Bong Bong Street. It is said to have been placed there for the more speedy administration of justice by Mr. J. G. Fairley, J.P., who could slip out of the side door of his store, exercise a very summary jurisdiction, and return to attend to the next customer. It should be added, however, that Mr. Fairley tempered justice with mercy; according to local tradition his sentences were usually suspended on condition that the prisoner caught the next Sydney train, under the watchful eye of the sergeant of police.

**Dapto Doctors.** During the Smelting Works boom the town acquired a doctor. Dr. W. B. Curgenvin put in a brief appearance, buying a block of land on the main road (for £3 per foot) from John Brown in 1896. According to Dr. Harry Lee, a veteran Wollongong practitioner, "he fell into financial difficulties....When I last heard of Dr. Curgenvin he was laying the odds at Randwick". After an interval of some years he was followed by a Dr. Scott, somewhat equivocally commended by Dr. Lee as "a very good practitioner when at his best and a very nice man."

**Dr. Scott's Motor Buggy.** While in Dapto, wrote Dr. Lee, "Dr. Scott achieved fame in two ways. He was the first man to bring into the district a motor-buggy. These were terrible machines. They were high double buggies with an engine under the seat, transmission by two

belts, solid tyres, and top speed of about twelve miles an hour. They made a noise like a traction engine, gave out a terrible smell, and never did more than twenty miles without requiring some adjustment.

**Dr. Scott's Tiger.** "Dr. Scott's second claim to immortality was that he was as far as I know, the only Doctor in Australia ever to be attacked by a man-eating tiger. He was walking back from a farm-house on Farmborough Road when he was seized from behind by a large animal that he took to be a tiger. The tiger grabbed him by the waist and proceeded to carry him to the road, I presume to eat him on the main road. Dragging him through the barbed-wire fence, he broke a bottle of chloroform that Scott had in his pocket. The smell presumably alarmed the beast, for he dropped Scott and made off. He has never been seen since. Scott escaped but was very badly scratched. He told me the story himself".

**Dapto At Its Zenith.** In 1903 the Commissioner for Railways declared that Dapto was the most valuable station on the Illawarra Line, its traffic being double that of Wollongong. Hopes for the future were brighter still: "A beautiful town is being marked out at Tallwarra Point where the city surpassing Newcastle will be".

**Closing of the Smelting Works.** Then, quite suddenly, everything folded up. Competition cut off the supply of ore from Western Australia and Broken Hill, an ambitious scheme for treating nickel from New Caledonia came to nothing, and in 1905 the works closed. The company was reconstructed and next year began to shift its works to Port Kembla, where the government was constructing a harbour, but work on the transfer was stopped before it was completed, and in 1909 the company went into liquidation. Its most enduring memorial looks like being the long-winded, involved, and in practice quite meaningless covenant which afflicts the title to half the land in Dapto.

**Dapto At Its Nadir.** The collapse of the works produced a temporary collapse of the town - one account says "it suffered an almost complete clipsie" (sc. eclipse). Many business people were virtually ruined because of unpaid debts. Dozens of houses, complete or partially erected, were carted away bodily, mostly to Port Kembla. One builder alone, Edward Simpson, removed and re-erected over 80. Those which remained were sold for as little as £40 or let in the case of better-class house for 1s. or 2s. a week; the owners of merely average houses would let them rent free, for the sake of having them lived in and looked after. The morale of the townsfolk was so shaken that in a local option poll they voted for prohibition. Although this was not carried by the necessary two-thirds majority, the result was sufficient to bring about a reduction of licenses and the end of the old hotel at the Bong Bong Street corner.

In this sorry state we leave Dapto, the shadow of what it had been in its brief boom. But perhaps, when one considers what the smelting processes then in use could do to a landscape, the loss of the Smelting

Works was not the unmitigated disaster it seemed at the time. At least Dapto has never been described, like one Tasmanian town where long-established smelting works had done their worst, as “Hell with the fires out”.



**THE DAPTO SMELTING WORKS**  
(Illawarra Historical Society collection)

**THE ILLAWARRA LAKE HOTEL, c 1890**  
Note older wing on left  
(Carl Weber collection)



## Appendix I The Name of Dapto

The earliest known use of the name of Dapto is in the instructions to Surveyor Knapp in 1829 to mark out the veterans' grants on Dapto Creek.

There is more than one school of thought on the derivation and meaning of the name. The more prosaic version, that it is an aboriginal word, is backed by James Jervis, who gives no meaning, and by Mr. A. Armstrong, who says it means "plenty water." This meaning had been quoted in 1893 by John Brown, apparently with approval and certainly without demur, from "a correspondent some time ago" in the *Town and Country Journal*: "The western portion of the Hooka lands towards West Dapto...was called by the aboriginals 'Dabpeto' hence the name of the settlement Dapto. The meaning of the word 'Dabpeto' is 'Water plenty', and during the recent floods the residents of the locality have had ample proof of the correctness of the same. It is, however, understood that the word does not refer to flood waters but to the many streams of beautiful fresh water that flow through that portion of the district."

Brown had then lived in Illawarra for over sixty years. He was interested in the local aborigines, as appears from letters and articles contributed by him to local papers, and apparently had some knowledge of their language.

To the contrary there are various theories which have one point in common - that the name is in some way a corruption of "Dab-toe". Mr. E. Beale wrote in the *Illawarra Historical Society Bulletin* (March, 1975) that he was told "by a great-aunt who used to sit on the knee of her grandfather Charles Throsby Smith...that the name 'Dapto' referred to a man who had lost a toe, though I cannot recall how this happened, except that an axe performed the operation." Mr. Beale went on to quote Rev. W. B. Clark's diary for 9th January 1840: "Mt. Dapto is not a native name. I understand it was so called from a man cutting off his toe with a hatchet."

A *South Coast Times* writer in 1957 apparently tried to work out a compromise, when he said that "authorities" (unspecified) interpreted it as a lame chief or lame aborigine; then himself alleged that it was the nickname of "an old aborigine in the district with a permanently injured foot."

The late Mr. David Denniss said that an investigation in connection with a "Back to Dapto Week" in 1931 was inconclusive, but it seemed

most likely that in some way it was derived from "Dab-toe". His sister, the late Miss Lillian Denniss, told me that she had heard from her father that there was an old aborigine in the district nicknamed "Dab-toe", because "he had webbed feet like a duck" (an intriguing thought, but the logic of the nickname escapes me).

The "Dab-toe" theory in its most enticing form (and the only form which offers any plausible explanation of the "dab" part) appeared in the Charter Night programme of the Dapto Rotary Club: "The chief of a small tribe of blacks living in the gullies of West Dapto was a big man and of a very inquisitive nature. One day a farmer's wife had a large wash-basin of butter made and salted. The blacks with their chief were, as usual, visiting the farm. The chief dabbed his big toe into the butter. Upon the return of the farmer from the ploughing field the chief was promptly christened 'Dab-toe'."

In short, while the witnesses would almost unanimously agree that "in the entire annals of our history there is absolutely no circumstance so entirely free from all manner of doubt of any kind whatever," that is about all they would agree on.

Though it is not strictly accurate - for I have my own opinion on which explanation is most likely - it is tempting to quote an English judge's classic summing up: "Gentlemen of the jury, you have heard the evidence in this case. If you believe the witnesses for the plaintiff, you will find for the plaintiff. If you believe the witnesses for the defendant, you will find for the defendant. If, like me, you don't believe any of them, God only knows how you will find. Consider your verdict!"

### "PENROSE"

The home of the Evans family



## Appendix II

### Buildings included in National Trust of Australia (N·S·W·)

#### Register of Historic Buildings

Recommended **CLASSIFIED** ("In the Trust's view essential to the heritage of Australia and must be preserved"):

"Horsley", Bong Bong Road.

"Marshall Mount", Marshall Mount Road.

St. Luke's Church of England (Osborne Memorial)

including old Church, Prince Edward Drive, Brownsville.

**RECORDED**: ("contributes to the heritage of Australia and should be recorded and preservation encouraged"):

"Cleveland", Cleveland Road.

"Penrose", Princes Highway.

Former D (new listing to be determined):

"Avondale", Avondale Road.

(List as advised by National Trust, September, 1975)

#### **ADDENDUM** **"CLEVELAND"**

One of the properties listed above, "Cleveland", is curiously little known. It is invisible from Cleveland Road, though visible in the distance from Avondale Road. Perhaps because its owners changed so often, and so many were absentees, few of them left much mark locally. At the time of its listing by the National Trust practically no information on its history was available; but while this booklet was in the press Mr. Edgar Beale generously made available the results of his researches, from which the following note is abstracted.



“Cleveland” stands on a grant of 600 acres (Portion 59, Parish of Kembla) made in 1833 to George William Paul, a Sydney merchant, who had disposed of his land even before the grant was issued. A series of subdivisions and conveyances followed in fairly rapid succession. In February, 1841 Maurice Fitzgerald bought 300 acres for £150; in May of the same year he sold 145 acres for £800; which suggests that the house was built in the interval.

The purchaser, Hercules Watt, held it only till November, when he sold to Cornelius Wholohan, who mortgaged the property to one Thomas Jessett. Then in 1843, in the depth of the depression of the “hungry forties”, Wholohan died. Jessett exercised his power of sale - somewhat dubiously, “for a suspiciously low price and in a suspiciously short time”, to a purchaser who sold back to him before the year was out. Jessett worked the property for several years, evidently successfully, winning prizes at local shows for produce (including hops), poultry, cows and pigs, becoming a steward and a committee member of the Show Society, and for three years a member of the Illawarra District Council. Then Wholohan’s heir, his son Thomas, bought an equity suit to redeem the mortgage and, after protracted proceedings, in 1853 Jessett was ousted from his seemingly ill-gotten estate.

Thomas Wholohan, however, apparently saw his redeemed inheritance only as a source of profit. He promptly sold to William Speer, who sold in 1856 to William Howe, a son of William Howe of “Glenlee”. Howe survived only two years; his widow and daughter lived elsewhere, and the property was let to a succession of tenants, among them Mr. King Barton, who had been Governor Fitz Roy’s private secretary - an office calling for the utmost discretion and diplomacy - and his wife, a grande dame in the high Victorian tradition who must have struck awe into the natives. “Any suggestion that they worked the farm”, says Mr. Beale, “must be quickly discounted; neither of them ever whilst on this earth sullied a hand with even domestic work”.

In 1888 the property was sold, evidently in poor condition (the price had dropped over thirty-two years from £3500 to £2610) to the Madden family, who held it till 1912.

The house, described as possessing “architectural interest, charm and atmosphere”, has unfortunately suffered so much from the ravages of time, and of earth tremors in recent years, as to make its future extremely doubtful.

## Notes

References in the text and notes to Cousins, Jervis and McCaffrey are respectively to:

Cousins, Arthur: The Garden of New South Wales.  
(Producers' Co-op. Distributing  
Society Ltd., Sydney, 1948).

Jervis, James: Illawarra: A Century of History,  
1788-1888. (Royal Australian Historical Society  
Journal and Proceedings, Vol. XXVIII, Sydney, 1942).

McCaffrey, Frank: The History of Illawarra and Its Pioneers.  
(The author, Haberfield, 1922).

1. By Mr. Edgar Beale, who has made a detailed study of Robert Brown and of the early exploration of Illawarra, the results of which are to be published by the Illawarra Historical Society.
2. Mr. J.F.R. Browne, in "A History of William 'Merchant' Browne of Abbotsbury and Appin" (published by the author, 1974).
3. In the deed by which late in 1832, George Brown conveyed the 500 acres to Richard Brooks, he was described as "of Sydney, Farmer", and his wife's name was given as *Maria*. But in a mortgage over a year before George Brown of Brownsville was described as "of *Illawarra*, Innkeeper" (which would still have been an appropriate description in 1832) and his wife was *Mary Ann* (see the Brown family tomb in St. Luke's Churchyard). Moreover, in the mortgage his 300 acres are described as "bounded on the south by 500 acres granted to Mr. George Brown"; if mortgagor and adjoining owner were one and the same the description would presumably have read "bounded on the south by other land of the said George Brown", or words to that effect.
4. The story of Henry and Sarah Osborne and of "Marshall Mount" is related in much greater detail in "Some Southern Homes of New South Wales", by G. Nesta Griffiths.
5. Though the old house for a time fell on evil days, it is a pleasure to be able to add that it is now in good hands and is being fittingly restored by the present owner, Mr. G. F. McDonald.
6. Mr. B. J. Dowd in "The First Five Land Grantees" (p.5) appears to imply that "Macquarie Gift" was included in the sale of "Johnston's Meadows" in 1876, but from titles which I have investigated it seems clear that the Marshall Mount end of the grant at least was owned by the Westons till much later.
7. For the story of Charlie Hooka, see Illawarra Historical Society Bulletins, Oct-Nov-Dec. 1970.

8. To wale a text: to give out the text of a sermon.  
Skirl: shriek, scream.  
Shauchlin': shuffling; hence hesitating, uncertain.  
Sit under: to sit under a minister was to attend his kirk and listen to his sermons.
- The quotation is from "The Scotsman's Return from Abroad", by R. L. Stevenson. In these unregenerate days it may be necessary to add that the preceding verse quotation is from the metrical Psalms.
9. Lang's connection with Kembla Grange is more fully dealt with in "John Dunmore Lang on Mullet Creek," by A. Gilchrist.
10. John Dunmore Lang was evidently of this opinion: "There was a settlement of veteran soldiers formed by the late colonial administration: the issue of which, I am sorry to say, entirely confirms the remarks I have elsewhere made, in regard to the improbability of ever forming an industrious and thriving population out of such materials."
11. McCaffrey relates that when the blacks were raiding the maize paddock, Sheaffe's overseer concealed himself in the crop with a drawn sword, and, when a black reached through the fence to steal a cob, slashed off the thief's hand. This story is, I think, to be regarded with suspicion. It seems inherently improbable - shooting would have been less trouble; McCaffrey, as well as being credulous, was eager to repeat, so far as the law allowed, any story tending to the discredit of Protestants and the Establishment; and an old resident tells me he has heard the story related of a different person at a different time and place.
12. Easy descent. Possibly a reference to Virgil's *facilis descensus Averno* - "easy descent to Hell".
13. Jervis (p. 278) says 1879; Cousins (p. 110) 1876.
14. Illawarra Historical Society Bulletin, November 1973-December 1975.
15. "Architect Extraordinary: The Life and Work of John Horbury Hunt, 1838-1904," by J. M. Freeland; Cassell. Australia 1970.
16. Illawarra Historical Society, 1950, second edition 1968.
17. The Illawarra Mercury of 16 June 1876 recorded that "on Tuesday last Mr. John Reid (late of Kiama) applied for and obtained a publican's licence for the premises formerly known as the Dapto Post Office".

Reed Park, one of the principal local sports grounds, is sometimes said to have derived its name from John Reid. But on some parish maps "Reed Park" (so spelt) appears to be shown as the name of Edward Robert Stack's 300-acre grant (Portion 55, Parish of Kembla) which includes the present park. By-laws gazetted on 10 November 1922 referred to "the land at Dapto, area 10 acres, proclaimed 22nd September, 1893, to be a public Park....and known as 'Reed Park'".

The ascription of the name to John Reid therefore seems extremely doubtful.

## INDEX

- Agricultural Society, 47-50, 69  
Alley, George Underwood, 38, 45  
"Alley's Line" — see Bong Bong Pass  
Alpacas, at Avondale, 40-41  
Architecture: pioneer, 32-33  
    St. Luke's, Brownsville, 64-65  
Armitage, Misses (school), 47  
Armstrong, Thomas, 56  
"Athlanlin", 11-13  
"Avondale", 14, 16, 18, 40-41, 55-56  
Avondale Public School, 60-61  
Band, Dapto Enterprise, 71  
Banfield, H. J., 70  
Barrett, Mary, 26  
Bayliss, Joseph, 62  
Beach, William, 62-64  
Blackman, John, 66  
Bong Bong Pass & Road, 37-39, 40  
Bovard, John, 62, 65, 68  
Brisbane, Sir Thomas, 15, 20  
Brooks, Henry, 10  
Brooks, Richard (snr.), 9, 10, 15  
Brooks, Richard (jnr.) & Augusta, 10  
Brown, George (I), 14, 39, 44, 45, 78  
Brown, George (II), 14, 78  
Brown, George William (III), 15, 44, 49  
Brown, George (IV) ("little"), 49  
Brown, John: on Bong Bong pass, 39, 40  
    Gives Methodist Church site, 47  
    First Show Secretary, 48  
    Alderman, 50  
    On "Brown's" in 1873, 59-60  
    Offers school site, 61  
    And Bill Beach, 62  
    Offers building for P.O., 65  
    Reluctance to sell freehold, 67-68, 69  
    Offers showground, 69  
    On name of Dapto, 74  
Brown, Robert, 9  
Brown, William, 9  
Brown family of Wollingurry, 54  
"Brown's", see Brownsville  
Brown's Inn (see also **Hotels**)  
Brown's Mill, 44, 48, 51, 52, 54  
Browne, William ("Merchant"), 11-13  
Brownsville ("Brown's"): In 1873, 59-60  
    Post Office at, 65  
    Buildings at, in 1883, 65  
    Name, first use of, 65  
    Stagnates after 1887, 67-68  
Burke, Surveyor, 38-39  
Butler, Lieut., 24  
"Calderwood", 16  
Campbell, Archibald, M.P., 39-40, 68, 69  
Campbell, John Thomas, 11  
Canadian "Patriotes", 26  
Carruth, Robert and William, 22  
Cattle, Improvement of breeding (see also **Dairying**), 54  
Cattle-Stealing Prevention Association, 13  
Cemetery, R.C., West Dapto, 24, 26, 29  
Central Illawarra, Municipality of: formation, 50  
    H.Q. at Dapto, 50  
    move to Unanderra, 66  
Cheese factory, 52  
Chi, John, 46  
Chi, John Chin, 46  
Churches: Anglican, 45-46, 64-65, 69  
    Methodist, 45-46, 68  
    Presbyterian, 45, 65, 68  
    Roman Catholic, 24, 46, 65, 68  
Clarke, Rev. W. B., on name of Dapto, 74  
Clearing leases, 30-32  
Clifford, Tom, 62, 63  
Coach services, 44, 59  
Coghlan, Rev. Father, 65  
"Coral Vale", 27  
Corr, Frank, 68  
Country Milk Co., 54  
Court House, 71  
Cowler, Dean, 64

- Cray, Elizabeth, 24  
Cream, — (Manager of "Exmouth"), 10  
Curgenvin, Dr. W. B., 71  
"Dab-toe" (Aborigine), 74-75  
Dairying: in 1870's, described, 52-53  
    improvement of breeding, 54  
    butter factory, 54  
    cheese factory, 52  
    cream sent to Sydney, 54-55  
    working conditions, 56-57  
"Daisy Bank", 15, 56  
Dapto: name of, 24, 71-72  
    township, in 1879, 59  
    new town centre, 67-69  
Dapto Creek, Veterans' grants on, 24  
Dawes, James, 55, 56  
Denniss, Adam, 29, 32, 49, 51  
Denniss, Richard and Sarah, 27, 29  
Duck Holes, C. T. Smith bogged at, 37  
"Dunlop Vale" (see also Kembla Grange), 20-22  
Elizabeth Point, 69  
Elyard, Alfred, 14  
Evans, Evan Robert, 14, 49, 50, 56, 62  
Evans, George William, 9  
Evans family and A.I.S. breed, 14, 54  
Ewing, Dean, 64  
"Exmouth", 9-10, 12, 16  
Fairley, J. G., 71  
Faithfull, W. P., 38  
Fleming's Mine, 69  
Frahlig, Henry, 46  
Fraser, James, 25  
Fresh Food and Ice Co., 54  
Gerard, Gerard, 22, 23, 45  
Gerard, John, 45  
Gipps, Sir George, 36  
Graham, John, 46-47  
Hanlan, Edward, 63  
Hargraves, Edward Hammond, 44-45  
Harris, Alexander, 12-13, 34-35  
Harris, Joseph and Anastasia, 25  
Harris, William, 25  
Haworth, Robert, 23-24  
Hayes, J., 46  
Heininger, C., 56, 62  
Henning, Rachel, on railway, 55  
Hooka, Charlie, 20  
Hopkins, Mary, 46  
"Horsley", 10, 54  
Hotels: Brown's Inn, 38, 44, 49  
    Farmer's Arms, 70-71  
    Illawarra (Lake Illawarra), 44, 49, 59, 70  
    Reid's, 68, 70, 79  
    Ship Inn, 44  
Huffer, Inspector, 60-62  
Hunt, John Horbury, 64-65  
Illawarra Harbour & Land Corporation, 69, 70  
Illawarra, Lake: 12, 13, 20, 69  
    races on, 62, 63  
Irving, David Williamson, 22-23, 49  
Jacques, Surveyor, 38  
James, William, 14  
Jenkins, William Warren, 38, 45  
Johnston, Blanche, 20  
Johnston, David, 20  
Johnston, George and Esther, 19, 20  
"Johnston's Meadows", 20  
Kanahooka Point, 10, 69  
Kanahooka Road, 43  
Keever, William, 25-26  
Kembla Grange: early history of, 20-24  
Knapp, Surveyor, 24, 74  
Lake Illawarra Harbour scheme, 69  
"Lakelands", 19, 56, 67  
Landlordism, end of, 55-56  
Lang, Andrew, 22  
Lang, John Dunmore, 21-22, 79  
Leverett, John: letters quoted, 30, 31, 32  
Lindsay, George, 10, 52, 68, 69  
Lindsay, John (snr. and jnr.), 10, 49  
Lindsay, William, 62  
Literary and Mutual Instruction Society, 47  
"Log Bridge", 27  
Lynch, Stephen, 49  
McFarland, (Judge) Alfred, quoted, 52-53  
McKelly, John, 24  
Mackenzie, K., 62  
McPhail, Elizabeth, 25  
McPhail, George, 25, 46, 65, 68

- McPhail, John and Margaret, 26  
 Macquarie, Lachlan, 11, 12, 19, 20  
 "Macquarie Gift", 19, 20, 32, 56, 78  
 Macquarie Pass, 40  
 Macquarie Rivulet, 12, 20, 36  
 Macrae, Duncan, 62  
 Malbon, —, 48  
 Mallon, Richard and Elizabeth, 24  
 Marceau, Joseph and Mary, 24  
 Marshall, Anne, 15, 67  
 Marshall, Arthur, 45  
 Marshall, Rev. Benjamin, 15  
 Marshall, Benjamin Hamilton, 68  
 Marshall, Robert, 15  
 Marshall, Robert James, 62, 64  
 Marshall Estate subdivision, 67  
 "Marshall Mount" (Estate), 16, 18, 55  
 Marshall Mount (Locality): Methodist Church, 47  
   Failure of wheat, 41  
   Public School, 61  
 Meehan, James, 9  
 Miller, Rev. Richard, 65  
 Missing link, G. Osborne meets, 60  
 Mitchell, James, 24  
 Mitchell, (Sir) Thomas Livingstone, 25, 35  
 Moore & Vaughan, 37  
 Moran, Martin and Catherine, 29  
 Moran, John, 29  
 Moran's Swamps, 29  
 Motor Buggy, Dr. Scott's, 71-72  
 Mullet Creek, 9, 21, 34, 44, 71  
   Crossing of, 34-35  
   Bridging of, 36-37  
   Sculling races on, 62  
   Called "Beach's River", 63  
   "Mullet Creek Farm", 14  
 Neale, James, 10  
 "Newton", 22  
 O'Brien, Cornelius. Henry and Thomas, 12  
 Osborne, Alick, 15, 16, 44  
 Osborne, Anne, 15, 67  
 Osborne, George (son of Henry), 19  
 Osborne, George (publican), 60  
 Osborne, Hamilton, 55  
 Osborne, Henry, 15-16, 18, 45, 47  
 Osborne, Henry Hill, 18, 40-41, 50, 56-57  
 Osborne, John, 15  
 Osborne, Patrick Hill, 19, 44, 61-62, 67, 69  
 Osborne, Sarah, 15-16, 18  
 Osborne's Cattle Track, 38-39  
 Oxley, John, 9  
 Paterson, Andrew Barton (Banjo) on Bill Beach, 63-64  
 "Patriotes", Canadian, 26  
 Pearson, James, 51  
 Pearson, John, 55  
 Pearson, William, 55  
 "Penrose", 14, 54  
 "Pumpkin Cottage", 16, 18  
 Racecourse, 71  
 Railways: Illawarra line, 67  
   Illawarra Harbour & Land Corporation's, 69-70  
   Milk trains, 55  
 Railway stations: Dapto, 67, 72  
   Yallah, 43  
 Reed Park, 79  
 Reid, John, 70, 79  
 Rifles, Wollongong Volunteer, 62  
 Rigney, Rev. Father, 46  
 Roads: Bong Bong, 37-39, 42-43, 67  
   First Dapto Road, 34  
   Fowler's, 69  
   Kanahooka, 41  
   Main South Coast, 34, 35-36, 37  
   Marshall Mount, 41  
   West Dapto, 34  
 Robins, John, 24  
 Schools: Armitage's, 47  
   Avondale, 61  
   Dapto: "Episcopalian", 61, 62  
   Dapto Presbyterian, 46, 61-62  
   Dapto Public, 47, 61-62  
   Dapto R.C., 46, 61, 62  
   Marshall Mount, 61  
   West Dapto Public, 26, 62  
 Scott, Dr., 71-72  
 Sheaffe, Capt. William, 25, 45, 73  
 Shone, Surveyor, 39  
 "Shoran Vale", see "Dunlop Vale", 39  
 Showground: Mullet Creek, 48  
   Moved to new town, 69  
 Simpson, Edward, 72  
 Smelting Works, 70, 72

- Smith, Charles Throsby, 16, 25, 37, 44, 48, 74  
Smith, Elizabeth, 25  
Smith, G. O. Martin, 57, 66, 70-71  
Smith, James and Mary, 26-27  
Somerville, George, 47  
"South Coast Herald", 71  
Stack, Rev. J., 64, 69  
Stewart, Alexander, quoted, 34, 35-36  
Store at "Brown's", in 1870's, 54-55  
Stuart, Rev. J. A., 61  
Sturt, Charles, 25  
Tait, Rev. John, 46  
Tallawarra Point, proposed town at, 72  
Thomas, George, 56  
Thomas, Henry, 27  
Thomas, William, 27  
Thompson, Andrew, 10  
Throsby, Charles, 37-38  
Tiger, attacks Dr. Scott, 72  
Timbs, G., 55  
Timbs, Henry, 55  
"Town and Country Journal": on Dapto in 1879, 59  
on name of Dapto, 74  
Townsend, Joseph Phipps: on clearing lease system, 30-31  
on Church of England, 45  
Transportation, effects of cessation of, 29-30  
Veterans' Grants, 24  
Volunteer Rifles, 62  
Weaver (Architect), 36  
Weber, Carl, 40  
"West Horsley", 10  
Weston, Augusta, 10  
Weston, Blanche, 20  
Weston, Edward and Esther, 20  
Weston, Elizabeth, 10  
Weston, George Edward Nicholas, 20, 43  
Weston, William Frederick, 10, 20  
Wild, Joseph, 9  
Wilson, James, 52  
Wilson, William, 47  
"Wollingurry", 11, 54  
Wyllie, John Dunlop, 20, 21, 22  
Yallah, 11, 12, 19, 43  
Yallah Lake (see Illawarra, Lake),

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