



People of The Hawkesbury

A HAWKESBURY REGIONAL MUSEUM FACTSHEET



YELLOMUNDI

Yellomundi was a Darug elder, one of the first of the Traditional Owners to meet with Europeans in 1791.

He was paddling on the river with his son, Deeimba, and Gomberee (possibly his father), when they came upon Governor Phillip, who was leading his second expedition to the Hawkesbury. After stopping to give the explorers directions, and later joining them around a campfire, Yellomundee operated on Colbee, an Aboriginal man from the Sydney area and a member of Phillip's party, to remove two splinters from a spear wound.

Captain Watkin Tench recorded:

'...Yèl-lo-mundee...took the cup, and filled his mouth with water; but instead of swallowing it, threw his head into Colbee's bosom; spit the water upon him; and immediately after, began to suck strongly at his breast, just below the nipple...he retired a few paces, put his hand to his lips, and threw into the river a stone...When he returned to the fire-side, Colbee assured us that he had received signal benefit from the operation...and assured us that Yellomundi was a Cár-ad-yee, or Doctor, of renown... not only he, but all the rest of his tribe were Cár-ad-yee of special note and skill...'

Yellomundee, a.k.a. Yaramandy continued to be prominent in local affairs throughout the first decade of European settlement. In 1804, he was one of two 'district chiefs' to be summoned to discussions with Magistrates Marsden and Arndell when violence flared in that year.

ANDREW BARBER

Andrew Barber was the last Aborigine in the district who had direct nineteenth century associations with the Hawkesbury. He was born at 'Lilburndale', Sackville, in the 1850s, though neither of his parents was Darug.

His mother, Ballandella, was a Wiradjuri child who had been brought by Major Thomas Mitchell, Surveyor-General, from the Riverina. By 1839 Ballandella was in the care of the Ascough family of Wisemans Ferry, to whose children she became nurse until she was 15, when she married John Luke Barber, a Darkinjung man from the Macdonald Valley. They had two sons, Andrew and Harry.

Andy was well-known and respected for his knowledge and for his skilful ploughing, fencing and horse breaking. For a time after his wife died, he lived alone beside Ebenezer church, before moving down river to the Sackville Aboriginal Reserve and Mission, established in 1889 for the local aboriginal community. Andy Barber died in 1943 and is recorded as the last person living on the Reserve to die. Some of the original reserve is now under the ownership of the Deerubbin Local Aboriginal Land Council following the successful land claim in 1993.

JOHN HUNTER

Governor of NSW 1795-1800

John Hunter had captained a vessel in the First Fleet, and returned as governor in 1795. On his arrival he found that more land grants had been given than were registered, with Hawkesbury being the most affected. The result of this would have been to deprive around 77 Hawkesbury settlers of their land, had Hunter not intervened.

He also showed much sympathy for the Hawkesbury's distress in the 1799 flood:

'Applications are coming to me, from every quarter of this distressed district for cloathing and bedding, of which we have none to supply. I will do all I can to moderate their distresses, and I trust I shall not be censured shou'd it occasion some expence.'

Despite his support, Hunter received a long list of complaints from 14 Hawkesbury farmers, titled 'Expenses of Farming at the Hawkesbury'. In this and in a later plea, grievance was piled upon grievance, unwisely suggesting that Hunter was not taking the necessary actions to make real improvements.

Hunter was greatly disaffected by this affront, and although he later acknowledged that some of the settlers' complaints might have been justified, he turned a deaf ear and continued to speak ill of them.

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LACHLAN MACQUARIE - Governor of NSW 1810-1822

The Hawkesbury was mentioned in the very first brief that Macquarie received when he was appointed Governor of NSW: he was instructed to secure the colony's food supplies, which had been ravaged by the regularity and severity of the Hawkesbury floods, and he was required to 'lay out Townships of a convenient size and extent' according to his own judgement. He named the

towns Richmond, Castlereagh, Windsor, Wilberforce and Pitt Town. Under Macquarie's administration, Windsor acquired more than 14 public buildings of various kinds, including St. Matthews Church, designed by the convict architect, Francis Greenway, and regarded as one of the most beautiful buildings in Australia. Another exconvict to be elevated was one of

Windsor's leading citizens, Andrew Thompson, after whom Thompson Square is named. Such acts brought Macquarie into conflict with the 'pure merinos', who wanted to keep civil rights and judicial privileges for themselves, and in holding out for a wider distribution of power and influence, Macquarie helped to pave the path to Australian democracy.

MARGARET CATCHPOLE

Margaret Catchpole arrived in the colony a convicted horse thief. Before she died, she had become a free and independent woman, much admired in the Hawkesbury for her services as a midwife, storekeeper, and farm overseer.

She acquired her own small collection of stock, which she kept on the Rouse property while she went to work for the Dight family on the Richmond Lowlands, and it was there that she experienced the terror of a sweeping Hawkesbury flood. The description she

left is one of the most moving of the flood descriptions available.

'This happened the 22nd of last March [1806]... Some poor creatures riding on the houses, some on their barns, crying out for God's sake to be saved, others firing their guns in the greatest distress for a boat. There were many thousands of head [of pigs]– all kinds of cattle lost, and so many bushels of all sorts of grain was lost so now this place is in great distress.'

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GRONO-BOOKS FAMILIES

The first of the family to settle in the Hawkesbury was John Grono, a seaman on the *Buffalo*, which arrived in the colony in 1799. As well as farming, he established a flourishing boat building business, and built up a considerable stake in sealing in Bass Strait and New Zealand.

By the time of his death in 1847, he was considered the colony's foremost ship builder, his largest, the *Australian*, being '100 feet long, and of 270 tons burthen'. He was buried at Ebenezer Church, which he had helped to found.

John Grono's daughter, Margaret, married another seaman, Alexander Books, and they went to live at Webbs Creek. The families carried on the boatbuilding trade together, continuing to use the half hull models and traditional techniques and methods of John Grono.

John's son, William Grono, described some of those techniques in diary entries of March 1866, during the building of the *Esther Maria*: '...Thursday 1. We went up the Crecke And got A loge to Cut Beemes for the wesel and got Stuf for A pit to Cut the Beemes on. Sataday 3. Alex And Tomas fliched Alf the log up in to Beemes has We Came ome We Herde that the Windsor punte Was swomped putin Catl Across the river.'

ANDREW THOMPSON

Andrew Thompson was one of the few convicts sent from Scotland, and despite a substantial sentence (14 years) his diligence and good character saw him rapidly promoted from stonemason's labourer to Constable, Chief Constable and then Magistrate – the first ex-convict to be so honoured.

Thompson's business activities were equally successful. He commissioned a punt-like structure, and installed it as a floating bridge to link South Creek with the Hawkesbury, close to the government stores and wharf. As a reward, Governor King granted him the right to collect tolls from all travellers using his 'bridge', with the exception of government workers and officials.

King also gave Thompson valuable brewing utensils and licences. Meanwhile, Thompson had built up a fleet of trading vessels which carried Hawkesbury grain to Sydney markets, or were used in the sealing trade.

When Andrew Thompson died on 22 October 1810, after a heroic effort to assist the victims of flood, the Sydney Gazette eulogised: '...he not only exposed himself to personal danger, but laid the foundation for that illness which has deprived the World of a valuable Life...'

GOMBEREE

Gomberee was an important member of the Darug tribe. According to Captain Watkin Tench, who met Gomberee in 1791 while travelling with Governor Phillip on his second expedition to the Hawkesbury, he was 'a man of middle age, with an open cheerful countenance, marked with small pox, and distinguished by a nose of uncommon magnitude and dignity'.

Gomberee offered gifts of string and a spear, and left his canoe to help the explorers find their way along the river bank. Later, he and some other Darug men sat around the Governor's campfire.

The following morning Gomberee demonstrated his skill in climbing trees in search of animals. Tench observed:

'He mounted to the height of twenty feet, in nearly as short a space as if he had ascended by a ladder, although the bark of the tree was quite smooth and slippery; and the trunk four feet in diameter, and perfectly strait... he descended with as much ease and agility, as he had raised himself.'

MARY ARCHER

On 19 September 1799, Mary Archer witnessed the cold-blooded murder of two Aboriginal boys by a gang of European youths. The next day, in an action that was both courageous and most unusual, she reported them to Chief Constable Rickaby. Without her intervention, it is likely that the murderers would have avoided any sort of trial or punishment.

Rickaby acted promptly, locating the victims' remains, and investigating suspects. Eight men were brought to trial, and five of them were convicted.

Mary Archer must have been aware that she would confront criticism and intimidation from her neighbours. What she could not have foreseen was that her action would precipitate legal change. Forcing a formal investigation allowed a trial, and the killers' subsequent conviction set the precedent by which other Europeans throughout the settlement would be held legally accountable for killing Aborigines.

JOHN TEBBUTT

It was in his Windsor observatories that John Tebbutt made discoveries that were to bring him world renown, including the sighting of two comets, in 1861 and 1881. He conducted regular, systematic observations, and published his results in many letters and reports in the Sydney newspapers and in British astronomy circles. When offered the post of Government Astronomer around 1862, he declined, preferring to continue his work at Windsor.

He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society in 1873, and, 22 years later, accepted the position of inaugural president of the Sydney branch of the British Astronomical Association. Recognition of Tebbutt's outstanding contribution to world astronomy continued after his death, with the bestowing of his name on a lunar crater by the International Astronomical Union (1973) and on the first \$100 note (1984).

MURIEL POWER

In the 1930s and 40s, Muriel Power was a regular visitor to *Waterford*, the Richmond property of her son Bob, and during these visits she promoted equal rights for women, and participation in the arts.

Under the banner of the NSW Arts and Crafts Society, which she started and led, Muriel gave expert tutorials in her studio. She initiated the printing of small volumes of literary efforts, displayed collected art works and crafts, and set up a 1,000 volume personal library for the use of women and others in the district.

WILLIAM BLIGH

Governor of NSW 1806–1808

At the time of Bligh's arrival, the colony was in trouble, partly because of the disastrous Hawkesbury floods. Bligh at once organised flood relief. He also tried to fix the labour shortage, and the influence of 'trading sharks'.

At the same time, he established a farm for himself at present-day Pitt Town. This was greatly resented by his enemies. In particular, it was noted that Bligh's farm benefited from the acquisition of Government stores and stock, without payment. Bligh argued that he had set up the farm as a model, to show settlers the best methods, just as King George III had done in England – an argument with which Hawkesbury settlers tended to agree. After his arrest during the 'rum rebellion', 15 of them signed the following address:

'...We no sooner began to feel the benefits of your administration and see your benevolent plans than our spirits began to revive, and our hopes to brighten, that by industry we would be able to support our families in comfort, improve our farms, and leave our children with a prospect of supporting themselves by a similar conduct...than we were alarmed at your being arrested; and we solemnly protest against that act and declare we had no foreknowledge, act, or part in the said rebellion...'

Finally the British Government decided the matter of the Hawkesbury farm and Bligh's conduct generally. It concluded in his favour, and the mutiny was judged an illegal proceeding.

ANDREW TOWN

Andrew Town was said to be a racehorse judge 'without peer' and it was considered that 'no man in Australia had done so much to improve the breed of all classes of stock'.

In 1877 Town purchased *Hobartville*, a fine property built by William Cox Jnr, for use as a thoroughbred stud. The unbeaten 1880 Melbourne Cup and Victorian Racing Club Derby winner, Grand Flaneur, was soon acquired, producing in his turn two more Cup winners: Bravo and Patron.

By the early 1880s, Hobartville Stud boasted 130 broodmares and 40 draught mares, as well as pedigreed cattle and pigs, carriage horses, ponies and trotters. Its annual yearling sales attracted buyers who came by special trains from all over Australasia. Guests enjoyed liberal alcoholic refreshments in the shade of the old oak trees, and a free luncheon was provided in a huge marquee that sat 300 patrons at a time. In two decades, Hobartville sold 747 horses, valued at 95,000 pounds.

Despite appearances, Town was not a successful businessman, and in the lead-up to the 1890s economic recession, he lost his horses, his properties and his fortune. Town left the district in October 1889, and died at Rockdale in February 1890, aged 49.

Images: the astronomer, John Tebbutt and his Windsor observatory.

