A Thematic History of the City of Wollongong

- Final Report -

For Wollongong City Council, 41 Burelli Street, Wollongong

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<tr>
<td><strong>Balgownie School Centenary</strong></td>
<td>Balgownie School Centenary 1889-1989, Balgownie, 1989</td>
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<td><strong>Davis, Lake Illawarra</strong></td>
<td>Joseph Davis, <em>Lake Illawarra – an Ongoing History</em>, Lake Illawarra Authority, Wollongong, 2005</td>
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<td><strong>DP</strong></td>
<td>Deposited Plan</td>
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<td><strong>Hagan &amp; Wells</strong></td>
<td>Jim Hagan &amp; Andrew Wells, (ed) <em>A History of Wollongong</em>, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, 1997</td>
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<td><strong>Henderson, Early Illawarra</strong></td>
<td>Krimhilde &amp; Terry Henderson, <em>Early Illawarra - People, houses, life</em>, History Project Inc, Canberra, 1983</td>
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<td><strong>JRAHS</strong></td>
<td><em>Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society</em></td>
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<td><strong>LPMA</strong></td>
<td>Land and Property Management Authority</td>
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<td><strong>NAA</strong></td>
<td>National Archives of Australia</td>
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<td><strong>NSWPP</strong></td>
<td><em>New South Wales Parliamentary Papers</em></td>
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<td><strong>Richardson, Bitter Years</strong></td>
<td>Len Richardson, <em>The Bitter Years - Wollongong during the Great Depression</em>, Hale &amp; Iremonger, Sydney, 1984</td>
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<td><strong>RPA</strong></td>
<td>Real Property Application</td>
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<td><strong>Rogers, ‘Thematic History’</strong></td>
<td>Brian Rogers, Thematic History, McDonald McPhee Pty Ltd, City of Wollongong Heritage Study, June 1991, Volume 1, For Wollongong City Council</td>
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<td><strong>Secomb, Dapto</strong></td>
<td>Nicole Secomb, Dapto Thematic History: Dapto Community Heritage Project, December 1999, For Wollongong City Council</td>
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<td><strong>SRNSW</strong></td>
<td>State Records of New South Wales</td>
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Introduction

This thematic history has been prepared as the first stage for the Wollongong Heritage Study Review. It is NOT meant to be comprehensive history of all aspects of the history of Wollongong and its different suburbs and localities. It has been framed in the light of the methodology recommended by the NSW Heritage Office. It identifies the main ‘themes’ or historical processes and developmental forces, which have shaped the landscapes and streetscapes of the area. These themes need to be identified in order to understand the context that created the physical evidence that survives of these past activities and lifestyles throughout the district. Ultimately, this document is a land-use planning tool, aimed at assisting the informed identification of heritage items and an appreciation of their historical context. This history has centred on the major forces that have moulded the people and environment of the city.

Limitations of time and budget and the competing demands of a comprehensive Brief have ensured that this thematic history cannot be a full or detailed history of the city. Wollongong is blessed with a number of excellent professionally written histories to which those seeking a more detailed analysis of its history are directed, whilst many aspects of local history have attracted the attention of the historical society, which has produced excellent small publications. Limited primary research has been undertaken on some subjects, particularly subdivision plans. With the exception of Nicole Secomb, the histories of the greater Wollongong area do not deal with the expansion of subdivision that influenced the texture of the landscape and was instrumental in providing the sequence of housing development across the area.

I wish to thank Joel Thompson and Katie Thomas who oversaw this project for Wollongong City Council. Zofia Laba supplied useful material about early Polish and other migrant settlers in the area. Others who assisted in correcting errors and providing valuable advice and commentary included John Arney, Joyce McCarthy, Ben Meek, Michael Muston, Frank Osborne, Bruce Reyburn, Maureen Slapp, Helen Voysey, Sharralyn Robinson, CEO, Illawarra Local Aboriginal Land Council, provided valuable commentary on the Aboriginal/Koori history of Illawarra. Members of the Wollongong Heritage Advisory Committee who bring a wealth of personal involvement with Illawarra to their role have also assisted including Doug Boleyn, Ben Meek, Fidelia Pontarolo, Meredith Hutton, Carol Herben, Sharralyn Robinson and Dr Nicholas Gill. Discussions with the Committee of the Migration Heritage Project have assisted in clarifying some aspects of Illawarra history and aspects of significance for migrants. Ron Cairns and Geoff Mould imparted some of their immense knowledge of Illawarra coal mining on a most informative tour. Meredith Hutton has provided numerous suggestions and insights into Wollongong history and heritage.

The mapping staff at Wollongong City Council kindly converted my manual plotting of the subdivisions of Illawarra into the excellent maps in Section 8.0.

This study has been partially funded by the Heritage Branch of the New South Wales Department of Planning as a Community Based Heritage Study Review. The assistance of the Heritage Branch and the New South Wales Department of Planning is providing funding for this Study is gratefully acknowledged.
NOTE

Throughout this History, the term ‘Illawarra’ is used to refer to the district.

How to Use this History

This history is arranged in the following manner.

The major sections are Contextual Essays such as ‘1.3 Settlement’ or ‘1.5 Housing and Accommodation’. These provide a contextual history of change, development and continuity in the City of Wollongong. All the Contextual Essays are labelled as such to assist the reader.

The Contextual Essays are divided into sub-sections arranged by Theme. These ‘themes’ explain the principal forces of change that have shaped the development of the City of Wollongong and its peoples and created its current form. Such forces leave evidence of past practices, ways of life, technologies, economic and leisure time activities and so on.

To more precisely define what some of these forces were a series of Secondary themes is listed at the end of each theme, often with surviving examples that demonstrate that secondary theme.

Thus the arrangement of this history is:

Contextual Essay

Theme

Secondary theme (with examples)
1.0 Thematic History

1.1 Contextual Essay & Theme – The Natural Landscape

Like all areas, Wollongong is a product of man’s interaction with its geography. There are three broad geomorphic zones in Wollongong – coastal plain, escarpment and plateau. The coastal plain has varying underlying geology creating a variety of landforms. Most of the rock strata of the coastal plain consist of alluvial and recent marine sediments at lower levels and Permian sediments and volcanic rock at higher elevations. The Berkeley Hills north of Lake Illawarra and are an outlying band of Permian volcanic rock. Mangerton Hill is an outcrop of tuffaceous Budgong sandstone. Much of the escarpment is composed of sedimentary material of the Permian and Triassic periods whilst the plateau is of Hawkesbury sandstone. In the northern parts of the area the rivers that drain into the Nepean, namely the Avon, Cordeaux and Cataract have cut incised valleys in the Hawkesbury sandstone.¹

An unusual feature of Illawarra geology is the presence of Glendonites, small crystals about 80-100 mm across found in globular masses with visible prisms. They are believed to form in a cold climate. They are rare on a worldwide basis but are visible around Flagstaff Point. They were first brought to prominence by James D Dana, a US geologist who visited the area with the United States Navy expedition of 1838-42 under Charles Wilkes. Also of interest there is the ‘concentric structure’ weathering patterns in the rock strata at Flagstaff Point.²

Figure 1 Schematic diagram of the topography of the Greater Wollongong area. Source: L Fuller, Wollongong’s Native Trees, second edition, pr Weston, 1982, p 15

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¹ K Mills & J Jakeman, Rainforests of the Illawarra District, Calderwood, Jamberoo, 1995, p 10
² M Hutton, Conservation Study for Belmore Basin Conservation Area, Wollongong, NSW, For Wollongong City Council, June 1997, p 88
The escarpment backing Illawarra rises steeply from the coastal plain. It both hinders access into and exit out of Illawarra. But its steep vegetated slopes with the talus slopes below declining into the flatter coastal plain, its prominent peaks, often clad in cloud, and the sheer walls that occur in places serve to define Illawarra. The escarpment gives Illawarra a very strong sense of place.

Rainfall in the City of Wollongong is very high in comparison to much of the state, due to the abrupt escarpment that backs the city causing rain-bearing clouds to drop much of their moisture. Part of the plain near Lake Illawarra at the widest part of the plain, receives less precipitation due to the more distant escarpment that means far less rainfall. In addition, isolated projections from the escarpment such as Mount Keira and Mount Kembla receive far greater rainfall.

Vegetation on the coastal plain falls into two zones with an intermediate zone in between. From North Wollongong northwards, vegetation is affected by the presence of coal seams. A series of spurs projecting from the escarpment ensure the presence of species more typical of the escarpment such as *Eucalyptus pilularis*, *Eucalyptus botryoides* and *Syncarpia glomulifera*. On flatter areas, the trees were once large eucalypts and *Melaleuca* species. On some flatter areas, trees were often eucalypts with rainforest species as an under storey. On open treed areas, there was originally a ground cover of *Themeda australis* and *Danthonia* species, creating excellent grazing for livestock in the earliest flush of settlement. Odd patches of rainforest can be found along streams. From North Wollongong south to Berkeley the vegetation was mixed with open forest similar that in the northern part but lacking the species from the escarpment that grew on projecting spurs. Mount Drummond possesses a colony of spotted gum that was not found elsewhere in Illawarra. An area at Berkeley possessing volcanically derived soils also retains some patches of rainforest.

On the escarpment, vegetation is a complex mosaic of different types of temperate rainforest or schlerophyll forests. Rainforest is found in deep gullies between spurs, at the rear of benches or terraces on the down slopes and on the talus slope beneath the tops of the escarpment. The schlerophyll forest on the escarpment was different from that on the plain, with tall trees with canopies from 20 to 30 metres tall. Altitude influences eucalypt species along the escarpment. From Stanwell Park and Coalcliff to the north is a zone where the Wollongong type of vegetation merges into that of the Sydney region. Most notably, *Angophora costata*, a notable species in the Sydney area, is found in this transitional zone. The plateau possesses schlerophyll forest of medium height with a medium to dense under storey of eucalyptus or prickly shrubs. Hanging swamps are also found on the plateau usually on areas of deep sandy soil.

Cabbage tree palms were mixed in the rainforest vegetation and were quickly noted by explorers. Painters always included them in their images of early Illawarra as a way of emphasising the exotic nature of the landscape. Cabbage tree palms were dominant in heavy scrub. Settlers cleared the palms by cutting them down. Since they did not burn, they split them to make rough huts whilst their pigs ate the chips from the inside. The tops were edible and were eaten by Aborigines and settlers.

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Introduced species also began to invade the area. Grasses were introduced to provide feed for livestock once the better native grasses had been eaten out. In the 1920s prickly pear grew on shores of Lake Illawarra and children ate the fruit when it was ripe.¹

¹ Secomb, Dapto, np
1.2 Contextual Essay - Occupation by Aboriginal Peoples/Kooris

1.2.1 Theme – Living in harmony with the land

The name ‘Illawarra’, according to one interpretation, means echidna although it has also been interpreted as ‘pleasant place’. The name ‘Wollongong’ refers to the shape of the coast or headland.\(^1\)

Illawarra Aboriginal clans belonged to the Dharawal language group, which refers to the cabbage palm.\(^2\) They have been in Illawarra for at least 30,000 years, though sea level change has obliterated any evidence of earlier occupation. Lower sea levels at the height of the coldest period (15,000-20,000 years Before Present) meant the coastline was 15 kilometres east of its present position at Stanwell Park. When the sea level stabilised at its current position about 6,500 BP, coastal lagoons at Lake Illawarra and Fairy Creek were formed altering the available food sources for the Aboriginal peoples of Illawarra.\(^3\)

The groups occupying Illawarra were of the Wodi Wodi group of the Dharawal, and were known by where they lived on the coast, on the swamps or plateau and inland valleys as either the salt water, bitter water or fresh water people.\(^4\) Like other language groups, the Wodi Wodi lived in, with and through their land as illustrated by the story of Oola-boola-woo, the West Wind. He punished his five lazy daughters by blowing them out to sea on different occasions to create the Five Islands. The last daughter, Geera, sat depressed and sulky on the mountain range until she turned to stone and became Mount Keira.\(^5\)

The sea and other water bodies provided a large part of their diet of fish and shellfish, though they also caught small marsupials and gathered some native tubers and grasses.\(^6\) Lake Illawarra, Tom Thumb Lagoon and Coomaditchy Lagoon were significant sources of food, whilst beaches and rock-pools offered other important nourishment. By using pit traps, snares and spears, they were also able to catch game in the bush. Carefully managed fires were used to create cool burns in the scrub to open up the forest for pasture suitable for grazing game such as wallabies and kangaroos. There is also evidence that they managed the impounding or exit for water from Lake Illawarra to manage their catch of fish or to protect their homes from flooding.\(^7\) Palm leaves were used for shelters and trees and shrubs gave materials for weapons, fibre for twine, dilly bags and nets as well as medicines.

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\(^1\) Hagan & Wells, p 7-9  
\(^2\) Hagan & Wells, p 9  
\(^3\) Australian Museum Business Services, Aboriginal Heritage Study: Illawarra Escarpment, For Wollongong City Council, September 2008, p 33-4  
\(^4\) DECC, Aboriginal People, p 6  
\(^5\) Hagan & Wells, p 11  
\(^6\) Hagan & Wells, p 12  
\(^7\) DECC, Aboriginal People, p 10-3
Large groups gathered near the coast in spring, summer and autumn when fish were more abundant but were more scattered in winter months according to Val Attenbrow. However, Sharon Sullivan has posited that different groups used both zones shifting between them for resources and food. There is evidence that they mainly used open camps but occupied overhangs or caves along the escarpment. Mullet Creek contains a number of open Aboriginal occupation sites. There is ample evidence that they often shifted from one area to another taking advantage of the seasonal abundance of different food sources.

Secondary themes

Country as giver of life

Following songlines/storylines (Five Islands, Mount Keira)

Gathering food

Producing implements

Finding shelter

1.2.2 Theme – Coping with invasion

Aboriginal people guided the earliest Europeans who entered Illawarra, most notably Charles Throsby. Yet, there were already white men there. According to Aboriginals who spoke to Bass and Flinders in 1796 there were some in Illawarra growing their own food. When Governor Lachlan Macquarie visited Illawarra on 15 January 1822, a crowd of about 100 Aboriginals met him near Tom Thumb Lagoon.

Despite the initial pacific relations between the white invaders and Illawarra Aboriginals, they were affected by Governor Lachlan Macquarie’s efforts to protect settlers from the depredations of Aboriginal groups in other areas, principally in the Hawkesbury-Nepean area near Sydney. In April and May 1816, a military detachment was stationed at Red Point (Hill 60) and ‘cleared’ areas of Illawarra and the South Coast.

There is little evidence that there was any marked opposition to the entry of the Europeans with a programme of guerilla warfare. Targeted raids on the settlers’ farms were conducted to collect food. Reprisals did occur and though they were brutal, they appear to have been few. Disputes, fights and even killings occurred between settlers

1 Secomb, Dapto, np
2 DECC, Aboriginal People, p 12
3 Secomb, Dapto, np
4 Australian Museum Business Services, Aboriginal Heritage Study: Illawarra Escarpment, p 45
5 M Organ, A Documentary History of the Illawarra and South Coast Aborigines 1770-1850, Aboriginal Education Unit, Wollongong University, 1990, p 9
6 Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 80
7 Australian Museum Business Services, Aboriginal Heritage Study: Illawarra Escarpment, p 37-8
8 DECC, Aboriginal People, p 18
and Illawarra Aboriginals. Like elsewhere, these incidents were often not recorded but some were such as the threat to burn Thomas Binskin out of his farm and kill him in 1822. Additionally, the introduction of air-borne and water-borne diseases unknown to Illawarra Aborigines reduced their numbers.

A listing of 2 July 1827 of blankets issued to Aboriginals at Illawarra recorded a total of 21 at Five Islands and 35 at Illawarra. It is likely there would have been far larger numbers in the district who were not issued blankets.

The entry of European settlers placed pressure on Aboriginal use of their land and the boundaries between different groups. A notable battle occurred in 1830 at Fairy Meadow between the Bong Bong Dharawal and those of Illawarra over the abduction of a Bong Bong woman by ‘Dr Ellis’. The dead were estimated at 100 of the 1,500 warriors engaged in the battle. The dead were buried on Fairy Creek at ‘the bottom of Townsend’s paddock’. This appears to have been between the two arms of Fairy Creek. Henry Osborne at Marshall Mount was reputed to have treated the local Aboriginal people kindly providing food for them at Christmas. An old settler Alexander Stewart remembered that they were numerous in the area near Tom Thumb Lagoon, Mullet Creek and Lake Illawarra.

Though they were unsuccessful in halting European penetration of their lands, the Kooris had some small successes. In 1835-6, the Aboriginals of Illawarra objected to the cutting down of a large and venerated fig tree where Old Timbery was believed to have been born as well as being the site for ceremonies and birthing along traditional travel routes. As a result, the road that would have caused destruction of the tree was diverted. The tree survived until the 1990s, though daughter trees of the fig tree have since been planted and grow on the site in Figtree Park, near the intersection of O’Briens Road and the Princes Highway.

Traditional lore and ceremonies were passed on despite attempts to fracture Aboriginal customs by the Europeans. What has been claimed to have been the last report of a corroboree was held at New Year 1839-40 including Aborigines from as far away as Newcastle, Brisbane Water and Kiama. On the other hand, a corroboree was also reported to have been held at Unanderra in the 1870s. There is evidence that Sandon Point was a traditional meeting place where the Gandangara from west of the escarpment met and traded with the coastal Dharawal.

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1 M Organ, *A Documentary History of the Illawarra and South Coast Aborigines 1770-1850*, p 93, 127
2 M Organ, *Illawarra and South Coast Aborigines 1770-1900*, AIATS, Woonona, December 1993, p 57
3 M Organ, *A Documentary History of the Illawarra and South Coast Aborigines 1770-1850*, p 157-9
4 M Organ, *Illawarra and South Coast Aborigines*, p 171
5 Secomb, Dapto, np
6 DECC, *Aboriginal People*, p 20
7 Hagan & Wells, p 20-1
8 M Organ, *Illawarra and South Coast Aborigines*, p 380
9 Therin Archaeological Consulting, Sandon Point Aboriginal Heritage Study, Volume 1, Report, For Wollongong City Council, June 2003, p 52
As they have for past generations, Aborigines continued to care for their land and its flora and fauna despite the ravages of the white settlers. When a shooting party left Mr Marr’s house on Mount Keira Road in September 1858, they had three Aboriginals as guides. After the party shot over 30 wallabies and pademelons on and
around Mount Keira, they were persuaded by ‘Joey’ to leave unharmed the last wallaby they had found.¹

Secondary themes

Fighting inter-tribal battles (Battle site, Fairy Creek)

Leading white intruders to the Five Islands (Throsby’s track)

Coping with invasion

Actively resisting the invader

Resisting loss of land and customs (Figtree Park)

Losing country (Hill 60, Port Kembla)

Losing people

1.2.3 Theme – Maintaining a cultural identity

As European settlement covered more of their traditional food gathering areas the Illawarra Dharawal retreated to small creeks and along the shores of water bodies such as Lake Illawarra or Tom Thumb Lagoon that provided food. They also retreated into land less favoured for cultivation by the invaders, such as steeper and more heavily vegetated land along the escarpment. An Aboriginal fishing community grew at Berkeley on Lake Illawarra, in the 1860s that substantially enlarged the number of Aboriginals in Illawarra.² They continued to live on the shore of Tom Thumb Lagoon until 1928 when forced to shift for harbour works for Port Kembla. Here they continued to use traditional food sources such as Coomaditchy Lagoon.³

Reserves were set up for Illawarra Aboriginals. In June 1899, the La Perouse Aboriginal Mission opened a mission at Lake Illawarra. Rejecting proposals to shift them to Port Kembla, in 1900, the Aborigines Protection Board officially notified the creation of an Aboriginal Reserve at the entrance to Lake Illawarra for ‘permissive occupancy’ over 19 acres whilst distribution of blankets and tobacco was already under way at Lake Illawarra.⁴ By the 1890s, King Mickey Johnson had become a noted local figure. After converting to Christianity in 1899, he was the prime mover in having a church built on the reserve. He had previously been presented with a brass chest plate signifying that he was ‘King Mickey Johnson’ at the Wollongong Show in

¹ M Organ, Illawarra and South Coast Aborigines, p 106-7
² Australian Museum Business Services, Aboriginal Heritage Study: Illawarra Escarpment, p 42
³ DECC, Aboriginal People, p 22
⁴ Australian Museum Business Services, Aboriginal Heritage Study: Illawarra Escarpment, p 42; For the area of the reserve, see Parish Map, Parish Wollongong, Co Camden, 1907 edition, Lands Dept, at http://parishmaps.lands.nsw.gov.au, Map id 13807601
1896.\textsuperscript{1} After his death in 1906, William ‘Bill’ Saddler was made ‘King of the Illawarra’ on 24 November 1909.\textsuperscript{2}

Though forced into a position as fringe dwellers at the margins of white society, Illawarra Aboriginals were not restricted to Illawarra. They became part of a statewide network of movement between work in the country, or up and down the coast in fishing or labouring jobs, interspersed with return to their home district, often for Christmas camps near the sea which gave sustenance, life and the opportunity for family to be together on traditional lands such as Hill 60. Strong links were forged with the La Perouse Aboriginal community on the southern shore of Botany Bay in Sydney. These movement patterns allowed Illawarra Aboriginals to survive and escape Aborigines Protection Board control but also created bonds, often by inter-marriage with groups at La Perouse, the Burragorang Valley, Wallaga Lake and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{3} Continuing into the twentieth century and up to the present day, these were valuable links when Aboriginal activism became more overt from the 1930s onwards. The traditional importance of Sandon Point, Coomaditchy Lagoon and Hill 60 was continued by regular family gatherings and occupation into the twentieth century. Thus, these sites have direct links to many Aboriginal people living today up and down the NSW coast.

In 1883, requests for a boat from the Aborigines Protection Board for the Aboriginal group to use seem to have been the basis for a fishing industry developing near Hill 60.\textsuperscript{4} Hill 60, which had a magnificent view up and down the coast allowed them to spot schools of fish. Fish were caught to sell to the local white community and for their own consumption from the early 1880s onwards. Men could also work as coal trimmers or on the wharfs at Port Kembla nearby, whilst women worked as domestic servants. They also took advantage of the opportunity to send their children to Port Kembla Public School.\textsuperscript{5}

However, their occupation of land at Port Kembla was unwelcome to the NSW Public Works Department and there were moves to restrict them to the land at the Reserve at Lake Illawarra, which was not a popular location for them. Most preferred to live near Hill 60.\textsuperscript{6} Various moves were made to shift them away from Port Kembla. Aboriginal occupiers of vacant Crown land near Port Kembla and Lake Illawarra were shifted to other sites in 1914.\textsuperscript{7}

Another danger emerged from white interference in Aboriginal family lives. The 1909 Aborigines Protection Act gave the Aborigines Protection Board power to close reserves as well as to remove Aboriginal children from their families. Resistance became not just a matter of keeping traditions, cultures and bodies alive, but family life, the core of Aboriginal existence alive as well. In 1923, the Port Kembla Golf Club built a golf course on the lower parts of Hill 60. When it was proposed to

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{1} M Dallas, Hill 60, Port Kembla Conservation Management Plan, Volume 1, Report, For Wollongong City Council & Department of Land & Water Conservation, October 2000, p 26
\bibitem{2} Ibid, p 28
\bibitem{3} H Goodall & A Cadvow, Rivers and Resilience: Aboriginal People on Sydney’s Georges River, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2009, p 87-8, 110
\bibitem{4} M Organ, Illawarra and South Coast Aborigines 1770-1900, p 150
\bibitem{5} DECC, Aboriginal People, p 39-40, 46-7
\bibitem{6} Eklund, Steel Town, p 117-8
\bibitem{7} M Organ, Illawarra and South Coast Aborigines, p 228
\end{thebibliography}
expand the course to a full 18 holes in 1929, the residents of Hill 60 gained the support of the Association for the Protection of Native Races and local Labor aldermen. Eventually, the golf club moved to its present site near Primbee.¹

From the 1920s, the Commonwealth Department of Defence wished to move them off Hill 60 since it was a gazetted military reserve. It was not until 1942 that they were compulsorily moved from Hill 60 due to the construction of major defence works on the hill to the Official Camp near Coomaditchy Lagoon, which also accommodated unemployed and other people lacking housing after the 1930s depression.² After the war, once the squatters left, the Aboriginals returned to Coomaditchy.

In March 1962, tenders were called for the construction of six houses to accommodate Aboriginals at Coomaditchy near the ‘Official Camp’, which had no running water, electricity or sewerage. As well as being vacant land the site was claimed to be an Aboriginal burial ground.³ The Coomaditchy Aboriginal Reserve, Shellharbour Road, Warrawong measuring 1 acre 23 perches became officially operational on 29 June 1962.⁴

Suburban development enabled some Aboriginal families to move to other areas such as Warilla, Barrack Heights, Koonawarra and Berkeley by 1976. Since better housing for Aboriginals was slow to be supplied, the growing thrust of land rights campaigns and legislation from the 1970s began to have its impact. Demands were made for the restitution of land that had traditionally been occupied for many years but had only recently been taken from Aboriginal owners. In 1995, a native title claim for Coomaditchy Lagoon was rejected causing widespread dissatisfaction with the process.⁵ Meanwhile, part of Hill 60 has become a recreation reserve, the site of Port Kembla High School and a football oval whilst a sewerage treatment works was sited on Red Point.⁶

By the 1980s, there was a ‘significant’ Aboriginal population at Dapto and Koonawarra.⁷ At the 2006 Census, a total of 3,121 people identified themselves as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background out of a total population of 184,213 for Wollongong City (1.7% of total).

Formation of the Illawarra Local Aboriginal Land Council provided the Aboriginal/Koori community with a stronger voice in local affairs. Two sites have been significant focal points for Aboriginal efforts to maintain contact with their country – Hill 60 at Port Kembla and Sandon Point at Bulli. The campaign to preserve Sandon Point gained a strong focus with the establishment of the Sandon Point Community Picket in March 2001, which seeks to hold back the proposed residential development of the site by Stockland. Declaration of the site as the Sandon Point Aboriginal Place by the Minister for Environment, Bob Debus, under the National

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¹ Eklund, Steel Town, p 122-3
² Eklund, Steel Town, p 125-6
³ M Organ, Illawarra and South Coast Aborigines, p 261
⁵ Eklund, Steel Town, p 129
⁶ M Dallas, Hill 60, Port Kembla Conservation Management Plan, Volume 1, Report, p 43
⁷ Secomb, Dapto, np
Parks and Wildlife Act in February 2007 was a significant achievement. The campaign is continuing. The opening of the Jumbulla Aboriginal Discovery Centre at Bulli Tops on 7 May 2009 established a centre that would raise understanding of the role of Aboriginal/Koori people in Illawarra and Australia as well as greater awareness of their past and culture. Since it is located in a prominent location, even if some passersby do not visit it, Jumbulla will still raise awareness.

**Secondary themes**

- Learning to interact
- Dealing with a controlled environment
- Being forced to assimilate (Lake Illawarra Aboriginal Reserve site)
- Keeping family together
- Acknowledging wrongs committed by the early invaders
- Suffering inequality in employment, housing, education and health
- Working together to protect country (Hill 60; Sandon Point)
- Maintaining an attachment to country (Hill 60; public art)

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1.3 Contextual Essay - Settlement

1.3.1 Theme - Settling Illawarra

Though occupied by the Aboriginals for thousands of years, the ‘discovery’ of Illawarra has usually been dated from 28 April 1770 when Captain James Cook’s *Endeavour* approached the shores of Illawarra at ‘Red Point’ but the crew was unable to land.\(^1\) George Bass and Matthew Flinders came ashore from their boat the *Tom Thumb* near Red Point on 26 March 1796. They located a lagoon they named ‘Tom Thumb’s Lagoon’ which was actually Lake Illawarra.\(^2\) A fishing boat brought survivors of the *Sydney Cove* wreck to Sydney on 17 May 1797. They had traversed Illawarra whilst travelling on foot from Ninety Mile Beach in present day Victoria and found coal. George Bass was later sent to locate the coal, which he found at Coal Cliff.\(^3\)

Settlement came shortly afterwards. There is some evidence that a few people had unofficially visited the Wollongong area in the early 1800s.\(^4\) Possibly as early as 1807, noted bushman Joe Wild was assisting bird collectors to enter the area. The first load of cedar was shipped from Illawarra in 1812.\(^5\)

In 1815, Dr Charles Throsby was reported to have entered the area from the west guided by Aboriginals from Liverpool using an existing Aboriginal trail down Bulli mountain to gain access.\(^6\) He erected a stockyard and hut near what is now the corner of Harbour and Smith Streets, Wollongong.\(^7\) Here he had access to a freshwater lagoon.\(^8\)

Once knowledge of Charles Throsby’s entry into the area became common, other settlers followed. On 11 November 1816, Macquarie ordered that those who had received promises of grants from him should meet at Throsby's stockman’s hut. Late in November 1816, Surveyor-General John Oxley and surveyor James Meehan commenced measuring grants near Lake Illawarra.\(^9\) The earliest grants were made on 24 January 1817 to Richard Brooks, George Johnston, Andrew Allan, Robert Jenkins and David Allan, who did not reside there but ran cattle cared for by their employees.\(^10\) Settlement commenced in the Parish of Kembla west of the present day Wollongong running south to Dapto in 1817. An area of 300 acres was granted to George Molle on 11 September 1817.\(^11\) Macquarie informed the Home government

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5. Hagan & Wells, p 24
6. Hagan & Wells, p 20
8. Rogers, ‘Thematic History’, p 21
on 12 December 1817 of the discovery of new country at ‘Five Islands’ known to the Aborigines as ‘Illawarra’.¹

Charles Throsby Smith arrived in the colony at the request of his uncle, Dr Charles Throsby, in 1819. Hence, it could be argued that it was the first example of ‘chain migration’ to Illawarra, a process that was a significant element of future migration to Illawarra to the present day. He obtained a grant of 300 acres in Illawarra from Macquarie and lived there from 1822.² In 1823, he was directed by Surveyor-General John Oxley to occupy land originally occupied by Charles Throsby and expended much money on it.³ Much of Wollongong is built on that grant.

After the original series of grants in Illawarra were handed out, alienation of land was based on the principle promoted by Commissioner J T Bigge of awarding large area grants to large capitalists or officials to create a plantation society to supply raw materials to Britain. The inability of the poorly resourced and staffed survey department to keep up with settlement meant that many prospective landholders were given ‘promises’ which they then used to claim land once they had scouted out the best areas.⁴ Commentators were highly favourable to the fertility of the area.

Promises of land grants permitted landowners to take up land and place their employees on it to cultivate it or use it for grazing even though their grants were not officially recorded until years later. Many of their employees were assigned convicts. Even as late as 1841, almost 12% of the male and female population consisted of assigned convicts.⁵ On 20 May 1837, 300 acres (Parish Kembla portion 55) was granted to John Stack on a promise of 1825. On 10 May 1841, a grant of 1,000 acres (Portion 7 Parish Wollongong) was issued to R Campbell and Charles Campbell on the basis of a promise to James S Spearing of 1825. It became known as Paulsgrove and then later as the Mount Keira Estate. Spearing occupied Mount Keira house on this land. A grant for another 1,000 acres (Portion 8) promised to him was also issued to the Campbells. A grant of 1,280 acres (Parish Wollongong), later known as Keelogue’s or Gundarun, promised to Gregory Blaxland in 1830 was issued to J H Plunkett on 12 April 1837. A grant of 2,000 acres issued to Jemima Jenkins (Portion 6 Parish Wollongong) on 24 September 1834 on the basis of an 1825 promise was known as Berkeley. By 25 April 1826, when he died on the property, W F Weston was occupying his West Horsley grant (Parish of Kembla). The deed was issued to his two daughters Augusta Brooks and Elizabeth Weston on 13 January 1842.⁶

Settlement had commenced in the Parish of Woonona in 1821 when settlers Cornelius O’Brien, R Lillis, P Lillis, Thomas Trotter, T Brophy and D Guiney took up land. Two large grants were promised in 1827 and 1829 in the Parish of Woonona to John Buckland and another to Miss Harriett Overington (3 March 1827) who married J S Spearing. Her deed was issued to trustees Robert and Charles Campbell.⁷

¹ HRA, I, volume 9, p 713
² 29/1096, Col Sec re Land, Charles Throsby Smith file, SRNSW 2/7972
³ 33/8124, Col Sec re Land, Charles Throsby Smith file, SRNSW 2/7972
⁴ Hagan & Wells, p 26
⁵ Henderson, Early Illawarra, p 136
⁶ Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 86-7
⁷ Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 89
The earliest occupation of land in the Parish of Calderwood dated from 1817.¹ As elsewhere, the official grant deeds came later. George Johnston's grants in the Parish of Calderwood became known as Johnston’s Meadows. By 1828, George Brown who conducted one of the earliest hotels in Wollongong had received land in the Parish of Calderwood and had a man making salt on the beach near Wollongong.²

Henry Osborne received authority to settle and took up occupation of land in the Parish of Calderwood, which he named Marshall Mount after the maiden name of his wife. He built his first house ‘Pumpkin Cottage’ in 1829. In 1839, he commenced a two storey stone and brick building, which was widely regarded as one of the best in Illawarra. There was also a 6-acre orchard and vineyards, with ornamental plantings of English trees.³

Smaller grants catering for men of more modest capital were also measured. Surveyor E J H Knapp was surveying 10 lots at Dapto Creek in 1829 for veterans (Portions 9-10, 27-8, 31-3, 33-7, Parish of Kembla). Huts were built for them. Of those settled there only four remained on the land long enough to receive their grants.⁴ The huts were reported to have two rooms with glass windows with weatherboard fronts and the backs of slab construction. West Dapto Road bisects the grants. The only ones to receive their grants were John Robbins, James Mitchell and John McKelly.⁵ In June 1836, orders were issued to survey the ‘Great Reserve’ in Parish Kembla into portions of up to 100 acres for granting to small holders.⁶

The 1841 Census showed there were 468 males and 296 females in northern Illawarra, 637 males and 294 females in Wollongong, 233 males and 143 females on the small farms around Dapto whilst the Lake Illawarra area had a sizeable population of 588 males and 340 females.⁷ The 1841 census listed 659 houses in Illawarra of which 571 were of wood and 88 of brick.⁸

After the intensive surge of taking up the best land from the 1810s and 1820s, there remained less attractive land on the escarpment and plateau and in rough and heavily vegetated areas. Some of this land was taken up after the 1861 Crown Land Alienation Act. A total of 24 selectors were reported to have taken up 39 selections totalling 2,708 acres in the Bulli area.⁹ Early editions of parish maps show the spread of such selections along the escarpment.¹⁰

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¹ Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 148
² Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 149
³ Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 149-50
⁴ Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 87
⁵ Secomb, Dapto, np
⁶ Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 87
⁷ K & T Henderson, Early Illawarra - People, houses, life, History Project Inc, Canberra, 1983, p 19, 24
⁸ Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 273
⁹ Bayley, Bulli, p 30
¹⁰ Parish Maps, County Camden, Parish Calderwood, 1892; Cordeaux, 1885; Wonona/Woonona, 1887; County Cumberland, Parish Southend, 1903
Secondary themes

Leading white European settlers to the Five Islands District (Throsby’s track)

Occupying large grants (Marshall Mount)

Using assigned convict labour

Clearing land

Finding transport routes down the escarpment

Experimenting with crops

1.3.2 Theme - Establishing a regional centre at Wollongong

The establishment of a garrison on 10 July 1826 under Captain Bishop at Wollongong as the local administrative centre was the foundation of Wollongong emerging as the regional centre. Originally, the garrison was located at Red Point near Port Kembla but later moved. In 1826, Surveyor-General John Oxley reported that land had been set aside for a town at Wollongong. An order was issued in 1829 for a survey of the natural features as the prelude to laying out a town. Surveyor E J H Knapp was sent to Illawarra to measure land for veterans and to measure land for a township at Wollongong.

The nucleus of a settlement was emerging. In 1827, permission was given to a shoemaker to erect a hut on the beach but he left when C T Smith blocked access to the water supply. The completion of the military barracks in 1830 served to enhance the regional role of the town even though the barracks was only occupied briefly before being taken over in 1832 by the mounted police. Charles Throsby Smith built a brick bond store about 1829, believed to be the first commercial building in Illawarra and a distribution point for supplies across the district. It later became the Black Swan Hotel and Brighton Hotel. George Brown erected an inn in 1830 on part of Edward Bourke’s grant. Instructions were issued on 28 June 1833 to survey an acre for shipbuilder John Cunningham for a shipyard on the harbour where he built a cottage and commenced shipbuilding.

Surveyor Elliott sent in his plan of the town of Wollongong on 2 May 1833. Governor Gipps approved it on 11 November 1834 and sites for public buildings would be laid out. A contract for a courthouse was approved in 1834. A small area

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1 Hagan & Wells, p 31
2 Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 100-1
3 Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 84
4 Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 103-4
5 M Hutton, Conservation Study for Belmore Basin Conservation Area, Wollongong, NSW, June 1997, For Wollongong City Council, p 74
6 Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 103
7 Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 101-2
at the eastern end of Crown Street was in use as a Catholic cemetery, where burials appear to have already commenced. The town was set up on government land along Crown Street and bounded by Harbour, Stewart and Church Streets. Nearby private grants were absorbed into the town layout. On 20 December 1835, Charles Throsby Smith, of Wollongong, received his grant of 300 acres called ‘Bustle Farm’. Wollongong was extended onto his land. On 8 January 1840, Edward Bourke was granted 40 acres (Portion 12) and the town was also partially built on this.

Meanwhile the budding town grew. In 1838, the post office shifted from the magistrate’s office to E Palmer’s store. Mr Mackie established a brewery about 1838. A steam mill owned by Palmer commenced operation in July 1840. Previously, a water mill and windmill had ground grain. In 1841, there were two inns - the Governor Bourke and the Wollongong.

The 1840s depression caused a marked decline in the town, which had been fuelled as much by speculative investment in land as by any realistic assessment of its prospects. Many houses were deserted. G C Mundy estimated the town had 120 houses and 500-600 people in 1849. In 1855, the town consisted of a single main street with scattered development on side streets. The brick National School (on the site of the later Town Hall) was a notable building. A water supply was set up from a pond or lagoon with a trough for cattle on the market square in 1858.

Public buildings were constructed to serve a wider district as well as the town. On 1 February 1858, the first sitting of magistrates was held in the new courthouse in Cliff Street facing Wollongong Harbour. Contractor McBeath gained the contract to build a new gaol beside the courthouse in April 1859. A new School of Arts in Smith Street erected by George Osborne was completed in May 1861. The telegraph line to Sydney commenced operation from a temporary station in Market Street in August 1862. A new Public School building was completed on the Wollongong Public School site in 1884. A new courthouse was built for £12,000 in 1885 in Market Street. A Town Hall was completed on the site of the former National School in 1887.

Commercial functions and facilities were enhanced as the town grew in importance. A Savings Bank was operating by 1856. A branch of the Commercial Bank opened in March 1859. The existing agency of the English Scottish and Australian Bank was elevated to branch status in July 1859. The Commercial Banking Co completed a large stone building costing £4,000 in 1879.

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1 Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 104
2 Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 100
3 Rogers, ‘Thematic History’, p 23
4 Grants, volume 43 no 20, LPMA
5 Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 85
7 Hagan & Wells, p 36
8 Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 106-7
9 Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 130
10 Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 130-1
11 Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 133
12 Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 130
13 Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 131
14 Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 133
Leisure activities were not neglected. On 13 July 1861, the Keira theatre opened with ‘Ravens of Orleans’ with an audience of 200.\(^1\) The second Agricultural and Horticultural Society was formed in 1882 and a pavilion was erected in 1884.\(^2\)

Originally, the harbour had tended to be the focus for administrative activities but as Crown and Market Streets grew in importance those functions began to be concentrated there. The opening of the railway station further west caused the commercial centre to shift towards it away from the ocean end of Crown Street towards the west. Landowners also took advantage of the opportunity to sell.

For example, on 10 November 1888, Kenny’s Estate First Subdivision facing Atchison Street was offered at auction.\(^3\) It was followed on 13 October 1889 by a clearance sale of Kenny’s Estate lots facing Atchison and Kenny Streets.\(^4\)

**Secondary themes**

- Establishing administrative services (Former Wollongong Courthouse and former Customs House, Cliff Road)
- Creating a working harbour (Wollongong Harbour)
- Using convict labour
- Setting up shops and services (Brighton Hotel site)

### 1.3.3 Theme - Subdividing the large rural estates

Rural industry in Illawarra went through three phases. The initial phase was grazing, largely of cattle due to the dampness of the climate though J S Spearing of Paulsgrove had 750 sheep on his property in 1832. In the 1830s and 1840s, Illawarra became an agricultural area producing market garden and grain crops such as wheat, maize and potatoes. From the 1840s onwards, dairying increased in importance.\(^5\)

The drought and rust outbreaks of the 1860s were major factors influencing farmers to get out of wheat growing and into dairying. From the 1840s, clover, mainly white clover, was introduced as feed for dairy cattle, and native trefoil was also introduced.\(^6\)

Transportation of convicts ceased in 1840 so landholders no longer had access to a supply of cheap labour to clear their properties. Clearing leases were brought into play to have land cleared relatively cheaply. Thus from the 1840s onwards, large grants were subdivided for sale to smaller farmers and larger owners also used clearing leases.\(^7\) For example, a grant of 2,000 acres was issued to Andrew Lang and Gerard

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\(^1\) Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 131
\(^2\) Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 133
\(^3\) Wollongong Subdivision Plans, ML ZTP: W32/65
\(^4\) Wollongong Subdivision Plans, ML ZTP: W32/41
\(^5\) Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 274-6
\(^6\) Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 276-7
\(^7\) Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 278
Gerard on 3 March 1840 on the basis of a promise of 1829 to J D Wylie and was known as Kembla Grange. On 26 May 1840, Lang subdivided part of the Kembla Grange grant into 34 farms of 10 to 20 acres.\(^1\) From then onwards, the high concentration of convicts in the population declined as free immigrants entered the district. However, Dapto remained as an area with a large population of Australian born and with a higher percentage of Roman Catholics in the population of smallholders.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 88  
\(^2\) Hagan & Wells, p 32
Secondary themes

Clearing land

Farming grains and vegetables

Milling grain
1.3.4 Theme - Developing a dairy industry

Dairying was the mainstay of small farmers but it took time to take hold. In 1879, J and T Wilson from Victoria opened a cheese factory in Brown's old mill at Dapto but butter proved to be more profitable for the farmers. Factors which promoted the success of dairying included the introduction of refrigeration using the Mort-Nicolle system; the use of the factory system to manufacture butter; the introduction of the cream separator; the formation of co-operative societies to market and then manufacture dairy products; and lastly the extension of the railway to Illawarra making access to market much easier.¹

In 1881, farmers at Wollongong and elsewhere formed the South Coast and West Camden Co-operative Society to market dairy produce from the South Coast free of commercial agents. It became the Farmers Co-operative Society in 1898. When it foundered in 1900, the Coastal Farmers Co-operative Company took over.²

After the success of the Kiama Pioneer butter factory, other farmers formed similar co-operatives. There was one at Unanderra in 1887 and another at Dapto in 1888. In 1898, they combined to create the Illawarra Central Dairy Factory based at Albion Park and the smaller factories closed. Wollongong and Kiama dairy farmers formed the Dairy Farmers Co-operative Milk Company in 1900 to sell fresh milk.³ After World War One, dairy production remained stable but the number of farms declined as holdings were amalgamated into larger more workable units.⁴

Men such as Henry Osborne of Marshall Mount and Evan Evans of Penrose used imported cattle to improve the quality of dairy herds. Jersey cows were popular for their rich milk production. The development of the Illawarra Shorthorn breed of cattle was a major advance in the quality of dairy herds.⁵

Dairy farming was based on the use of unpaid family labour to obtain a marginal return. Government control of production conditions became ever stricter. In 1901, the Dairies Supervision Act placed strict standards on hygiene and required dairies to be registered as well as specifying standards for buildings. Government support in the twentieth century ensured that butter production continued. In 1925, the Federal Nationalist-Country Party government placed a basic price on butter with the Paterson scheme excluding foreign butter and levying consumers to fund exports.⁶ A joint Federal-State scheme replaced it in 1934. When the Lang Labor government repealed the failed Bavin government’s 1929 Metropolitan Milk Act with a new Milk Act in 1931, it set up a milk marketing scheme for fresh milk sent to Sydney and established the Milk Board.⁷

¹ Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 279
² Hagan & Wells, p 41
³ Hagan & Wells, p 41
⁴ Hagan & Wells, p 55
⁵ HLA- Envirosciences Pty Ltd, Non-Indigenous Heritage Study West Dapto Release Area, New South Wales, Feb 2006, For Wollongong City Council, p 15
⁶ A Cousins, Garden of New South Wales, p 127-9
⁷ Hagan & Wells, p 53
In the early days, production of milk products such as butter and cheese was a farm-based enterprise, needing specialised buildings on the farm such as cool cream rooms and places to store the finished product until it could be sent to market. In later years once the co-operatives were in full swing, another set of buildings were needed. In the Milk Board era, strict sanitary rules controlling buildings on the farm were major influences on the layout and construction of dairy farms. Hence, a stronger emphasis was placed on concrete buildings such as milking sheds and silos able to withstand constant washing down without harbouring grime. Out in the paddocks, swamps were drained or filled, unwanted trees were cut down or ringbarked and grasses that promoted milk production were planted, all divided by fences of post and rail and later of steel.

The layout of such farms can be seen in a plan of William Harris’ ‘Stream Hill’ property in 1898.

**Secondary themes**

- Raising dairy cattle
- Breeding improved dairy cattle
- Improving pastures
- Operating farms as dairy complexes (Marshall Mount; Horsley, Bong Bong Road, West Dapto)
- Forming co-operative societies
- Processing dairy products
- Creating a dairying landscape
Figure 5 The 'Stream Hill' property owned by William Harris mapped by surveyors MacCabe and Owen in May 1898 showed the outbuildings including the cow bails. Source: Illawarra Historical Society Map collection
1.3.5 Theme - Opening coal mines on the escarpment

Good quality easily worked coking coal was available in seams on the coast or accessible by shaft or adit down the escarpment close to water transport. In many places, coal seams were exposed on the escarpment. The Upper seams were the Bulli, Bellambi and Wongawilli seams. These had the best coal and were the seams mostly worked particularly the Bulli and Wongawilli seams. They were also mined at other places such as Appin, Lithgow and the Burragorang valley. The Lower seams were not normally mined.

Due to its gassy nature, there were technical problems in mining the seams, inspiring solutions such as venting or using the gas released from the seams. In the most extreme cases, a spark or flame caused explosions. Additionally, there were often problems with shipping due to the open nature of the coast. Though known since 1797, there was little opportunity to develop the seams due to the monopoly the Australian Agricultural Company held on coal production for its Newcastle mines.

In 1848, the Australian Agricultural Company monopoly was ended by parliament so James Shoobert took the opportunity to open a small mine at Mount Keira in 1849. On 27 August 1849, the first load of coal from his mine opened on Portion 114, Parish of Woonona was produced at Mount Keira but production was spasmodic. A large procession led by a brass band accompanied the ox carts down to the jetty where the coal was loaded.

Thomas Hale opened another mine at Bellambi, which was shipping coal on 17 December 1857. A jetty was being built at Bellambi and a tramway was laid for the mine to the Bulli Road. Construction of a tramway from Hale's mine to Bellambi commenced on 8 August 1858. A relatively large ship, the Tiger entered Bellambi harbour for the first time in 1858 to load coal. The Bellambi jetty was enlarged by seventy feet to a total length of 570 feet in 1859.

Opening of mines along the escarpment coupled with construction of inclined ways to the plain linked to tramways to the shipping points and jetties created a distinctive landscape. The tramways running east-west to the coast bisecting the main road and all communications which ran north-south were a dominant feature. In March 1859, E O Moriarty, Engineer-in-Chief of the Harbours and Rivers Branch of the NSW Department of Public Works drew a sketch plan to illustrate a proposal to provide a harbour at Bulli, which showed the coal pits in the district.

The first load of coal was delivered to Wollongong Harbour from the mine at Mount Pleasant operated by Lahiff and Fawcett on land owned by Plunkett in July 1861. By 1862, their interest had been transferred to James and William Byrnes when the Illawarra Coal Company was formed. A Bill to allow construction of the tramway from Mount Pleasant to Wollongong Harbour was presented in Parliament in

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1 Hagan & Wells, p 35
2 M Hutton, Conservation Study for Belmore Basin Conservation Area, Wollongong, NSW, June 1997, For Wollongong City Council, p 10
3 Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 284-7
4 Rogers, ‘Thematic History’, p 38
5 Lds&PW59/1030, SRNSW 5/3599
September 1862. By December 1862, work had advanced enough to send loaded skips to the wharf. By 1871, coal from Illawarra was being shipped to the San Francisco Rolling Mill Co and to Shanghai.¹

**Figure 6 E O Moriarty's sketch of March 1859 showing the coal pits operating.**

**Source:** Lds&PW59/1030, SRNSW 5/3599

In November 1863, the Bellambi and Woonona Coal Mines were advertised for sale in the bankrupt estate of Thomas Hale and John McMullen & Co. The mine was on Hugh Dixon’s grant (Portion 133, Parish of Woonona) with a 21-year lease dated from 1 October 1858. There were also fifteen miners' cottages let at 10 shillings per week on the land.² In 1888, work commenced on the Woonona Old Tunnel originally opened by Thomas Hale. A new jetty was completed in 1889 and a tramway three miles long was opened by a new company called the Bellambi Coal Co, which leased 779 acres from the Osborne Estate.³

The North Bulli Coal and Iron Company commenced work in 1876 with a tunnel near Bulli but it was some years before the mine was in full operation.⁴ In 1879, there were four mines including two at Mount Keira, one at Bulli and one at Coalcliff. A total of 754 men were employed as miners in 1880, consisting of 331 at Bulli, 138 at Coalcliff, 136 at Mt Keira and 136 at Mount Pleasant.⁵

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¹ Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 291
² Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 290: RPA 3015 shows that Thomas Hale had purchased most of these lands and only sold them after his bankruptcy.
³ Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 295
⁴ Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 292
⁵ Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 293
Booming conditions from the 1870s to the 1890s and strong demand for coal ensured the opening of a number of collieries in Illawarra. By the 1880s and 1890s, the district was split just south of Wollongong. To the north, coal mining was the major economic activity but not the only one. To the south it remained dairying country with some coal mining.

The Mount Kembla Coal and Oil Company had built a jetty at Port Kembla in 1883 and in 1887 the Southern Oil Company had built another. The greater depth alongside these jetties allowed larger vessels to load coal and effectively ended Wollongong’s role as a major coal export. In 1915 the NSW Department of Public Works built a coal jetty at Port Kembla known as No 1 Jetty.

Over-speculation in new mines coupled with over-production elsewhere in Australia and the world meant an oversupply of coal drove prices and workers’ wages down. By the 1890s, when combined with the general economic depression the situation had a severe impact on workers’ living conditions.

Mine disasters included two of Australia’s worst – the methane explosions at the Bulli colliery in 1887 and at Mount Kembla in 1902. The explosion at Bulli coalmine on 23 March 1887 killed 81. A memorial was erected. The Mount Kembla explosion of 31 July 1902 killed 94 miners and two rescuers. Until the Victorian bushfires of 2009, its was greatest loss of life in an Australian peacetime disaster.

Coalmines began to consolidate operations in the early 1900s by closing smaller pits and jetties and shifting to rail transport of coal to Port Kembla. Electric coal cutting machines were introduced at South Bulli in 1903 enabling further cost cutting. BHP commenced using mechanical coal cutters at its Wongawilli and Mount Keira mines in 1938. Though technological advances such as these made mines more efficient, some mines such as Mount Kembla were still using pit ponies as late as the 1950s and building stabling for them.

Though there was less demand for labour, conditions for miners improved as much from the demands of a unionised workforce as from legislative requirements. In August 1918, the first mine bathhouse allowing miners to clean themselves before leaving for home was established at Coalcliff. A Mines Rescue station was set up at Princes Highway, Bellambi in 1927.

New mines were developed at Avondale and Mount Kembla-Nebo after World War Two. The major demand for coal was from the steelworks plus the need for hard coking coal from Japan. In 1946 BHP commenced its Nebo colliery.

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1 Hagan & Wells, p 43
2 Hagan & Wells, p 45-6
3 Hagan & Wells, p 49
4 Hagan & Wells, p 51
5 Bayley, Bulli, p 12-14
6 Rogers, ‘Thematic History’, p 49
7 Hagan & Wells, p 68
8 Bayley, Bulli, p 21
9 Bayley, Bulli, p 20
10 Secomb, Dapto, np
11 Rogers, ‘Thematic History’, p 57
Huntley colliery was operating to supply Tallawarra power station.\(^2\) By the 1970s, major companies such as Conzinc Riotinto, Shell and Clutha were concentrating on coal exports.\(^3\)

The coalescing of the separate mining villages into a single conurbation focussed on Wollongong affected the lifestyles and social character of the former mining villages. Once coal in the eastern parts of leases was mined out, pitheads shifted west of the escarpment, so miners were no longer tied to the pithead, whilst the increasing ownership of cars enabled them to be more residentially mobile.\(^4\) New mines opened at Appin and the Burragorang valley and in the 1970s at Cordeaux, Tower and West Cliff.

The background and development of a sample of coalmines are dealt with below.

### 1.3.5.1 Mount Keira Colliery

James Shoobert opened a small mine at Mount Keira in 1848 into what was later known as No 3 seam.\(^5\) On 27 August 1849, the first load of coal from his mine (Portion 114, Parish of Woonona) was produced at Mount Keira but production was spasmodic.\(^6\) The first load of coal was taken by ox cart to Wollongong Harbour in a grand procession with a band in 1849. In 1850, a second mine named the Albert Mine was opened to the seam.\(^7\)

The property was sold to Henry Osborne in 1856. Henry Osborne and William Robson opened up the No 1 seam higher up the escarpment in 1857 and it became known as the Osborne Wallsend (Mt Keira) Colliery.\(^8\) The Osborne Wallsend Coal Mining Co was formed in 1858 and was later established by a deed of settlement in July 1861.\(^9\) Robson and Osborne decided to build a tramway to shift coal to Wollongong Harbour. William Robson began a local campaign to pressure the government to undertake improvements in the port at Wollongong.\(^10\) On 11 November 1859, an incline initially served by skips commenced taking coal to depot.\(^11\) In May 1861 the Mount Keira Tramway served by horse-drawn trucks opened giving better access to Wollongong Harbour.\(^12\) As result of pressure and lobbying, work commenced on the construction of a basin extension to Wollongong Harbour, which was opened by the Governor’s wife naming it Belmore Basin, which

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\(^1\) Hagan & Wells, p 68  
\(^2\) Secomb, Dapto, np  
\(^3\) Hagan & Wells, p 75  
\(^4\) Rogers, ‘Thematic History’, p 60  
\(^6\) Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 284  
\(^7\) G Mould, ‘Brief History of the Mount Keira Tramline’, p 84  
\(^8\) OHM Consultants, Strategic Management Plan for Historic Coal Mining Sites of the Illawarra, 2006, For Wollongong City Council and Dept of Primary Industries, Mineral Resources Division, Kemira listing sheet  
\(^9\) Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 286  
\(^10\) Hagan & Wells, p 38  
\(^11\) G Mould, ‘Brief History of the Mount Keira Tramline’, p 86  
\(^12\) G Mould, ‘Brief History of the Mount Keira Tramline’, p 88
opened with three coal staiths on 6 October 1868.

The Mount Keira mine began to haul coal to port by locomotive in 1878 replacing horse drawn skips.\(^1\) The Mount Keira Mine was offered for sale in 1888.\(^2\) In 1899, Ebenezer Vickery and Sons bought the Osborne Wallsend Mine.\(^3\)

### 1.3.5.2 Coalcliff Colliery

After the seam at Coal Cliff was mined in a small way, the property was bought by a consortium led by Alexander Stuart, which formed the Coal Cliff Mining Company in 1877. Thomas Hale, the original owner of Bellambi Colliery developed their colliery. An ocean jetty 500 feet long was built. A rough pathway down the cliff face gave access for miners to the adit.\(^4\)

A timber slide was built in April 1877 providing access to the mine.\(^5\) The first shipment of coal from the jetty plus an official opening occurred on 11 January 1878.\(^6\)

A ventilation adit was added and another ventilation shaft was built to the level of the present Lawrence Hargrave Drive. In 1899 that shaft collapsed and a steam driven ventilation fan was provided. Problems with geology and shipping by sea made the mine a poor financial proposition. In 1890, the partners formed the Coal Cliff Coal and Land Company Ltd to take over the colliery.\(^7\)

### 1.3.5.3 Mount Kembla Mine

A company was formed to mine coal at Mount Kembla in 1878 near the old Pioneer Kerosene Works, which operated the first shale oil works in Australia until 1877. Building of a railway to Port Kembla plus a jetty commenced in 1880. Opening the seam began in March 1882.\(^8\) A new furnace shaft and chimney was built in 1887 with a second furnace shaft added in 1891.\(^9\)

A major mine disaster occurred at this mine on 31 July 1902 when an explosion and

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\(^1\) G Mould, ‘Brief History of the Mount Keira Tramline’, p 89
\(^2\) Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 295
\(^3\) OHM Consultants, Strategic Management Plan for Historic Coal Mining Sites of the Illawarra, 2006, For Wollongong City Council and Dept of Primary Industries, Mineral Resources Division, Kemira listing sheet
\(^4\) OHM Consultants, Strategic Management Plan for Historic Coal Mining Sites of the Illawarra, 2006, For Wollongong City Council and Dept of Primary Industries, Mineral Resources Division, Coalcliff listing sheet
\(^5\) Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 292
\(^6\) Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 292
\(^7\) OHM Consultants, Strategic Management Plan for Historic Coal Mining Sites of the Illawarra, 2006, For Wollongong City Council and Dept of Primary Industries, Mineral Resources Division, Coalcliff listing sheet
\(^8\) Jervis, ‘Illawarra’, p 294
\(^9\) OHM Consultants, Strategic Management Plan for Historic Coal Mining Sites of the Illawarra, 2006, For Wollongong City Council and Dept of Primary Industries, Mineral Resources Division, Mount Kembla listing sheet
gas fumes killed 94 miners and two rescuers. Until the 2009 Victorian bushfires, it was the worst peacetime disaster in Australia with the greatest loss of life. It remains the greatest workplace disaster. The impact on the community was great and the event is commemorated annually. A small museum has been set up at Mount Kembla. The Mount Kembla Collieries Ltd bought the mine in 1913. On 1 July 1946, Australian Iron and Steel bought the colliery and the railway line. The mine ceased operating in 1970.¹

1.3.5.4 Wongawilli

In 1913, Alexander Lang acquired Mineral Lease (Coal & Shale) No 321 for MP6 registered in the Department of Mines on 22 December 1913 but he does not appear to have had enough capital to fully utilise the mine. On 18 December 1916, Wongawilli Colliery was established by G & C Hoskins Iron & Steel to supply coking coal for its furnaces.² Hoskins enlargement of the mine ensured the return of men to the Dapto area that had left after the smelter shut down or who had gone to war.³ By April 1918, Hoskins Iron and Steel was sending 1,600 tons of coke per month to Lithgow from its coke ovens at Wongawilli.⁴

During the 1920s and 1930s, many miners established homes on Bankbook Hill near the mine that were later shifted to Wongawilli. About 20 substandard houses were reported to be in Wongawilli by the 1930s.⁵ A subdivision plan of 1936 of lots along Wongawilli Road near the mine showed cottages on a number of lots being sold by Australian Iron and Steel.⁶

**Secondary themes**

Finding coal on the escarpment (Coalcliff Cliff mine)

Digging coal from easily accessed places on the escarpment

Transporting coal to coastal jetties by road (Route of first load of coal from Mount Keira mine)

Transporting coal to coastal jetties by private tramway or railway (Bulli tramway bridge; Mount Pleasant and Mount Keira tramways)

Shipping coal to market by sea

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¹ OHM Consultants, Strategic Management Plan for Historic Coal Mining Sites of the Illawarra, 2006, For Wollongong City Council and Dept of Primary Industries, Mineral Resources Division, Mount Kembla listing sheet
² OHM Consultants, Strategic Management Plan for Historic Coal Mining Sites of the Illawarra, 2006, For Wollongong City Council and Dept of Primary Industries, Mineral Resources Division, Wongawilli Colliery listing sheet
³ Secomb, Dapto, np
⁴ Hagan & Wells, p 59
⁵ Secomb, Dapto, np
⁶ DP 18020