

# THE MILLSTONE

KURRAJONG ~ COMLERoy HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Society is dedicated to researching, recording, preserving and promoting the history of the district. Covering the area west of the Hawkesbury River - North Richmond, Kurrajong, Berambing, Bilpin, Grose Vale, Bowen Mountain, Colo, Wilberforce, Ebenezer, Glossodia, Tennyson, Freemans Reach.

## Air Force Centenary and the history of RAAF Base Richmond

*Flight Lieutenant Eamon Hamilton was guest speaker at the K-CHS Christmas function held on Saturday 11th December 2021. He has been Public Affairs Officer with the Air Mobility Group at RAAF Base Richmond since 2006. The Air Mobility Group is the section of the Air Force that flies people and things to where they need to go, from flying people out of Afghanistan to air-dropping resupply packages to a remote ice station in Antarctica. Lt. Hamilton is also currently serving as the Air Force Centenary 1921-2021 Base Liaison Officer for Sydney. Below is an abridged summary of his presentation on the evening.*

To give some background, the Australian Air Force was established on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 1921, and became the 'Royal' Australian Air Force the following August. Prior to the establishment of the Air Force as an independent service, the RAAF had been part of the Army as the Australian Flying Corps and later Australian Aviation Corps. The Air Force's home is at Point Cook near Melbourne, Victoria, where there is an excellent museum illustrating the RAAF history.

While 2021 marks the year of the Air Force Centenary, the history of RAAF Base Richmond goes back a little further to November 1911, when William Hart, a 26-year-old dentist and pioneering aviator, flew over the area in his Bristol Box-kite with his 16-year-old brother, on their way from Penrith to Parramatta. Hart must have liked what he saw of Richmond from the air, because in 1912 he returned to the region, sought permission from Council to use the area of Ham Common as an aviation ground, and moved his flying operations there in April 1912.

The following is a summary of the past 110 years of RAAF Base Richmond's history. Richmond Council gave permission for a small paddock in Ham Common to be used for private flying in 1912. Pioneering aviators inspired the State Government to establish a Flying School in 1916. In subsequent years the State Government threatened to close down and sell the aerodrome.

Richmond Council campaigned for the aerodrome to be turned over to the newly-established Air Force, who had determined the aerodrome was an excellent site for a RAAF base in Sydney.

The limited post-war Defence budget prevented the arrival of RAAF at Richmond until June 1925, but in the following 15 years, it grew to become the largest RAAF base in Australia.

RAAF Base Richmond was a powerhouse during the Second World War, providing many of the recruit training, squadrons and aircraft used in the Mediterranean and South Pacific theatres of the war, as well as supporting the defence of maritime lanes along the east coast of Australia. Outside of the base's perimeter, there were even satellite airfields at Pitt Town, Castlereagh, and Marsden Park.

Following the war, the base expanded eastwards towards Windsor and extended its runway. It fulfilled a variety of aviation roles including anti-submarine operations and our first

helicopters, before becoming a centre for transport aircraft – firstly with the Dakota, then Hercules, and later Caribou and Boeing 707s. This put the base at the forefront of supporting operations around the globe including Vietnam, Cyclone Tracy, and various peacekeeping operations.

The early 1990s saw a downturn in the number of personnel at Richmond as Defence civilianised many of its workforce roles. Many aircraft were also retired from service and their replacements delivered to other bases.

The early 90s also coincided with Air Force studies to determine whether or not to close RAAF Base Richmond. This would cloud the base's future for the next 30 years, and be further compounded by Sydney's search for a second airport.

In the meantime, the base was busy supporting a range of operations around the globe including peacekeeping in East Timor, warlike operations in the Middle East, and disaster relief across Asia and the Pacific.

In the last ten years, the base has re-established a strategic relevance in Sydney and within Australia through its ability to support emergency operations, including aerial firefighting. The success of RAAF air mobility operations at home and abroad in the past 20 years has also reinforced the need for Defence to keep the base in Sydney. **Cont. page 3**

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**K-CHS Australia Day Breakfast**  
9am Bowen Mt. Hut Bowen Mountain

## President's Report

Well the light at the end of the tunnel seems to have dimmed again. Just hope it isn't a train heading full on towards us ;-)

We were able to hold our AGM as planned in Hanna Park. Despite a pessimistic weather forecast for the day, it turned out to be a nice sunny day and the venue worked well. We had 26 members present. The existing committee all re-stood and were elected unopposed. Thank you to everyone for your continuing support of the society.

We also managed to hold our Christmas Party dinner between constantly changing restrictions. There were 40 in attendance and all the feedback was that it was a good night. Our speaker Lt Eamon Hamilton from the Richmond RAAF Base was interesting and his talk is summarised on page 1 & 3.

We have a number of local outings under discussion for the year, but even if the restrictions remain open slather, we will probably refrain from any gatherings given the present infection numbers.

We should be OK with Australia Day as it is an outdoors function. Keep an eye on the web site and upcoming Millstone Newsletters.

David Griffiths Mob: 0498 646899

Email: [president@kurrajonghistory.org.au](mailto:president@kurrajonghistory.org.au)

[Visit the K-CHS Website for GM Society Events and info updates](#) Also articles and stories from the past 20 years recorded in The Millstone Newsletter are readily accessible via the web-site. Also under *Archives* there is an extensive Collection of over 5000 images, including a *People & Families* reference site. Interesting *Resources & Documents* are also found under *Archives*. The *K-CHS Members Library* listing and *Publications* for sale, can all be accessed via: <https://www.kurrajonghistory.org.au>



## KURRAJONG – COMLERoy HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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[secretary@kurrajonghistory.org.au](mailto:secretary@kurrajonghistory.org.au)

**Singleton's Reserve Visit:** On the 28<sup>th</sup> October 2021, a visit was made by staff of the Premier's Office from the Department of NSW Environment & Heritage to Singleton's Reserve and the old Kurrajong Mill Site in Mill Road, Kurrajong, (10.30am - 2pm). The group also included members of K-CHS and a representative of Hawkesbury City Council. Many photos were taken and the Heritage consultant will now create a report for the Premier's Department. Evidence of possible aboriginal tool sharpening grooves along Mill Creek, also got everyone rather excited. This will now be one of several reports compiled for the Society and HCC by Heritage NSW. Of course it is all with a view to listing the old Mill Site Kurrajong, on the State Heritage Register. Frank Holland and Les Dollin were much pleased with the days findings, which included further Mill Site foundations. **Image L-R:** Les Dollin K-CHS, Rev David Broughton (Merroo), Rebecca NSW E & H, David Hoffman NSW E & H, Frank Holland K-CHS, Gary Baldry (HCC). David Griffiths, President K-CHS was also present on the day and took the adjacent photo.



## Recent K-CHS happenings &amp; events



Pat O'Toole & Jennifer Griffiths were assisted by David Griffiths and Lesley Bobrige on the K-CHS Book Stall held in Kurrajong Village on the 6th November



A successful picnic lunch and K-CHS AGM was held in Hanna Park North Richmond on the 8th November 2021. The business of the meeting was addressed with Annual Reports read and received. After all committee positions were declared open, the meeting members supported the re- election of all past committee members for 2021 - 2022. Everyone present was hopeful of an active 2022 year ahead, given so many 2021 events had been cancelled due to the COVID restrictions. President David Griffiths continued with a brief GM, before we opened our picnic baskets for lunch.

#### **RAAF BASE RICHMOND Cont. *Retracing History 1912-1955*** ***RAAF Base Richmond's Runway:***

It is difficult to find a clear timeline about the construction of RAAF Base Richmond's runway. From 1912 until 1943, aircraft would typically take off and land facing into the wind. In 1944, approval was given to construct a 'surfaced' runway facing east-west that would allow heavier and larger aircraft to land on the base.

Following the War, the expansion of the RAAF Base eastwards coincided with the extension of the runway towards Windsor. There was some controversy at the time over the drainage issues this caused for local farms, with Windsor Council also being displeased about the safety of the newly-constructed Percival Street and Windsor Road (now Hawkesbury Valley Way) intersection, along with large amounts of soil being displaced and dumped near Icely Park.

Controversy continued in 1952 when residents discovered the RAAF had designs on building a 10,000-foot north south runway across Ham Common, which Richmond District Council feared would sever the district from the rest of Sydney. The RAAF later stated that roads and rail connections would either be tunnelled under the runway, or go around the runway thresholds. At the time, the runway was necessary to support larger and heavier jet aircraft that were being developed in the United States and United Kingdom.

Ultimately, the idea of the north-south runway would be abandoned. The RAAF would not purchase these large jet aircraft for some time, and there were significant drainage and cracking issues with the existing east-west runway in the 1950s that required costly repairs. One can't help but wonder what the Hawkesbury would have looked like today if that north-south runway had been constructed.

***Today and Tomorrow*** After all this time, where does RAAF Base Richmond find itself in 2021, and where is it heading in the future? The base is home to three flying units – Air Force's No. 37 Squadron flying a fleet of 12 C-130J Hercules transport aircraft; Air Force Cadets Richmond Detachment, which flies Diamond light aircraft with the Elementary Flying Training School Detachment Richmond; and the New South Wales Rural Fire Service, which flies large Air Tankers and spotter aircraft. The base also hosts visiting and transiting aircraft.

RAAF Base Richmond is also home to a number of 'air mobility' units – headquarters, coordination, training and engineering units – that support the flying squadrons at Richmond and Amberley (near Brisbane). Without these units, it would not be possible for our aircraft and their crews to do their work. Richmond is also home to combat support units – a range of squadrons whose job it is to enable the rest of the Air Force. This includes doctors, nurses and medics in aeromedical evacuation; plant operators and other trade specialists who work in airfield engineering and air base services, covering everything from air traffic control to airfield firefighting, security, and logistics.

The base also has a major industry footprint, including aircraft maintenance, estate management and garrison support, security, and other contracted services.

The sum of RAAF Base Richmond's contribution to Defence is therefore more than just the aircraft you can see from Hawkesbury Valley Way. Many of the squadrons here are essential to supporting Defence operations, from providing COVID relief workforces and delivering responses to natural disasters, to deploying Army and other Government agencies on major operations.

## The History of a vision to provide a 'Community Bank' in North Richmond NSW.

The impetus to establish a 'Community Bank' in North Richmond New South Wales, was driven by the owners of local businesses and members of the community, who were financially disadvantaged, as the result of, initially, the closure of Westpac Banking Corporation branch and later the closure of the Colonial Banking State Bank at North Richmond in 1999.

Three separate interest groups were formed in an effort to address the situation. Rafael Gilardi, owner of a general business outlet at North Richmond led one interest group of North Richmond shop keepers, who were concerned that the lack of banking facilities had resulted in business turnover being reduced by approximately 25%. Trevor Hitchcock, a local orchardist led another group and the third was the Kurrajong-North Richmond Rotary Club group led by Bob McCallum and Bob Brierley, then the owners of the Newsagency and Post office at Kurrajong.

Bob McCallum initially contacted one of Bendigo Bank's Community Bank Development Officers, Simon Moore about the possibility of opening a "Community Branch" franchise of the Bendigo Bank. He was informed about the formation of two other interest groups and was given contact details for a possible 'phone hook-up'.

The three interest groups had discussions, and as a result on 5th December 2000, the first telephone contact was made from Andrew Mansour's "Professionals" North Richmond business with David Macauley, who became the NSW Relationship Manager for Community Banking for Bendigo Bank. It was proposed to form a steering committee to establish a 'Community Bank.'

By 8th January 2001 nominations were accepted from the three interest groups for a Steering Committee and on the 15th February 2001 the first committee meeting was held at the 'Professionals' North Richmond. (Where 'Subway' now operates). Those elected were Bob Brierley Chairman; Bob McCallum Secretary; Trevor Hitchcock Treasurer and non-committee member Geoff Orchard; Janice Svenson; Rosina Saunders and Steve Gatt. Rafael Gilardi was ill and unable to

attend. A later addition to the committee was Peter Mortimer the proprietor of 'Words and Pixels.'

Prior to the first public awareness meeting, to promote understanding and gain pledges of financial support for establishing the North Richmond Community Bank Branch of the Bendigo Bank, committee members undertook an intense lobbying campaign in the community. Valued support came from The 'Hawkesbury Gazette', The Independent and Hawkesbury City Council.

On 23rd April 2001, 150 people attended the first public meeting at North Richmond Panther's Clubs function room, provided free of charge. Local business persons spoke of the positive effects that a 'Community bank' would have for the district, plus the negative experiences that the prior removal of previous banking services from North Richmond had caused to business and the district.

Bob Brierley chaired a question and answer time. Pledge forms were made available; volunteers took names of interested persons and the remaining forms were later distributed at various locations in the district.

Prior to the Steering Committee holding a second public meeting on 13th August 2001, explanatory literature was distributed to the community regarding the establishment of a 'Community bank'.

180 new interest people attended this meeting at which, Bendigo Bank provided two speakers for the occasion. Russell Jenkins, Chief Manager of Community and Alliance Banking gave a presentation supporting the Community Bank's establishment. Simon Moore, the Manager Community Bank Relationships continued to support this theme. Following these presentations, Ralph Steele explained some of the local experiences encountered when the community of Galston had established a Community Bank Branch.

Chairman of the meeting Bob McCallum informed that a Pledge Goal of \$450,00 was needed and a formal study to justify the viability of the goal.

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### COMMUNITY BANK North Richmond cont.

Following successful outcomes, a Public share Prospectus could be issued. Bob encouraged those present at the meeting to support the venture by signing pledges.

Lobbying of the community for sponsors continued and on 26th September 2001, 20 key sponsors had pledged \$18,500 to allow a survey to be prepared. The Australian Regional Consulting Group (ARGC) was chosen by the Steering Committee to do a feasibility study. This was completed by ARGC on 15th October 2001 and results of the survey were distributed on 19th November 2001.

On 15th December 2001 premises for establishing the North Richmond & Districts Community Bank Branch was selected as Shops 7 & 8 in the McNair Shopping Centre North Richmond.

Bendigo Bank approved the business plan on 18th February 2002.

To meet the requirements of the Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC) and the Corporations and Financial Services Acts, a meeting to conclude legal formalities and to decide on the preparation of a Prospectus, was held at the function premises of Loxley on Bellbird Hill, at the invitation of the Proprietor Paul Maher.

On 22nd April the prospectus for the Public Share Offer, written in conjunction with Bendigo Bank to their format, was submitted to ASIC.

Chairman of the Hawkesbury Community Financial Services Ltd, Chairman Bob McCallum launched the Prospectus on the 9th May 2002 at Panthers Club North Richmond.

Following formalities to purchase premises and commencement of appropriate fit out, share certificates were issued on the 22nd July 2002. A landmark achievement for the Board of HCFS was achieved on 26th July 2002 when a contract to purchase the premises was signed and a deposit was paid.

Community celebrations for the historic event were held on the 7th August 2002 when it was agreed with Bendigo Bank, that the 78<sup>th</sup> Community Bank Branch would open for



business at North Richmond on 10th September 2002. Many dignitaries from Bendigo Bank, Government and the community attended the occasion supported by the Kurrajong Rural Fire Service and North Richmond Rotary Club.

North Richmond & Districts Community Bank' Branch of the Bendigo Bank triumphantly opened the doors to its locally owned branch on the 10th September 2002.

Board members of the Hawkesbury Community Financial Services Ltd (HCFS Ltd) at the time of opening were: Bob McCallum, Chairman; Bob Brierley, Deputy Chairman; Trevor Hitchcock, Chief Financial Officer; Kathy McManus; Janice Svenson and Geoff Orchard.

Staff Members at the time of opening were, Denise Handcock, Manager; Clare Charlton, supervisor, and Customer Service Officers Michelle Gibbs; Kellie Scholte and Julia Partridge.

The Steering Committee and the Board Members of HCFS Limited's vision to provide our district with banking facilities was a credit to their commitment. The branch provides a valued service, which is appreciated by the businesses and members of our community.

**Valerie Holland**

The full story is available from the K-CHS Members Library  
**Community Bank North Richmond** by Valerie Holland  
[www.kurrajonghistory.org.au](http://www.kurrajonghistory.org.au)

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### My life growing up at North Richmond (Memories received in a letter from K-CHS member Bonnie Tosswill)

A lovely photo of the North Richmond School in the K-CHS 2022 Calendar, reminded me of a wonderful youth spent in North Richmond. I started school there in 1936 at age 6 when Mr Neave was the headmaster and lived on the premises. A lovely gentle man, he was well liked as I remember.



*Nth Richmond Public School combined 1939 classes with Bonnie Broughton Front Row 2nd from Right - Image 210400*

After 6<sup>th</sup> class I travelled on the *Pansy* train every day to Richmond High. Kamilaroi, the beautiful old home, still stood at the head of a circular drive. Unfortunately it is now demolished, although the grand gates remain. Girls were given domestic science, cooking, sewing etc., and other classes in a more recently built structure behind the old house.

I remember going to dances as a child with my grandmother (who reared me), in the hall opposite North Richmond School and well recall the night it blew over, never to be replaced.

We lived in a four room slab house owned by the pioneer Phipps family, who lived near Red Bank Creek. It was 5 shillings a week. We had no electricity, so my grandmother cooked on a primus and just about everything was done using kerosene, including the re-use of the 4 gallon square tins the kerosene came in. My grandmother was poor but she made it into a lovely little place with shiny Lino floors and hessian to line the raw corrugated iron ceiling in the kitchen to absorb the condensation after frosty mornings. We had a drip safe made of hessian too, so I think hessian was a well used product back then.

An old Irishman nearby even built his little home out of the kerosene cans, ...flattened out and attached to saplings ...he lived in Drews Lane. Early in the morning when we went to collect our cow to milk her and the sun hit all the bright shiny silver tin, it almost blinded us. The Irishman (I forget his name) was just a stranger to us, out of work, with no money, during the depression years he had just settled himself there and no one objected.

When our cow went dry, I bought milk from *Sunnyside* dairy, and would see Mr Bishop, a large wonderful Maori man,

pick up the milk cans each day and heave them on his truck before distributing them to their destination.

Mr Chajjoo "Charlie" Khan who couldn't read or write, but could add figures, owned a lot of property in North Richmond. His old shop stood on the corner of Grose Vale Road and Bells Line of Road, where I think the Aldi store now is. Mrs Lawson had a shop and house on the other corner. Snr. Lin shepherd owned the only garage in North Richmond, on the opposite corner to Mr Khan. The Methodist Church and an air raid shelter occupied the other corner. The *Pansy* train ran through the corner every hour until the last at 8.30 – 9pm.

My grandmother was Ethel Clarke who married Lawson Davis of Kurrajong at a very young age. They met at a dance in Kurrajong when she was fifteen years old, later marrying Lawson at eighteen years of age in about 1900. They lived in a bark hut along Wheeney Creek. Over the years she told me many stories about her life living in the Kurrajong. Lawson, his brother and his father ran fruit orchards along Wheeney Creek. I think the property was called "Timberinga". My grandmother often referred to the times when she would be picking fruit in the Timberinga orchard, with a sugar bag in front of her and a baby on her back. Her young husband took fruit to market by horse and cart ...and would drink the sale money away returning home at the many "*Traveller's Rests*"! Unfortunately there is no one I can ask now, as all have sadly passed on and resting at St Matthew's in Windsor, on my maternal side. Lawson died in 1916 in France during the 1<sup>st</sup> World War. I am 91 now, so soon that's where I have opted to go. (St Matthew's I mean!)

I married at 20 years of age and ended up living in Sydney for many years at Wahroonga, where I now reside. But every opportunity I get, I ask to be taken home to North Richmond.

I love receiving the "The Millstone" and know many of the places featured and easily become embedded in memories, all brought about and nurtured by the wonderful stories in the newsletter. I walked Crooked Lane many times when it was a dirt track, as was the Terrace.

My ancestral line on my maternal side was Captain Grono, who came to Australia shortly after Governor Phillip, and contributed to the building of the Ebenezer Church.

#### **Bonnie Tosswill (nee Broughton)**

*An interesting article appeared in the Windsor & Richmond Gazette on the 3 May 1940 - CAPTAIN JOHN GRONO Excerpt: "Although the Ebenezer Church was built during Captain Grono's advance on the Southern Seas, he had enthusiastically supported the project and "in case of accident", left a substantial sum for the building with the committee. He and his family were strong supporters of the church."*

Trove (nla.gov.au)





NORTH RICHMOND Main Street looking towards Kurrajong from North Richmond near to the intersection of Bells Line of Road and Grose Vale Road, taken from the middle of the road opposite the current site of the North Richmond PO and Veterinary Hospital. Lin Shepherd's garage *Plume* is on the right hand side of the photo where the Caltex service station now stands. Charlie Khan's general store is on the left across the road from the garage. Khan ran the store from the early 1920s until his death in 1948, when Roger Sinavin purchased the store. K-CHS Image Archives 032100

### **WHATS IN A NAME - Research by Deborah Hallam**

The first, 1809, land grants in what is now known as Grose Vale and Grose Wold were documented as located at Mulgrave Place. As the Curryjong Brush, or later Kurrajong became more populous the farms along the road to the Yarramundi Falls river-crossing became known first as *Little Kurrajong* and then *South Kurrajong*. The location South Kurrajong remained in official use until at least the 1880s.

In 1821 Richard Skuthorpe was granted land that had been surrendered by Joseph Singleton, at the Kurrajong. He built a home and surrounded it with extensive gardens and citrus orchards, thus calling it *Lemon Forest*. In 1850 Richard's daughter, Elizabeth, married William Lamrock who had arrived in the colony with his two brothers in 1842. William and Elizabeth settled at *Lemon Forest*. When Richard died, in 1880, he was variously recorded as of *Lemon Forest* and *Grose Vale*.

*Grose Vale* up until this point referred to the properties on the opposite bank of the Grose, the suburb now known as Yarramundi. The land previously illegally pastured by Matthew Kearns, following his purchase of Obediah Ikin's land at the confluence of the Nepean and Grose rivers was granted to Robert Ritchie in 1828 and according to the grant document, *to be known as "Grose Vale"*.

In 1855 *The Sydney Morning Herald* advertised for sale the *Grose Vale Estate* as "It contains 1900 acres, watered on the North by Grose River and on the east by the Hawkesbury or Nepean." It was being subdivided, however sold as one large parcel and a few small farms.

The first reference I can find to the name *Grose Vale* as now known is to the Dunstan family of Grose Vale in 1892 although mail deliveries were advertised to *Kurrajong* and *Grose Vale* by the *Western Road* by 1888.



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## Dates for Your DIARY



### K-CHS 21st Annual Australia Day Breakfast

All welcome

9am Wednesday 26th January 2022

*The Hut* Bowen Mountain Park

Guest Speaker, Awards & Presentations

Bring your own breakfast food to cook on the barbecue

Tea & Coffee will be available

Further enquires: President David Griffiths Mob: 049 864 6899

Email: [president@kurrajonghistory.org.au](mailto:president@kurrajonghistory.org.au)

NOTE: As editor of the Millstone I received an interesting note from K-CHS member Ray Goddard with reference to *The Flying Parson* (page 4 Nov/Dec 2021 Issue). The original title of Rev Daniels publication was "*Far West*" printed in 1959, but a later edited edition became known as "*Wings Over Wilcannia*". Ray also mentioned that the Rev Daniels aeromechanic was Kurrajong born bushman Albert Pope. I have managed to purchase via Rare Books, a copy of "*Wings Over Wilcannia*" and in the preface Rev Daniels mentions that it was "a few friends in the Kurrajong ...who urged me to write up my far western adventure ...notably Miss Smith, who helped much with the script". "*Far West*" was also the name Len Daniels gave to his Cirrus Moth Mark 11 aeroplane. **Suzanne Smith**

### More History on Lt. GMC Bowen (cont. from Millstone p7 Sept/Oct 2021)

Lt. GMC Bowen on retiring from services in His Majesty's Army for upwards of ten years, was granted 2,560 acres at the base of Mount Tomah, (approx.1036 ha). GMC Bowen's autobiography, in the Mitchell Library, Sydney, contains much information on the early years in the taking up of this grant, some of which is insightful, both of the man and the region.

In 1831 Bowen was appointed as a Justice of the Peace in the Windsor District and it was about this time it appears he began developing the above area, drained in part by the creek that bears his name and from which his son, George Bartley Bowen, was in 1867 to guide the surveyor, Edward Wyndham to Mount Wilson.

In January 1842, records show, GMC Bowen had also obtained a large 83 acre block on the south side of Mount Tomah, further extending the Bowen family interests, on the mountain.

Then in 1848 Bowen purchased land in the Bowen Mount area, where he built a house on the highest ridge, with well cultivated ornate gardens and orchards. This was for his second wife Letitia, their children, Susan, George and William. By the early 1860's, entrance avenues and extensive gardens enhanced the substantial timber home. A large section of the property is now an area of land, set aside for public use, known as Bowen Mountain Park, off Lt. Bowen Mountain Drive

**GMC Bowen and the Burrallow Swamp**  
Bowen made a road down the Western side of the Bowen Mountain escarpment, into the Burrallow valley and levelled an

area for rice growing. Traces of channels and embankments may still be seen to this day, together with the ruins of two cottages and some abandoned stone water tanks on the west side of the valley. There has always been a consistent story around the Kurrajong that states Bowen attempted rice growing in the Burrallow. But Australia's first attempt at a rice crop, soon proved a failure for him.

Although Bowen held substantial land holdings at Mt Tomah by the 1860's, he had made "Bowen Mount" his home and family seat until he began to retire frequently to Kirribilli in the late 1870's. This next phase of the story as recorded in the Australian Genealogist suggests "With the sixties going by, GMC Bowen, was undoubtedly beginning to feel his age and his eldest son's name begins to appear in directories and newspaper reports, firstly as a resident at Mount Tomah and later at Bowen Mountain".

So it appears during the late 1870's George Meares Countess Bowen began to spend less time at his farm on Bowen Mountain and more time at his home "Keston" at Kirribilli. He died on the 1<sup>st</sup> September, 1889 in his 87<sup>th</sup> year and is buried at St. Thomas' Cemetery, North Sydney. Most of the Bowen Mountain property was left to his son George Bartley Bowen, with smaller interests going to his other children. His 2<sup>nd</sup> wife Letitia lived on at "Keston" and died in Sydney on 5<sup>th</sup> July 1901.

All of GMC Bowen's former lands are today in hands other than those of his descendants. Historian MacLeod Morgan writes, "The Mt Tomah lands are now divided into smaller holdings and all that

remains of the "*Bulgamatta*" house at Berambing, are a few dressed masonry blocks, incorporated into a modernised dwelling, adjacent to the site, with a small section of the original wall still standing". Bowens Creek with its source on the Western side of Mt Tomah, flowed through the "*Bulgamatta*" property and this is where the convict built, Bowen's Mill once operated in the 1830s.

The Bowen Mountain homestead was destroyed by fire on 10<sup>th</sup> January 1914. The estate and its interests passing out of his son George Bartley Bowen's hands in the early 1930's to the MacKellar family (an Uncle of Dorothea MacKellar). The area remained relatively undeveloped other than for farming and cattle, until the 1960s, when the subdivision of Bowen Mountain as we know it today occurred.

GMC Bowen should most certainly be remembered as one of Australia's early pioneers. The Berambing property, Mt Tomah and Bowen Mt. areas having been pioneered by him and his family. He should also be remembered for his efforts at endeavouring to gain improvements to Bells Line of Road for the early settlers.

**Suzanne Smith**

#### Acknowledgements:

Bilpin, The Apple Country by Meredyth Hungerford 1995

The Mount Tomah Book - Mount Tomah Society 1987

Mount Wilson NSW by C.H. Curry 1968

George Meares Countess Bowen by John Barrett NLA

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