



The Berry & District Historical Society Inc

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The Shoalhaven Chronograph with Berry Newsletter

April - July 2021

In this issue:

- Dates for your Diary
- The Bum Tree
- Berry and North Sydney

Dates for your Diary

22nd September

2.00pm

AGM (to be confirmed)

The Bum Tree



The Bum Tree was a large, old growth Blackbutt tree (*Eucalyptus pilularis*), situated on the road verge of Gerroa Road, just north of its intersection with Beach Road, Gerroa. The tree became a well-known local landmark due to its large size, majestic crown, and an unusual prominent growth near the base of its trunk which resembled buttocks.

The height of the Bum Tree was approximately 35 m. At approx. 1.37m high, the diameter of the tree was 1.7 m, and the circumference 5.34 m. At ground level, the trunk had a maximum diameter of 2.20 m (minimum diameter was 2.00 m) and a circumference of 6.75 m.

It was an important habitat tree for local arboreal mammals, especially the listed endangered local population of Greater Gliders (*Petauroides volons*) dependant of tree hollows.

In March 2014, despite considerable opposition and alternative solutions, the Bum Tree was removed by the Shoalhaven City Council (SCC) as part of a program of vegetation clearance works with the objective of increasing the safety of the Gerroa and Crooked River Roads. This work involved the construction of wider road shoulders and was funded by the Nation Building Black Spot Program administered by the NSW Roads and Maritime Services.

Salvage



Berry Landcare and others approached Shoalhaven City Council to fund the salvage of sections of the trunk. The outcome of this salvage project, an involvement of Berry Landcare, SCC, the University of Wollongong and Berry Museum will benefit environmental studies now and into the future. The project

- preserved a cross section of the trunk for analysis and as a resource and reference for future scientific research
- determined the age and growth rate of the tree by dendrochronological analysis and radiocarbon dating
- contributes information towards future assessment and management of native road-side corridor and vegetation
- presented the cross section together with the interpretation of the results of the analysis to the Berry Museum
- and presented the section that included the burlled trunk for display at the Shoalhaven Heads Pool Complex

A second cross section was obtained as a resource and reference for future scientific research at the School of Earth, Atmosphere and Life Sciences, University of Wollongong

Importance of this Tree

The tree was highly significant to the Shoalhaven region.

It grew within the Berry Wildlife Corridor, a patchwork remnant native vegetation connecting the Barren Grounds Native Reserve on the escarpment and Seven Mile Beach National Park on the coast.

This habitat is identified by the Illawarra Shoalhaven Region of the Great Eastern Ranges initiative as a priority focus corridor for biodiversity preservation.

Given the continuing habitat loss and species extinction, exacerbated by climate change, such corridors are critical to the future viability of flora and fauna populations, and particularly their ability to respond to extreme events and adapt to changing climate. Many Shoalhaven planning and strategy documents stress the need to conserve old growth trees and the habitat values of road-side vegetation.

The Bum Tree sample includes a healed scar (about 200 years before its death) that is possibly from a lightning strike, as it is long and narrow. The cross section reveals at least 14 growth rings across a 106mm scar width. This reveals an annual regrowth rate of 7.5mm which is useful reference for archaeologists interpreting the age of the man-made scars on trees in coastal Shoalhaven contexts.

Scientific examination of the slice in the Museum

- provides a record for future research and important reference dates

- **assists future decisions in understanding and managing old growth trees, existing local vegetation communities, as well as others from comparable landforms and microclimates**
- **reflects the history of the original forest resources and the continuing importance of trees and forest remnants**
- **emphasises the importance of native reserves critical for the ecological health and character of the Shoalhaven**
- **provides a legacy for education**
- **and engenders a greater awareness to ensure we conserve our ancient trees alive**

Dating the Tree

A combination of tree-ring counting and radiocarbon-dated core samples was used to determine the age of the tree, which revealed it probably germinated sometime between 1626 and 1680, making it between 334 and 388 years old when it was felled.

Dendrochronology – the dating of events using characteristic patterns of annual growth rings in timber – is based on the premise the fibre growth within a tree trunk consistently varies in colour and density over the seasonal course of the year. Consequently, a year of growth is evident in cross section, as a light to dark ring and counting the rings theoretically provides the number of years of growth.

However, some trees may not provide a ring in a particular year, or may create multiple rings, and the tree ring boundaries can be indistinct. Estimating average ring width can assist in tallying ring numbers, particularly when the oldest (innermost) rings may be lost due to rot and borer attack.

Radiocarbon Dating is a method that provides a 'radiocarbon age' by measuring the decay of carbon isotopes within the fibre of individual rings. It is based on the principle that all living things contain carbon in a consistent ratio of 3 isotopes. This ratio gradually changes after death according to a known rate of radioactive decay.

The radiocarbon dates provide a cross-reference to the tree ring record, such that both techniques combine to provide a more reliable result.

The dendrochronological analysis was performed by Dr Matthew Brookhouse of the Fenner School of Environment and Society, Australian National University, Canberra.



For further information please ask about the Berry Museum booklet: The Bum Tree Report by Kelvin Officer

With thanks to Kelvin Officer and Jenny Clapham

BERRY AND NORTH SYDNEY

Some Berry locals may have noticed familiar sounding area and street names in North Sydney. Actually there is quite a connection between Berry and this area of Sydney that goes back to about 1819.

Scottish born surgeon and merchant, Alexander Berry, met Edward Wollstonecraft in 1812 whilst travelling from Lisbon to Cadiz and they formed a business partnership, sailing to Sydney in 1819.

Setting up as merchants in George Street in The Rocks area of Sydney, they applied for land after delivering several profitable cargoes of merchandise to the colony. They were promised a land grant from Governor Lachlan Macquarie which was the last of the large North Sydney grants given away before 1831, when the colonial Governors stopped dispensing 'free' land to those deemed worthy and productive.

Wollstonecraft took some 500 of the 2000 acres promised on the north side of Sydney Harbour, building on one section a small cottage called 'Crows Nest' on account of its elevated and commanding position. It was from this that the later suburb of Crows Nest gained its name. Later the suburb of Wollstonecraft was named after Edward, he being the first settler to receive a land grant in the area.

Berry and Wollstonecraft were also given a land grant of 10,000 acres and 100 convicts by Governor Brisbane to establish a settlement in the south coast area of the Shoalhaven, the area that we know so well today.

Thanks to valuable crops such as tobacco and cedar timber this Shoalhaven estate, during its early years, was the source of much produce sold in the George Street store. In 1827 Alexander married Elizabeth Wollstonecraft, Edward's sister, and while Wollstonecraft supervised their George Street business, Berry settled and worked on the Shoalhaven estate.

Interestingly, in the 1830's Berry and Wollstonecraft organised the first attempt to effect the Argyle Cut in Sydney. A more direct route between the two main wharf areas of Port Jackson was sought, to allow for goods such as wool to be transferred from the coastal vessels that used Darling Harbour, to the overseas bound vessels that tied up at Circular Quay. Alexander sought permission to make a cutting and establish a toll road as a commercial venture, however Governor Bourke determined that the ambitious project was to be undertaken by the Colonial Government rather than privately. Who knows.....we could have had an Alexander Toll Road or The Alexander Cut.



Crows Nest Cottage c1820's

Wollstonecraft died in 1832 and his estate passed to his sister Elizabeth and she and her husband, Alexander renovated Crows Nest Cottage before building the larger and more conveniently located 'Crows Nest House'. Elizabeth died before its completion and Alexander lived there with his servants from 1850 until his death in 1873. His cousin, Sir John Hay inherited it and when he dies in 1909, the house was occupied by Lady Hay until her death.



Crows Nest House c 1880

In 1933, Crows Nest House was demolished as part of the extension of Crows Nest Road to the Pacific Highway. Berry's original iron gates and a substantial section of the iron and stone fencing survive as part of North Sydney Demonstration School, originally called the Lady Hay Public School. Interestingly the wrought iron gates of the surviving fence feature a nest of crows.

Various Streets were named after the business partners and their families- Berry & Edward Streets in North Sydney and Hayberry, David and Alexander Streets in Crows Nest.

Interestingly, in more recent days, the Alexander Apartments, a 115 metre residential skyscraper in central North Sydney were built, named after our Scottish businessman.

There are three other areas that are interesting.

The first is the Berry Island Reserve. This area is part of a land grant that Alexander received next to Wollstonecraft's. It included the island and early in the piece Wollstonecraft attached the small island to the mainland by constructing a stone causeway over the mud flats.

It is located at the end of Shirley Road in Wollstonecraft, two kilometres upstream from the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and remains the most rugged and natural of Sydney's islands. Its caves and middens are still carpeted with shells collected by generations of Aborigines who once dwelt around the shores of Sydney Harbour and the island held great cultural significance to its occupants, the Cadigal and Wangal tribes. In 1926 it was dedicated as a nature reserve with its aboriginal rock carvings, middens, a smoke-stained cave and a stone tool grinding site. Then during the 1960s the land between the island and the mainland was fully reclaimed and made into a grassed area.

Next there is Berry's Bay. This area of water is situated on the Lower North Shore and Alexander and Wollstonecraft were the first Europeans to utilise this bay for maritime purposes. They constructed a stone wharf, a stone storehouse and workers' cottages and huts, with Berry's overseer, W G Mathews, living in a cottage on the site. Alexander leased the area for a short time to shipping companies, P & O and General Steam Screw Ship Company, establishing a precedent for industrial use on that site. The substantial original stone store erected by Berry and Wollstonecraft was demolished in the mid 1930's to open

the way for additional fuel storage tanks and the bund wall left standing contains the stones of the storehouse, listed as having 'high' heritage significance.

The third namesake that we will mention is Berry Creek. This waterway, also part of the original Berry & Wollstonecraft estate, runs through Smoothey Park and Gore Cove to Berry Island Reserve and is the longest stretch of natural open creek line left in North Sydney.

Now for a special place indeed - St Thomas Rest Park.

St Thomas Rest Park in West Street Crows Nest contains the family vault and final burial place of Alexander, his wife Elizabeth and her brother Edward Wollstonecraft.

The area was part of the Wollstonecraft's original land grant and when he died his sister Elizabeth inherited it. Upon her death in 1845 it was inherited by Alexander who donated it to the Anglican Parish of St Leonards. It was named St Thomas Cemetery and was the first burial ground or cemetery established on Sydney's North Shore and the largest area of park in the densely populated Crows Nest area. The first St Thomas church was built a short distance from there, between West and McLaren Streets, with financial assistance from Alexander. It was designed by the artist Conrad Martens, who was a close friend of Berry.

Alexander had a pyramid shaped tomb constructed in this cemetery for his wife and when he died in 1873 he was buried in the same tomb. The remains of Wollstonecraft, who had been buried in the Devonshire Street Cemetery, were later removed to this tomb. This impressive family vault or tomb is still to be seen in the grounds of the cemetery, which is now named St Thomas Rest Park. In 1967 the Cemetery was handed over to North Sydney Council by an Act of Parliament granting the area as 'community land' and allowing its conversion from a cemetery into a Rest Park which opened in 1974. The cemetery's original sexton's cottage, dating from around 1850, was restored and opened as a museum in 1985. Many monuments and headstones are located within the sandstone-edged historic precincts while others are scattered around the Rest Park.



The Pyramid Tomb

It is a hidden treasure and a fascinating place to visit.

Annette Frohling