

Hawkesbury Historical Society Newsletter

Newsletter of the Hawkesbury Historical Society Inc.

HAWKESBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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Website: www.hawkesburyhistoricalsociety.org
Facebook: facebook.com/hawkesburyhistoricalsociety
Aim: Hawkesbury Historical Society aims to encourage and preserve the history of the Hawkesbury
Meetings: 4th Thursday, alternate months, 7.30pm-10pm, except June and August - 2pm. Venue – St Andrew's Uniting Church Hall, 25W Market Street, Richmond.
Open to: People interested in the preservation of the history of the Hawkesbury, new members welcome.
Patron: Wendy Sledge

Office Bearers 2023/2024

President: Jan Barkley-Jack
Snr Vice President: Ted Brill Jnr Vice President: Dick Gillard
Secretary: Peta Sharpley Public Officer: Neville Dehn
Treasurer: Rodney Hartas
Newsletter Editor: Jan Readford
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Social Co-ordinator: [Vacant]

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Neville Dehn, Heather Gillard, Janice Hart, Cathy McHardy, Janice and Kathy Layton, Rebecca McRae, Jan Readford and Oonagh Sherrard

HHS Collection Committee

Carol Carruthers and Elissa Blair (Museum representative)

Publications Committee

Jan Barkley-Jack, Cathy McHardy, Rebecca McRae and Jan Readford

2024 MEETINGS

Thursday, 24 October – 7.30pm

St Andrew's Uniting Church Hall
25 West Market Street, Richmond

HAWKESBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC. TAKES NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ACCURACY OR THE AUTHENTICITY OF ARTICLES OR ANY STATEMENTS EXPRESSED IN THIS NEWSLETTER.

Hawkesbury Historical Society General Meeting

and

Ian Jack Memorial Lecture

Thursday, 24 October at 7.30pm

to be held at our new venue

St Andrew's Uniting Church Hall

25 W Market Street, Richmond

and via Zoom (*details provided separately*)

Parking is available next door (entry on West Market Street).

The Annual General Meeting includes the election of Office Bearers for the next 12 months. Nomination forms for positions have been sent to members and nominations are to be provided to the Secretary prior to or at the meeting. The October General Meeting will follow the AGM.

The topic for the 2024 **Ian Jack Memorial Lecture**:

Front-line heritage in the Hawkesbury

From Royal Australian Air Force Base Richmond to the fortifications that once guarded Broken Bay, the Hawkesbury has boasted many defensive cultural landscapes. Inspired by Ian Jack's pioneering work in industrial archaeology, this presentation considers the relics of twentieth-century industrialised warfare in local, regional, national and international context. It extends Ian's focus on the pre-1914 era into the years from 1911 to 1945, when national defence and



industrial self-sufficiency were critical social and political imperatives. But how did military mobilisation and large-scale infrastructure projects play out on the ground? How might we read them today, with the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II looming in 2025? And what relics should we preserve for that conflict's centenary in 2039? This presentation ventures some suggestions and invites local responses.

Speaker: **Dr Peter Hobbins,
Head of Knowledge,
Australian National
Maritime Museum**



Dr Peter Hobbins is a curator and historian of science, technology and medicine at the Australian National Maritime Museum in Darling Harbour. He is committed to connecting history with its communities, including aviation cultures, the long-term effects of pandemics and the cultural heritage of conflict. Peter's interests have ranged across snakebite, vaccination, quarantine, aviation accidents, shipwrecks and military technologies including coastal defence networks. Having worked in academia, heritage consulting and museums, he is currently an Honorary Associate in history at the University of Sydney, an Honorary Research Fellow with the Civil Aviation Historical Society, Honorary Treasurer for the Australian Historical Association and Editor of the maritime history journal, *The Great Circle*.



Ian Jack was an academic who came to Australia from Scotland to teach Medieval history at the University of Sydney. He rose to be an Associate Professor, and at various times, the Head of the History Department, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Head of the Board of Studies in Music during his 40 years teaching and administrating. During his retirement, in 2016 he was given the supreme honour of being made one of only six Fellows of the University of Sydney, which was an honour held until death. Amongst his special achievements during his university days was co-founding the study of Historical Archaeology within the History Department.

Ian was President of the parent body of New South Wales historical societies, serving for the longest time of anyone heading that Royal Australian Historical Society; as well, being a member of the New South Wales Heritage Council. He was also the Senior Fellow at St Andrew's College at the University of Sydney. He was committed to the preservation of

heritage and was on the Hawkesbury City Council Heritage Committee for many years.

Ian Jack morphed his career into one of a professional Australian historian who was a gifted researcher and speaker and a good friend to local historians. The histories he wrote to accompany Conservation Management Plans covered almost every area in New South Wales and he loved nothing more than to rummage in old industrial sites and mines, writing several books on industrial heritage and many varied articles for Journals.

I remember Ian as my cherished husband and that together we studied Hawkesbury history in detail, Ian initially vowing he didn't want to know about anything before the 1840s but gradually coming around to the importance of the convict area at Hawkesbury as he absorbed some of my vibes. This Society is grateful that Ian gave several years of his life to being President of Hawkesbury Historical Society and for finding time to write for our Journals, newsletters and newspaper articles until his death in 2019.

Jan Barkley-Jack

MEMBERSHIP 2023/2024

A friendly reminder HHS Membership Fees are now due for the coming year.

Pension/Student concession \$15.00

Seniors \$22.50

Single Adults \$30.00

Family Adults including children under 18yrs \$45.00

If you require another membership form, contact the Secretary at

secretaryhawkesburyhistory@gmail.com

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

October 2024

Hi everyone,

October is a month of promise of warmer, summery things to come and there are plenty of activities to prepare for and attend. Hawkesbury Historical Society together with the Defenders of Thompson Square Inc. (DOTS) are holding another joint tour of St Matthew's Church and Burial Ground on Sunday, and in early November I am speaking at the Thomas/John Acres Family Reunion along with Dr Carol Liston and family member Amanda Gabb; and around the same time, I am addressing the DOTS group on Early Hawkesbury Footprints. Then what better way to lead into the round of Christmas Celebrations than our own HHS Christmas Party on 1 December.

Oh, and please do not forget the RAHS Annual Conference to be held 26-27 October 2024 at Campbelltown- always a great weekend. I have had to give my apologies since that is my University Graduation weekend, but it would be good if other members could attend.

I must also mention one of our most important meetings of the year: the Ian Jack Memorial Lecture and Annual and General October Meetings. It is with particular pleasure I tell you of our special guest speaker, Dr Peter Hobbins who is Curator and Historian of Science, Technology and Medicine at the Australian National Maritime Museum in Darling Harbour. Peter is perfectly placed to give the memorial lecture to Ian Jack as he knew Ian personally and has reflections of Ian's ideas in his own work.

Dr Hobbins' topic is most intriguing and very pertinent to us as part of the Hawkesbury River community with an interest in the river over time, and over its entire length. The remnants of the war-time legacy in Broken Bay and elsewhere are important and Peter's lecture sounds revealing of unknown aspects for us.

Nearer to home, with the Windsor Bridge Replacement project in 2018-2019, the Australian Maritime Museum has

an overreaching interest in remains of several small boats found in the Hawkesbury River on the Wilberforce side near the old and new bridge sites. These remains are actually being conserved by Silent World Foundation (<https://silentworldfoundation.org.au/projects/Windsor-boats>) but I have requested from Peter that he might give us an update on their conservation progress, if he can.

The boats on the river have been a topic of interest for me since 1984 when I was asked to write part of the history of one of the earliest and most successful boatbuilding families on the river: the Grono family. I made this topic of early boat building on the upper Hawkesbury River the subject of a chapter in the 1997 book edited by John Powell called *Cross Currents: Historical Studies of the Hawkesbury*. I used my access to several of the diaries of the Grono family from the 1860s and 1880s, to write the article, describing a time when William Grono, the boat-building son of John Grono, was continuing to use and detail the same skills he learnt from his famous father, to build vessels within the rhythms of his farming property.

Evidence like the Wisemans Ferry police boat built by Robert Books, a Grono descendant, in the 1870s, led to the assumption the early boats were 'clinker built' with the planks on the outside of the vessel overlapping. The archaeology at Hawkesbury turned this on its head, revealing some were 'carvel built' with planks placed flat, side by side. This also seems borne out by the half hull models once used by John Grono, seemingly showing carvel construction. They are part of Hawkesbury Historical Society's Collection, now on display in Hawkesbury City's Regional Museum.

The Museum has formed two teams of interested people to help record the items from the Bridge archaeology. The Windsor Bridge Replacement Project Working Group and the Windsor Bridge Curatorium Group are now investigating such questions and as a member of both groups I ask that if you have any knowledge of this fundamental question of early construction types, please let me know.

This is my last newsletter introduction for 2024, so may I wish you one of your most happy festive seasons and a joyful 2025. In the meantime, I hope to see you and any non-member friends who wish to come along on Thursday, 24 October at 7.30pm at St Andrew's Church Hall, Richmond, for a very interesting Ian Jack Memorial Lecture.

Cheers,

Dr Jan Barkley-Jack
President



Mouth of the Hawkesbury River, watercolour by James Willis, 1882, showing an earlier picture of today's Lion Island than the picture supplied by Dr Peter Hobbins through war armaments. Courtesy of the Dixon Library, DL PX67/10a.



(Founded in 1956)

Hawkesbury Historical Society Inc.

PO Box 293 WINDSOR NSW 2756

ABN 91 099 233 587



Let's celebrate Christmas together on

Sunday 1st December 2024 at 11.30am at

Lynwood Country Club

4 Pitt Town Bottoms Road, Pitt Town

Tables have been booked for Hawkesbury Historical Society on the left hand terrace, which is the outside fully covered area. Purchase your lunch and drinks from Lynwood Country Club.



RSVP to HHS Secretary Peta by 24th November 2024 at secretaryhawkesburyhistory@gmail.com or 0410 498 944



The Hawkesbury's Lost Amusement Park

By Rebecca Turnbull

Paradise Gardens was one of many popular amusement parks around Sydney in the 1970s and 80s. If you grew up during this time, you might fondly remember some of the other amusement parks on offer, such as:

- Manly Fun Pier (1931 – 1989)
- Bullen's Animal World in Wallacia (1969 – 1985)
- Magic Kingdom, Lansvale (1970s – 1990s)
- Old Sydney Town in Somersby (1975 – 2003)
- El Caballo Blanco near Narellan (1972 – 2007)
- Mount Druitt Waterworks (1981 – 1994)
- Australia's Wonderland at Eastern Creek (1985 – 2004)

as well as many more!

In the Hawkesbury, many families visited Paradise Gardens at Cattai for their local entertainment. Opening in December 1975, Paradise Gardens was proudly promoted as *Sydney's newest pleasure park*, adopting the slogan *Fun for the family*.

Set on over 300 acres along the Hawkesbury River, the park included sandy beaches for swimming, picnic areas and room for the many attractions, which included a focus on the prehistoric.

Before Paradise Gardens

The land where Paradise Gardens was established, along the Hawkesbury River at Cattai, holds great significance for the people of this region.

Aboriginal people have lived along *Dyarubbin*, the Hawkesbury River, for over 35,000 years. As Darug and Darkinjung Country, and despite frontier wars and ongoing dispossession, the land is intertwined with Aboriginal culture and history.

George Hall and his family were among the first Europeans to begin farming in the Hawkesbury. Hall arrived as a free settler on board the *Coromandel* in 1802 and received a grant for land near Cattai in 1803.

In 1829, it was recorded that the Darug name for Hall's farm was *Tamangoa*, meaning 'place of Port Jackson Figs'. The Halls, however, later referred to

the farm as *Bungool* – an Aboriginal word referring to the sun (Karskens et al. 2020).

The Bungool estate left Hall family hands in 1912. It sold at auction to Mr Gilmour, whose son-in-law, Mr Romano, later ran a cheese factory there. By the late-1920s, Bungool opened to the public as a pleasure ground. A popular picnic spot, it attracted motorists, campers and many community groups. A golf course and club were added to the site in the 1960s.

Mary Corringham's evocative 1928 poem 'Bungool' reveals why the park was endlessly popular.

*"Beneath the weeping-willows, whither none,
May go unmoved by such incomparable charm,
There, in a sheltered hollow, lies Bungool."*

In 1972, a three-day music festival was planned to take place at Bungool, but Baulkham Hills Shire Council banned the event, and Armand Beaudoin, who leased Bungool, reportedly lost \$30,000 due to the ban. Soon after, the land was sold to the developers of Paradise Gardens.

Renowned County of Cumberland Property
Suitable Subdivision

"BUNGOOL" 43 miles Sydney

Sound Grazing and Farming Country
Ideally Situated for Country Club, Motel,
Golf Course, Etc.

Lovely Sandy Beach Frontage to Hawkesbury River
Would make splendid Stud or Private Training Track



"Bungool" overlooking homestead, buildings, river frontage and picnic area.

504 Acres — FREEHOLD — UNRESTRICTED TITLE
PUBLIC AUCTION

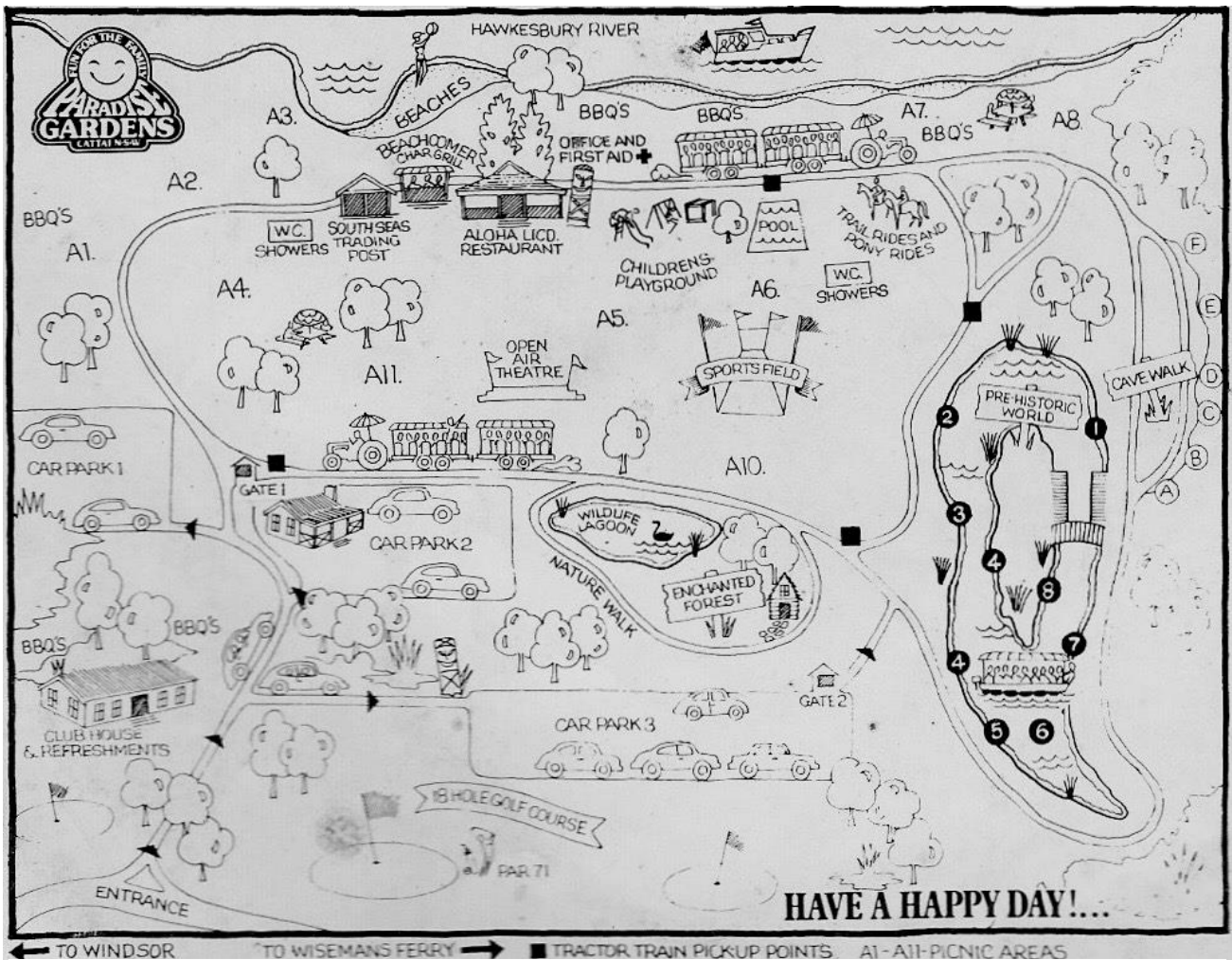
At the **ROYAL EXCHANGE, SYDNEY**
On **FRIDAY, 12th FEBRUARY, 1960 at 12 NOON**
(Assessors McKay Earth Movers Pty. Ltd.)

Winchcombe, Carson Ltd., 48 Bridge Street, Sydney
LICENSED AUCTIONEERS
Tel. B 0552

Auction advertisement, 1960,
Hawkesbury Library Service collection

Park Attractions

The main attraction of Paradise Gardens was *Prehistoric World*, featuring dinosaur replicas displayed around a primeval lagoon.



Paradise Garden Park Map, 1976. Courtesy of Hawkesbury Regional Museum

To see the dinosaurs, visitors could walk a track circling the lagoon or take a 15-minute guided jungle-boat cruise. Speakers in the grass nearby the dinosaurs regularly emitted bellowing roars and other primordial sounds, shocking visitors and making the models seem more lifelike.

Continuing with the prehistoric theme, there was also the *Cave Walk*. Visitors walked through a natural bush setting, past waterfalls, to a series of caves. Inside the caves were life-sized dioramas displaying the evolutionary history of humans, with cave paintings.

Another popular attraction, particularly among younger children, was the *Enchanted Forest*. Added to the park in 1976, it included large-scale models of characters and buildings from well-known children's tales- Little Red Riding Hood, the Gingerbread House from *Hansel and Gretel*, Snow White, and the Shoe House from Mother Goose's well-known nursery rhyme, *There was an Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe*.



A sabre-tooth tiger attacks a mammoth, 1977. Photo courtesy of David King



Old Woman's Shoe House, part of the Enchanted Forest attraction. Photo courtesy of Steve Edwards

Other family-friendly activities and amusements included a children's playground, beaches for swimming in the Hawkesbury River, paddle boats, water slides, a miniature train, pony rides, the Bungool 18-hole golf course, a BMX track and petting zoo – along with a souvenir shop, kiosk, and picnic and barbecue areas with free wood!

Tractor trains were used to transport visitors from the car park to these many different attractions.

Fun for all the family

Paradise Gardens was designed to be a fun day out. Events were often held on weekends and holidays, enjoyed by the whole family. Especially popular were Christmas, Easter and Father's Day events, held each year.

Vintage car displays; historically-themed events like the Aussi-tal Records Medieval Day or Aeroplane Jelly Vintage Air Pageant; as well as model plane, boat, car and train shows, were common occurrences.

Frequent stunt demonstrations included athletic ski manoeuvres, plane aerobatics, parachuting, and other dare devil displays. Events were often accompanied by live music, markets, and carnival stalls, providing further entertainment.



Entrance to Paradise Gardens 1975-1986.
Photo courtesy of Steve Edwards

Closure

After entertaining visitors for ten years, Paradise Gardens closed in 1986 and was transformed into Riverside Oaks golfing complex.

Paradise Gardens was originally owned by Stafford Bullen, in conjunction with UK entertainment conglomerate, Pleasurama.

Bullen was part of the well-known and successful Australian circus family, which operated a number of amusement parks – including Bullen's Animal

World, and the African Lion Safari. By the late 1970s however, he was facing controversy on multiple fronts. Along with growing concerns around animal rights in the 1980s, the Bullen family also drew criticism for firing multiple employees – allegedly because they joined a union. In 1981, picket lines were set up at Paradise Gardens and staff went on strike at Bullen's Animal World.

In 1983, another 'woefully underpaid' worker was sacked after joining a union. The Australian Theatrical and Amusement Employees' Association subsequently called for a boycott of Bullens' parks.

Paradise Gardens was one of several Sydney amusement parks to close in the following decades. Financial losses were a commonly cited reason for failure. Smaller parks were unable to compete against those with more elaborate attractions – particularly Wonderland Sydney (opening 1985), then the largest theme park in the Southern Hemisphere.

In spite of the controversies that led to the demise of Paradise Gardens, the park is remembered fondly by those who grew up in this period. It offered visitors a fun day out, where imaginations were captured and memorable experiences were created.

The current exhibition at Hawkesbury Regional Museum, *Paradise Lost*, highlights the history of this well-known Hawkesbury amusement park and explores the special place that local fun parks held in our collective childhood, family, and community memories.

Come visit the exhibition and relive these memories!

Hawkesbury Regional Museum opening hours:

Wednesday – Monday: 10am - 4pm
Closed Tuesdays.

Connect with Hawkesbury Regional Museum:

Facebook
<https://www.facebook.com/HawkesburyRegionalMuseum>

Instagram
<https://www.instagram.com/hawkesburyregionalmuseum/>

Website <https://www.hawkesbury.nsw.gov.au/museum>

Sarah Cooley: The second of Hawkesbury's outstanding ex-convicts

By Dr Jan Barkley-Jack

Some ex-convicts who achieved outstanding lives have become almost unknown to us today, mainly because no newspapers existed in the colony before 1803. My first exceptional convict in this series was John Stogdell who lived entirely before the first colonial newspaper came into existence; here is the second article, about a young woman named Sarah Cooley.

Sarah Cooley arrived as a convict in 1791 aboard the Third Fleet and died just nine years into the *Sydney Gazette's* early years. Thus, her exploits were not widely reported. The other reason she is forgotten is because mainly only the writings of officers and government officials who published diaries and sent official records to England in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, are known today. They reported about how they, themselves, were driving the success of NSW. Their leadership and the improvements they made to the colony were praised. Very rarely did a good word about ex-convicts and convicts pass their lips.

This was particularly so in Sarah's case because she was a woman, and also because she was the partner of an officer. You see, this sort of union outside marriage was frowned on by the English society of the time, not just amongst the humble population in early New South Wales, but in officer circles too, although it existed widely. So, it is easy to see why such relationships went undiscussed when an ex-convict had paired with one of the officers.

Stogdell and Cooley may have shown they had special ability to get ahead but such possibilities were only for a select few in the late eighteenth century. The pair cannot be termed natural leaders as they were able to achieve change in their own lives only from having access to privilege and power, not by reorganising new ways of using common and lowly resources holding out a direct way forward for the poor settlers.

Yet, both the lives of Sarah Cooley and John Stogdell gave hope for more comfortable and

independent lives than most ex-convicts and poor free-arrivals had ever dared dream of previously. This possibility of improving one's humble life and leading change for all the humble settlers who saw the opportunity in the colony of New South Wales, is a subject that has always fascinated me and which I explore in these articles based on my PhD thesis, as fore-runners to my forthcoming book.¹

The theft of a parcel of handkerchiefs from a draper's shop in High Holborn, London, was worth merely 10/-, but led Sarah Cooley to Newgate Prison and a seven-year transportation sentence to New South Wales. As one of the female prisoners arriving in Sydney in 1791, Sarah at best could have expected a lowly housekeeping job or else accommodation in one of the huts in the town and being put to work making garments to clothe the government convicts. Yet Sarah Cooley's life took a positive turn as she possessed obvious skills that likely worked in her favour from her early years in the colony.

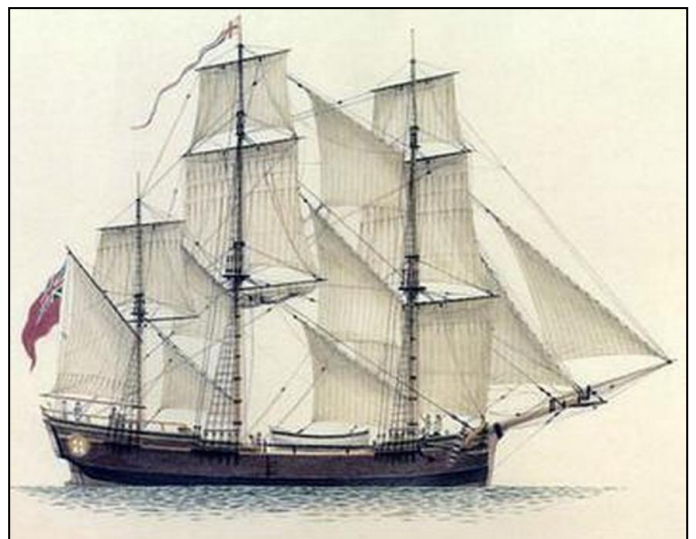


Figure 1: A convict transport like that on which Sarah Cooley came to Australia. Source: AllanCockeril.com

Possessing literacy skills, youth and beauty, within two years Sarah was the partner of Ensign Neil McKellar, an officer in the New South Wales Corps. Perhaps, as it was the custom for an officer to choose first any of the arriving convicts they wished to work for them, Sarah had attracted Neil McKellar from her very arrival. Certainly, she was bearing his child within two years of reaching Port Jackson.

¹ J. Barkley-Jack, *Hawkesbury Pioneer Era, 1793-c.1843: the humble settlers led change despite all the odds*. Forthcoming 2025.

Argyle Farm



Figure 2: "A View of Hawkesbury and the Blue Mountains", Captain James Wallis, probably 1815, engraved by William Preston, 1820. Courtesy of St Andrew's College, University of Sydney. Looking from Windsor across to Cornwallis.

Theirs appears a serious commitment to each other, despite such liaisons being officially frowned on. When McKellar was commanded to take papers detailing Lieutenant John Macarthur's illegal duel with his commanding officer to England for Macarthur's Court Martial in 1802, he wrote a will in Sarah's favour. He transferred to Sarah his Sydney townhouse and 'Argyle Farm', his 150-acre farm on the Hawkesbury River in Argyle Reach at Mulgrave Place.

It is presumed that the six soldiers, from whom the property was purchased, was sold directly to McKellar who began developing the lands in late 1796, and he registered it the following year. He and Sarah came to live in the district in 1797, but McKellar had been in the district for some of 1795. Cooley spent time on the farm after McKellar was called to Sydney to act as Aide-de-Camp to Governor King.

The guardians appointed for his five children were no other than the Lieutenant Governor and Captain William Cox. Until McKellar left the colony early in 1802, Sarah was his companion and as well as mothering his children, she also conducted his business matters in an independent manner with his full support.

Though Sarah's fortunes changed somewhat when Neil McKellar left the colony to take Governor King's dispatches to London, for he was shipwrecked off the South American coast and presumed drowned, Sarah had grasped her opportunity gratefully during their time together and continued on with a still somewhat privileged life, like she had led before McKellar died. Sarah inherited from his Will, and the children, with the exception of the youngest born, Neil McKellar jr, left the colony, returning to Scotland to be educated.

A strong example of this support and loving relationship up until 1802 was evident in a court case held while McKellar was Commandant at Hawkesbury from 1796 to 1798 and Sarah was managing 'Argyle Farm' where she and the children lived then and later. What the court case reveals was that Sarah had full control on 'Argyle Farm' for McKellar, who prosecuted three of the farm labourers on Sarah's advice. She was shown as being daily involved in the farm's management

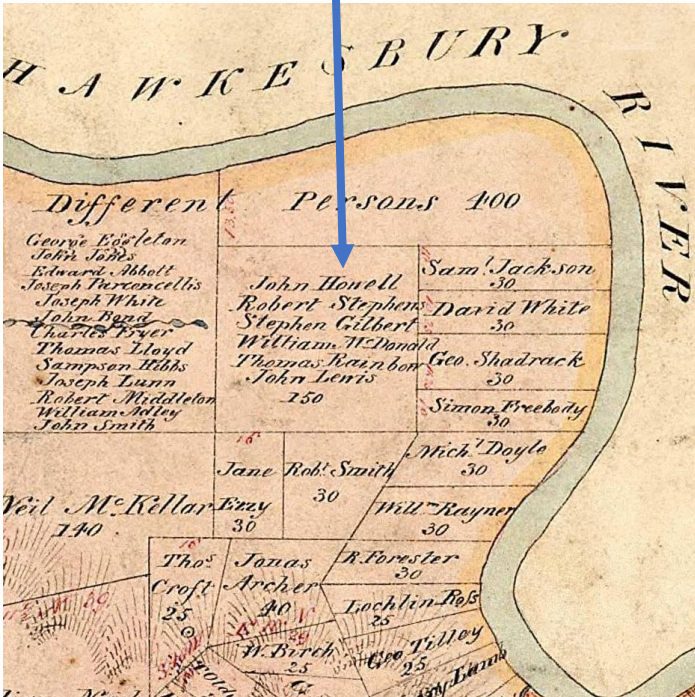
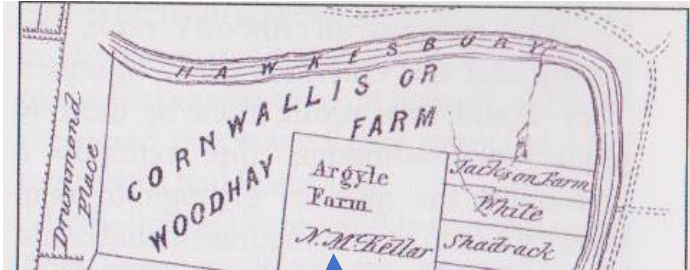


Figure 3: Plan 1857, E.J.H. Knapp, 'Cornwallis Estate near Windsor' and Parish map of St Matthew. Courtesy of Department of Lands.

by foreman James Martin, directing that labourers William Duckett (Pitt), James Whitney (Marquis Cornwallis) and Joseph Clarke be employed to thrash the wheat crop in May 1799.



Figure 4: 'View of the River Hawkesbury, New South Wales', John William Lewin between 1805 and 1812. Courtesy of the Dixon Gallery. DG ViB/3.

Noticing the men were behaving strangely, Sarah instructed Martin to watch them carefully and so he hid himself amongst the straw in the barn to watch them. At five thirty, Joseph Clarke crept into the barn and stole one of the wheat bags, meeting up with Duckett and Whitney in front of the barn chased by James Martin. The two already had a stolen bag of wheat with them. Martin bailed the three men up whilst Sarah went to get a constable to take them into custody.

Sarah was required to give evidence in court. She was astonishingly honest and when asked if a bag tied with animal skin exhibited in court was the one that had been in her shed, she replied that she was certain it was but as all bags had a similarity she would not swear to it being the identical bag. Such honesty was important to Sarah even if it lost her and McKellar the case and McKellar admired her for it.

Sarah also held the confidence of her staff and her superiors, so much so that William Baker, the Storekeeper at Hawkesbury, lent Sarah his chaise. The idea of an ex-convict woman riding in a chaise around the district in 1800-1801 was unheard of in the colony. So, when Sarah returned home in the borrowed vehicle, it could be seen to have accidentally sustained damage, and Storekeeper Baker saw his chance to extract money from Sarah.

He had miscalculated. Luckily for Sarah, an employee, James Rann, saw the carriage as it returned home and could testify that the damage to the wheel spoke was only slight and the harness

had previously been poorly mended. Baker's demand of trying to force Sarah to sign to show that she owed him 60 guineas damages (£63) was clearly outrageous but would normally succeed in

a case pitting a government officer against a mere ex-convict girl. Sarah had shown herself many times during her ten years in the colony that she was not easily intimidated and she stalwartly refused his extortion.

The suit, which Baker pursued regardless, came before the court on 5 August 1801 for a revised amount of £28.16.0. Several well-known tradesmen gave evidence for Sarah, including two who worked for John Stogdell's boss, Commissary John Palmer. John Marsden, a saddler, gave evidence that after he repaired the harness sent to him to be mended it was 'much better than it was before' since it had come to the colony in a broken state. Even more impressively, Matthew Golder, who had built wagons for John Stogdell several years before, nominated the damage value to the chaise at only three guineas.

Another reason for the esteem that the colonials held for Sarah Cooley, apart from having a partner who was an officer, came from the respect she garnered for her dealings in business. She was a generous lender to the settlers in the Hawkesbury, and shown in affidavits as a 'a dealer', but not as generous as she was honest. In 1797 alone, the money owed her in writs she took out demanding payment totalled a substantial £256.10.0. Four of these were small, usually from amounts kept as book tallies from the likes of James Hughes who owed her £12.10.0 the following year, and Paul Randall, who owed Sarah £12.1.6 for 'various articles' he had bought.

Bigger debts were owed by William Singleton who owed £162.16.0, and her close neighbour, Robert Forrester who owed her £41.2.6. What was important here was that Sarah Cooley secured her lending cash not from Neil McKellar but from her

own finances, gained from selling properties assigned over to her by borrowers to pay their debt. She also traded in the same way in Sydney and even received money as the representative of William Evans, the Bailiff to the court.

Although Sarah opened, it was not the 'proper way to seek a loan' and had he come in the 'proper way' she would have lent him some. He tried to rummage in a drawer and when Sarah began to shove him out the door he 'seized her by the collar' until she finally could shut the door on him.

She then became very ill and her son, Neil, fetched a neighbour. Even as she sat dying, Sarah Cooley was able to be charitable as always, recounting that although she had been 'ill-used by George', she did not believe he had struck her. Sarah had died of a heart attack, attested by the 12 men who carried out the inquest on her body. They declared Sarah had died 'from visitation of God'.

Whilst Sarah Cooley, like John Stogdell, was never accepted into the elite or officer society of the colony, she was a clever woman who was able to take the opportunities and privileges she had gained from being chosen by an Ensign to share his life. She had qualities of energy and acumen, yet gentleness which allowed her to well defend herself in a tough colonial business world and to build a good business. It

was impossible for the women on Hawkesbury farms to follow her as a leader, because she had achieved a life well beyond anything they could achieve without similar privileges, yet like Stogdell, Sarah Cooley alerted them to the power of agency.

Reference:

J. Barkley-Jack, *Hawkesbury Settlement Revealed*, Rosenberg Publishing, Dural, 2009, pp. 402-410

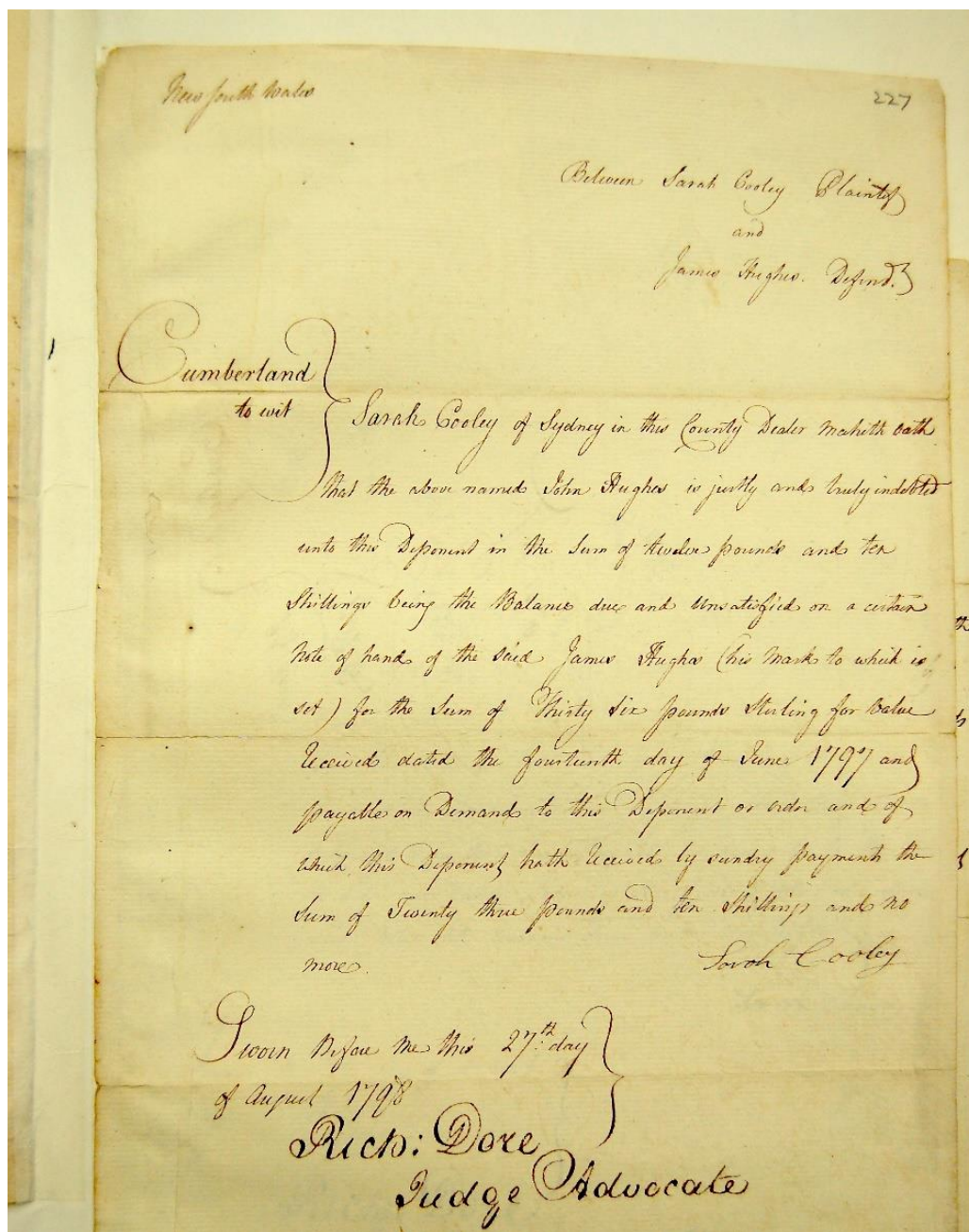


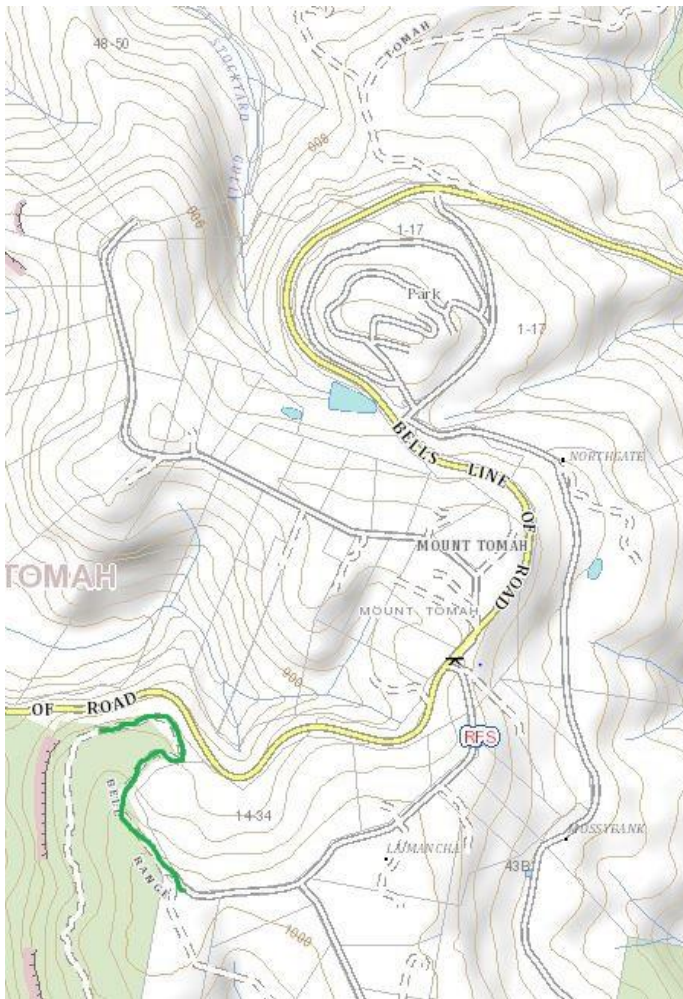
Figure 5: Sarah Cooley's Affidavit, 1798, relating to James Hughes, NSW State Archives and Records, 2/8147, p. 227.

When Neil was lost to the colony, Sarah married another convict, Thomas Broadhurst, and the pair continued to successfully trade and gain grants, until the fateful day in November 1812 when Sarah had a heart attack and died. She had opened the door of her inn in Sydney to the knock of George Humphries, an oyster man to whom she owed 9/-. He demanded a glass of spirits and would not be put off when told the inn had not traded for some time. He then demanded money.

Jacob's Ladder at Mt Tomah

Cathy McHardy cathy@nisch.org
September 2024

My interest was instantly piqued upon reading about Jacob's Ladder in Sam Boughton's seminal work *Reminiscences of Richmond* which was first published as a regular column in the local newspaper, *The Hawkesbury Herald* from 1903-1905. What and where was this infamous ladder, I just had to find out more!



Excerpt from the current map (2024)

<https://maps.six.nsw.gov.au/> with the approximate location of Jacob's Ladder marked in green although the steepest section of the Ladder was cut away with the major deviation of Bells Line in 1947.

Described by a correspondent in the *Australian Town and Country Journal* of June 1871 as "a steep rocky pinch" Jacob's Ladder, on the western pass on Bells Line of Road at Mt Tomah, remained part of the route from Kurrajong Heights to Bell until a complete deviation was made by 1900. Much like its Biblical namesake, a steep staircase linking earth and heaven, the Mt Tomah Ladder was composed of rough steps cut sharply into the sandstone enabling the intrepid traveller to descend from the top of Tomah to the narrow pass below which led to Mt Bell and beyond.

Ascending the mountain we passed to the west, and again began to descend a steep rocky pinch, called Jacob's Ladder. At the foot of this, towards the left, rises a curious conical-shaped mountain, called Mount Comrie, in compliment to the Hon. J. Comrie, of Northfield. Further on is Mount Bell, along the side of which runs Bell's line of road to Bathurst, and at the end of which is Cave-hill, named from a curious cave at the side of the road, the roof of which has some singular impressions resembling emu's tracks.

Excerpt from *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 3 June 1871 p. 10. Visit to the Kurrajong. Note that Mt Comrie is now known as Camels Hump.

Bells Line still follows the track delineated by Archibald Bell (junior) with the guidance of local indigenous people in September 1823, after a previous unsuccessful attempt in August that year where he failed to progress further than Mt Tomah. In the diary of his two expeditions, held by the State Library of NSW, Bell detailed the route as a possible alternative to already constructed Cox's Road over the Blue Mountains, and he noted the hazards encountered by the expedition as well as commenting on the potential usefulness of the land.

Although mentioning the assistance of indigenous guides in his first attempt, Bell assigned blame for his failure to conquer Mt Tomah on that occasion in a very ungenerous manner stating that on the second attempt "we were enabled to correct an error which the Natives had before led us into in regard of the Cooro River having its first rise in that Mountain".

An account of Bell's journey was accordingly published in the *Sydney Gazette* on the 9 October 1823.

We are happy to announce that Mr. Archibald Bell, junior, of Richmond Hill, has, after one unsuccessful attempt, at last effected a passage from that part of the country to Cox's River (on the other side of the Blue Mountains), which as the pass across these mountains trends so much to the northward, will not only be the readiest route from the Hawkesbury and Hunter's River, but will be as near from Parramatta as the old road over the mountains by way of Emu ford, and infinitely less difficult and sterile.

Mr. Bell is entitled to the sole merit of this discovery; and is now gone to repeat and survey the route accompanied by a Gentleman from the Surveyor General's Office, and with government men and horses. He travels N. W. from Richmond about 14 miles to Picture Hill, and thence due W. to Tomah, which is a round hill seen on the right from the burnt weather-boarded hut on the Bathurst Road.

Ongoing West about half way up this mountain he turned to the South, and after proceeding about a mile in that direction, found an excellent passage down it. He then proceeded round the side of an opposite hill, about a mile and a half in a N.W.S.W.

direction, and then bore W. for the remainder of the day, and N. W. the next day till he reached Cox's River.

He found no rocky ground till after leaving Tomah, and the whole distance of it then did not exceed 8 or 9 miles. The greatest difficulty he had to contend with, was in the thick part of his way to Tomah, so much so that in one place he was forced to cut his way through three miles. He left a good tract all the way he went, and was never obliged to unlade his baggage horses.

The whole of Mount Tomah is covered with ash, and sassafras trees of a prodigious size. It is only after leaving Tomah that the country assumes, for 5 miles, the appearance of the Bathurst Road in point of grass; but even, for that space, the feed is better than near the weather-boarded hut on that road. After that distance excellent grass continues with little variation for the rest of the way; there is plenty of water the whole way. The distance of this route, from Richmond to Cox's River, may be estimated at about 35 miles; but the return of the Government Assistant Surveyor, and party, will enable us certainly, to lay down and perhaps shorten the road.

Bell's 'discovery' of the new route was presented in glowing terms giving him "sole merit" with no mention of any indigenous guidance through the unfamiliar territory, to date, untravelled by Europeans. Also unsurprising is the lack of mention of any difficulties such as the steep and rocky descent from Kurrajong Heights or the precipitous "declivity" that was to become known as Jacob's Ladder.

The following month Surveyor General John Oxley dispatched Robert Hoddle to gather a small party including Bell jnr to survey and mark the route. Hoddle's expedition encountered many physical barriers along this mountainous route including the descent from the Tabaraga Ridge at Kurrajong Heights and the steep gradient on the western side of Mt Tomah.

Hoddle reported his findings in a report to the Colonial Secretary in November 1823. Writing about Mt Tomah he considered the accessibility of fresh water for stock and travellers should the road become a viable alternative to Cox's Road.

Near the highest point of the Hill [Mt Tomah], two Ravines run East and West, West and East, a chain in width from each other. In these Ravines were abundant supplies of Spring Water, easy of access. At the bottom of the Hill were steep Ravines, in which was plenty of Water, but quite inaccessible.

Of the descent down the other side of the mountain he judged that:

The descent [from Mt Tomah] was steep and dangerous from the loose stones. For the distance of about a Mile, had ravines which were nearly perpendicular close to us, which made our situation

dangerous, from the high winds blowing the Trees down in every direction. The obstacles we encountered would soon be removed by a Road Party. This part would require the most labour as there are many Sandstone Rocks.

Clearing trees and thick undergrowth largely by hand was a challenging and arduous task for the convict workforce but as Hoddle judged, not an impossible task. The assistance of bullocks could be employed to move the large rocks and other debris in order to make a trafficable surface. Today, we would describe the surface as a rough bush track. The route was cleared and marked over the ensuing three years.

The solution to the steep descent from Kurrajong Heights was to build a zig zag which remained in use until the deviation known as Cut Rock was completed in 1840 while the descent from Mt Tomah was negotiated by cutting a very steep ladder-like path which became known as Jacob's Ladder.

After the clearing of Bell's Line, the road was mainly traversed by travellers on foot or on horseback but drovers also moved mobs of cattle and sheep along this route. The road was considered too dangerous for wheeled vehicles until improvements to the road in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

In 1827, Thomas L Mitchell, Surveyor General at that time reported on this new route across the mountains stating in his report that:

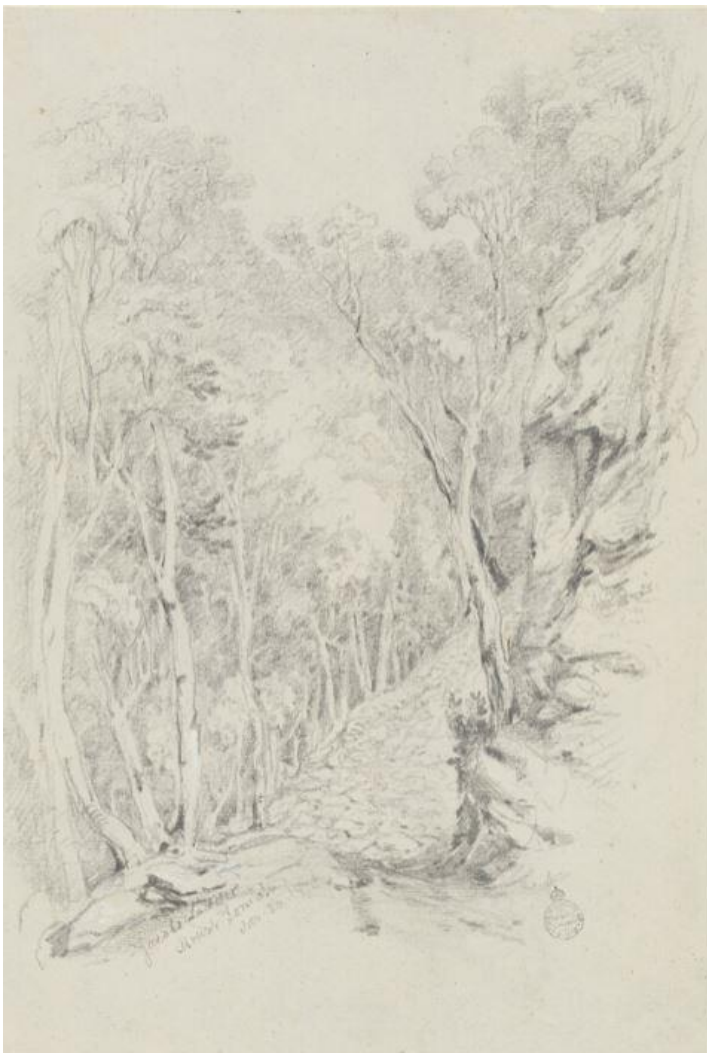
Bell's Road crosses the most elevated part of a ridge which is nearly parallel to the Nepean at a distance of about three miles from the River. The trees have been cut from thence to the summit of Mt Tomah. Just beyond where the wood has been cut, the road has been marked round the southern head of the hill, across a declivity of nearly 40 degrees. The passage here is extremely difficult at present.

An 1830 survey of Mt Tomah indicated that there may not have been a high number of travellers on this challenging route noting that after descending the western side of the mountain the surveyor reached a deep glen at a "point at which road is discontinued" indicated by a marked tree.

Bells Line did not have the high level of investment in terms of convict labour nor engineering expertise of the Great North Road constructed over the years 1826-1836 linking Sydney with the Hunter Valley. Perhaps Bell's alternative to Cox's road was considered by authorities to be ancillary rather than a premier route which warranted great sums of government funds.

Some concept of the steepness of the track at Jacob's Ladder may be gleaned from a pencil sketch by Conrad Martens in 1876. The rocky surface may be seen as the track turns right before

heading up hill. It is difficult to determine the vantage point for this drawing. Was the artist positioned at the base on the western end of the Ladder? I have not located any contemporary photographs or other drawings with which to compare Marten's work.



Pencil sketch by Conrad Martens dated 30 November 1876 and inscribed Jacobs Ladder Mt Tomah. Courtesy of the State Library of NSW. PXD 307 – 2 F12 Sketches 1873-1876.

Sam Boughton's mention of Mt Tomah and Jacob's Ladder in his *Reminiscences...* of 1903 spawned much disagreement and discussion in the local newspaper, *The Hawkesbury Herald*. It seemed that everyone wanted to be credited for being the first to cross the mountains from Kurrajong to Cox's Road.

In the 1860s G B Bowen was developing his property on the mountain and Boughton writes of being one of a team of men involved in clearing and building works. Perhaps it was Bowen's investment in the area that rekindled interest in this alternative route.

Boughton states that the first bullock team to go over Mt Tomah in the 1840s used a slide rather

than a dray indicating the difficulty of the incline. Attached to the slide which carried the cargo were four bullocks which steadied the loaded slide as it moved down the slope.

In answer to Boughton's comments on the topic another correspondent known only as 'Cubbygalo' wrote of the self-styled 'Road Trust' which managed the road for many years from 1872. The trust composed of John Lamrock, James Comrie and G B Bowen of Bowen Mount effected a number of deviations and repairs to the route including repairs to Jacob's Ladder with a deviation around the site several years later.

In the year 1878 a man named Sheridan (John, I fancy) completed the new deviation round the old "Ladder," and the first team to cross over Bell's Line and journey out back was that of old Jack Hurst, followed by the much-maligned Bill Berwick, nearly two years later. Bill Berwick asserted to this latter fact within my hearing last Saturday three weeks; and if he sees and denies this, I will invite him to Kurrajong and make a storyteller of him.

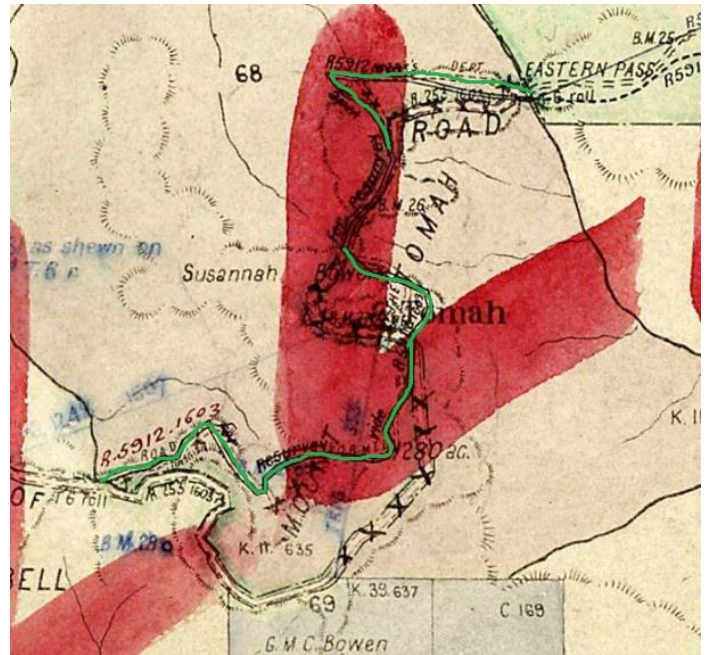
As Meredyth Hungerford rightly asserted in her work *Bilpin, the apple country* in 1995, it is difficult to ascertain whether the deviation around the Ladder in 1878 was a minor change or part of the new road that was in place by 1893. Establishing the correct dates of changes to the road have proved to be a challenge.

The Crown Plan 253.1603 traced by surveyor G M Pitt in 1854 and submitted to the Department of the Surveyor General in 1861 marks the location of the road at Mt Tomah at that time in red ink including the route of Jacob's Ladder. There is also a surveyed line in pencil which is marked "road in use". This indicates that the lower road which existed until the 1940s was in place as early as 1861.

Newspaper correspondent 'Cooyal' (nom-de-plume of George Charles Johnston) again writing in response to Boughton's *Reminiscences...* and seeking to make a correction to the narrative wrote:

Regarding the first bullock dray that descended Jacob's Ladder, I do not pretend to know, though I do know that when riding over Bell's Line in 1870, en route to Gulgong, and in company with three drovers, we saw wheel tracks all the way in to Mount Tomah to the Mudgee Road, and the drovers said that they were the tracks of the first wheeled vehicle that ever went down the Ladder. Be that as it may, I would have given something to see a vehicle go down the Ladder as it was then—in 1870. I can hardly believe that it arrived at the bottom whole. Our horses wouldn't carry us down and we had some trouble to lead them—though the drovers rode down—in fact, they dismounted for nothing—their horses being used to it, whereas ours were Windsor bred.

The Parish of Irvine County of Cook map dated 1893 (cancelled 1900) illustrates several of the changes to Bell's Line in the vicinity of Mt Tomah which were made by this time. Just to the west of the Eastern Pass near the top of the map a deviation known as The Elbow also known as the Devil's Elbow was completed in 1877 and is shown on Crown Plan R5912.1603 dated 1897. Instead of going uphill in a south-westerly direction the road continued due west before turning a sharp hairpin bend and heading south east to join the existing road (see Parish of Irvine map 1893).



Excerpt from Parish of Irvine County of Cook Parish Map 1893 which was cancelled in 1900, showing the three deviations of the 1890s marked in green.

Boughton wrote of construction of The Elbow in his *Reminiscences*... published in January 1904.

Another important deviation is the one on the Kurrajong side of Mount Tomah. In place of climbing up the steepest part of the mountain, a new road has been cut round the side until it ascends a certain distance, and then takes a sharp turn, coming along under Mount Tomah cottage, when it joins the old road again, and proceeds to the top of the mountain. This new road was first formed by Mr. Bowen in 1877, but has since been widened by the Roads Department, and it is now a very easy grade when compared with the old road, which was formed by prisoners in the early days.



Excerpt from Crown Plan 5912.1603 dated April 1897 confirming the deviations in place by this time.



State Archives of NSW image - NRS-4481-3- [7/16112]-St30079. Government Printing Office 1 – 43417. Mt Tomah section of Main Road no 184 [From NSW Government Printer series: Main Roads] Between 01-01-1947 to 31-12-1947.

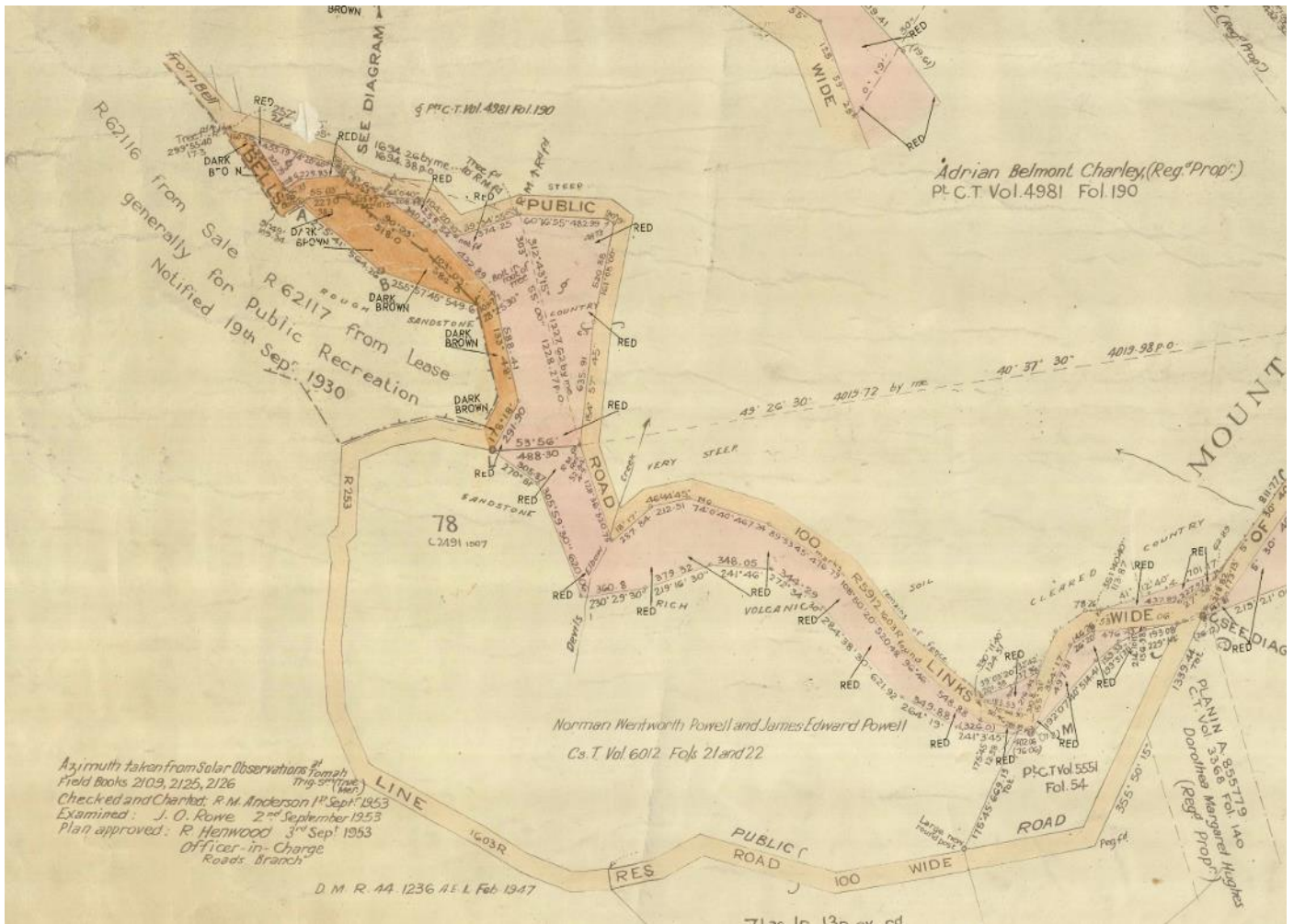
The Bells Line we travel today was created with major works taking place at Mt Tomah during the 1940s. Referred to as the “big cutting” on many of the glass plate negatives taken of the work in 1947, the hillside adjacent to the Western Pass was cut away including the steepest section of the old Jacob’s Ladder. The changes to the route over the years have included a deviation removing The Elbow in 1939 as well re-routing the road to skirt the western side of the botanic gardens.

The image above shows work well underway on the Western Pass cutting at Mt Tomah viewed from across the valley. The lower road completed by 1897 to the left of the image was blocked by falling debris resulting in the closure of Bells Line of Road at this point for two months in 1947 until the excavation work was completed.

Two tracks can also be seen on either side of the work near the top of the cut away embankment. It cannot be decided with any certainty if either of these are the old route of Jacob’s Ladder or the deviation formed by the ‘Road Trust’ in the 1870s. Or indeed neither could be the case as access tracks to the top of the hillside for the use of personnel and equipment were required for the work to commence.

According to the Blue Mountains Heritage Review published in 2016, “the most fearsome stretch of the original road, Jacobs Ladder is partly destroyed by twentieth-century road-works, but part of it constitutes the fire trail from the western end of Charleys Road”.

This assertion is confirmed by examination of Crown Plan R23546.1603 dated June 1946. The survey clearly shows the route taken by Bells Line along the road currently named Rainbow Ravine Road which heads in a westerly direction before turning northwards and then east to the commencement of the Ladder. The area marked in brown is the sandstone rock face which was cut away in the construction of the new road. The road to the north and lower down the valley on which the spoil accumulated is also clearly shown.



Excerpt from the Department of Main Roads: Crown Plan R23546.1603 dated June 1946 showing the location of the embankment including Jacob's ladder which was cut away during the deviation works

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Maps

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- Crown Plan - R5912.1603 dated 1897, Charles Robert, Scrivener surveyor
- Crown Plan R23546.1603 dated June 1946, Norman C Ray, Department of Main Roads surveyor
- Parish of Irvine County of Cook edn 1893
- Parish of Irvine County of Cook edn 1917
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Windsor & Richmond Gazette, Wednesday, July 5, 1961. Page 4

Windsor and Richmond Gazette, Wednesday 5 July 1961 (Trove)

NOTICE

**Annual General Meeting
and
Ian Jack Memorial Lecture**

**Thursday, 24 October 2024
at 7.30pm**

at our new venue

St Andrew's Uniting Church Hall
25 West Market Street, Richmond

PARKING is available next door with
entry via West Market Street.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU

To all our authors of articles
and to those who have
contributed items and
advertisements for our
newsletter throughout
2023/2024.

Your contributions have been
well received by our readers.

The newsletter could not exist
without you.

Our next newsletter will be
published in February 2025.

A strange incident at Sackville

by Michelle Nichols

A rather strange incident occurred in the Hawkesbury district in 1928. A man accompanied by two young women was arrested at Sackville with a stolen car. What events transpired for this situation to make the headlines all over Australia?



Constable Gillis, Gladys Jefferys, Jean Smith with Constable Hitchcock, Windsor Court House. Courtesy *Windsor & Richmond Gazette* 13 January 1928.

A local resident raised the alarm. A report was made to the Wilberforce police, about a suspicious vehicle and occupants, camping in a car at Sackville. Constable Cavanagh investigated and found George Peters aged 19, with Jean Smith and Gladys Jefferys, both aged 16, asleep in the car. Cavanagh became suspicious when they could not provide a licence or proof of car ownership. After confirmation with Parramatta Police the car was stolen, the trio were arrested and taken to Windsor Police Station.

Following examination of their belongings, questions

were asked about some of the clothing. Peters claimed they were his but it was obvious they were not his size. One of the girls informed police *"the clothing belonged to another man, Leslie Chisholm, who was with them, and who was drowned in the river at Sackville Reach"* two days previous. Chisholm was the son of the caretaker of the Brunswick Football ground.

At this stage, a very curious story unfolded. It began with how the group travelled from Melbourne, on Christmas Day in a stolen car which was discarded after breaking down, and how another vehicle was stolen.

The group travelled to Marrickville where they were staying in a boarding house. On January 4, they stole another car, hoping to travel to Brisbane. They stayed overnight at North Richmond before making their way to Sackville where Jean, Chisholm's companion for 12 months, quarrelled with him when he intended going for a swim. She told him he wasn't acquainted with the river. Afterwards he said goodbye *"in case you don't see me again"* and headed to the river. Chisholm asked Peters if he wanted

to go but he declined as he couldn't swim. He told the inquest, he watched Chisholm swim about half-way across the river, then heard him cry 'snag' and

Lovers' Fatal Quarrel

"GOOD-BYE, IN CASE I DON'T COME BACK"

YOUTH DROWNED AT SACKVILLE REACH

TRAGIC ESCAPEDE :: SEQUEL TO MOTOR THEFTS

DUE to the alertness of Constable Cavanagh, the Hawkesbury District was given much prominence this week by the arrest at Wilberforce on Saturday of a youth and two girls for illegally using a motor car, and the subsequent unravelling of the tangled threads of a most amazing tragedy.

Headlines from *Windsor & Richmond Gazette* 13 January 1928.

saw him turn to swim back. He *“watched him until he reached ... the bank and saw him no more.”* Peters went to where Chisholm should have landed but could not see him and decided he had already come ashore. When the question was raised, why didn't anyone call for help, there was more concern being discovered with a stolen car.

vehicle, with £50 bail. Peters, who was still on a 12-month good behaviour bond for stealing a motorbike, was also charged with having an unlicensed revolver which belonged to Chisholm's father. Chisholm's father states before the inquest that he believed his son was *“coerced into the escapade that ended in his death”* and his son had never given him any trouble prior to this.



Constable W. J. Cavanaugh or Wilberforce with George Peters at the Inquest
Courtesy Windsor & Richmond Gazette 13 January 1928.

Chisholm's body was returned to his family in Melbourne with the funeral held on 11 January, Leslie's 17th birthday.

Photographs of George Peters, shown below, were located via the Gaol Inmates Prisoners Photos Index which is available to search online from the State records website.

After sometime the trio returned to the riverbank and found Chisholm's clothing. They took it and spent the next day wondering if anything had been reported. At first the Police were cynical about the story but after talking to the boarding house manager, it was confirmed there was a fourth member of the party.

On Sunday the police organised a search party at Sackville with a motor launch and located Chisholm's body from a depth of 4.5m.

At the Inquest different versions of the event were presented by the trio but police warned them that it was necessary to keep to the truth. The Sergeant mentioned to the witnesses at the Inquest, *“you have told me any amount of lies yesterday and today in connection with the trip”* and *“notwithstanding the trouble you are in, you are apparently persisting in telling untruths.”*

A snag could not be found in the spot mentioned but police wondered if Chisholm just got tangled in the weeds? Dr Arnold examined his body at the Windsor Hospital morgue and found no evidence of violence but *“all the signs of death by drowning.”*

After the inquest the three were charged at Newtown Court with unlawfully taking and using a



Prisoners Photos showing George Peters
Courtesy State Records

If you are interested in reading more about this bizarre incident, check out the article in full from the *Windsor and Richmond Gazette* 13 January 1928 p. 1. Retrieved from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article85929836>