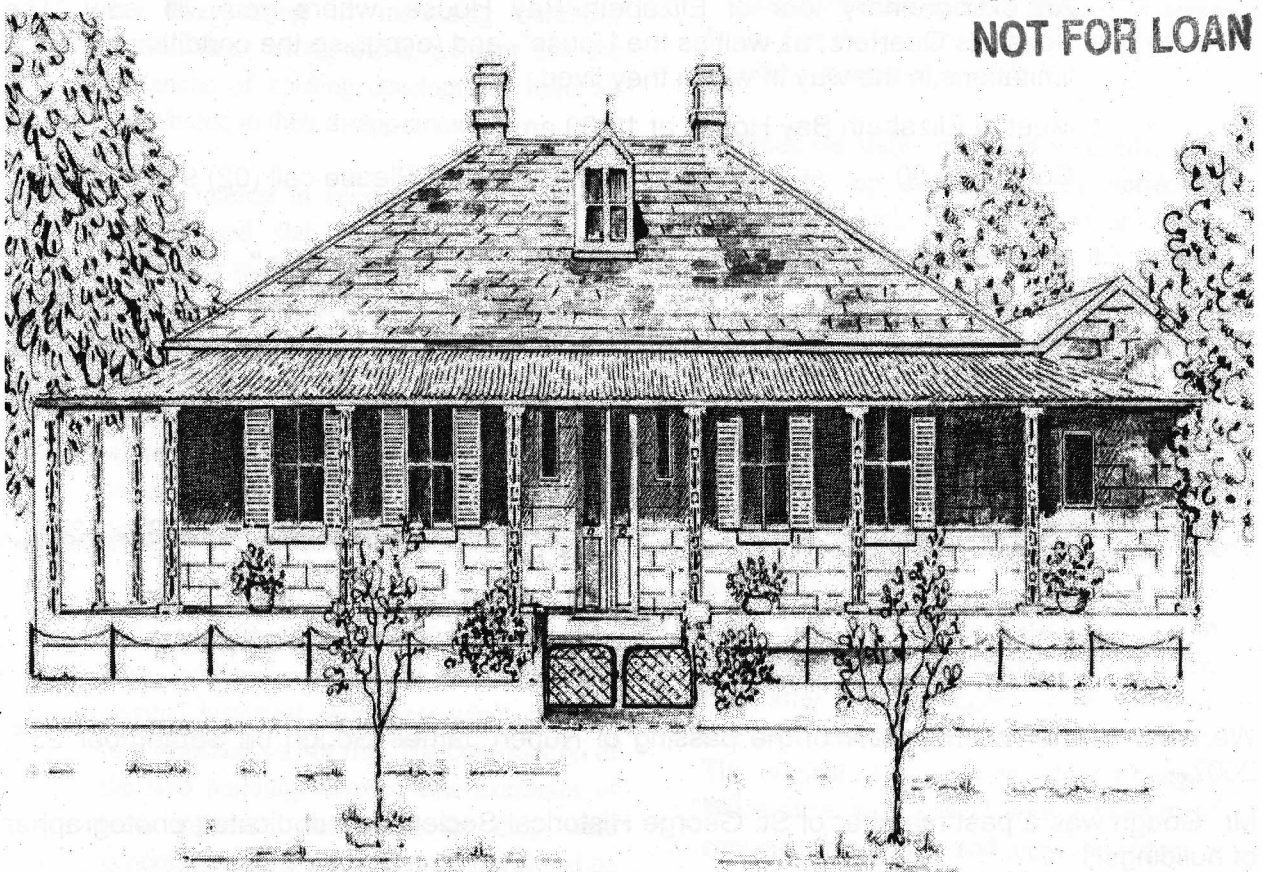


St. George Historical Society Inc. Bulletin

PROUDLY SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE CITY COUNCIL
JANUARY - MARCH 2008 EDITION

“Our Place”

ROCKDALE CITY
LIBRARY
LOCAL HISTORY
NOT FOR LOAN



St. George Historical Societies Museum – Lydham Hall

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Meetings are held 2:00 PM the third Saturday of the month (except January) in the Meeting Room 1st Floor, Rockdale Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale. Members, please bring a plate. Visitors are welcome.

EVENTS

APR 5th Elizabeth Bay House Tour

An extraordinary tour of Elizabeth Bay House, where you will view "The Servants Quarters, as well as the House", and recognise the conditions and the limitations in the way in which they lived.

Meet at Elizabeth Bay House at 10:00 am

Cost : \$15.00

Enquiries: Please call (02) 9567 - 8989.

Apr 6th The National Trust Festival for 2008 theme is "Our Place"

St. George Historical Societies Museum – Lydham Hall (18 Lydham Ave, Rockdale) will on this date have a photographic display of heritage houses in our area.

Time: 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Light Refreshments Served

Cost: \$6.00

Enquiries: Please call (02) 9587 - 8307



VALE



We were sad to recently hear of the passing of Rupert James Gough on September 23rd, 2007.

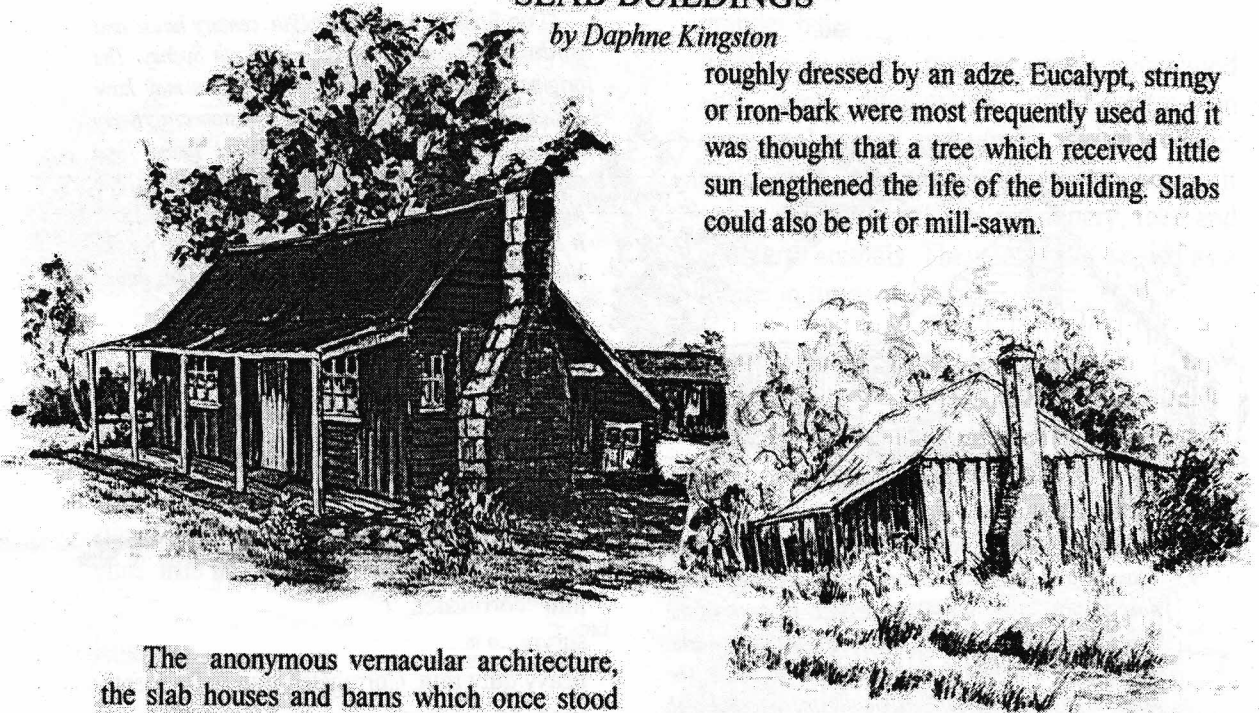
Mr. Gough was a past member of St. George Historical Society and dedicated photographer of buildings.

His Photographic work covered most of Sydney, the St. George Area, Sutherland and the Blue Mountains.

It is due to the late Mr. Gough that we have a collection of photographs of the St. George area at Lydham Hall which he kindly donated to our society.

SLAB BUILDINGS

by Daphne Kingston



roughly dressed by an adze. Eucalypt, stringy or iron-bark were most frequently used and it was thought that a tree which received little sun lengthened the life of the building. Slabs could also be pit or mill-sawn.

The anonymous vernacular architecture, the slab houses and barns which once stood secure in the semi-rural areas around Sydney, are disappearing in increasing numbers. Floods, fires, strong winds, termites and the avalanche of housing development have all contributed to their disappearance.

My interest in vernacular architecture in general, and slab buildings in particular, began over twenty years ago. At first, I looked on them as subjects to paint and draw, but when I began to look closer, I could see each one had its own story to tell and began to record them in drawings, slides and black and white photographs. The ever growing collection was the source of subjects for my books.

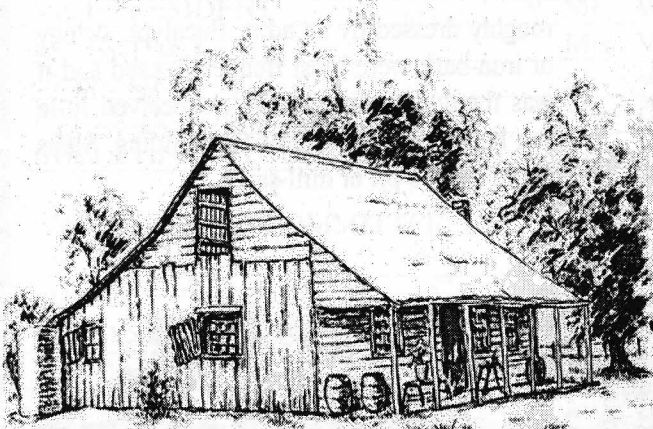
The early settlers' farm houses and farm buildings related directly to the environment - those which remain could be said to be original historical documents which can tell of a vanished way of life. The construction of the slab buildings showed fine examples of bush ingenuity and craft, for they were generally constructed from materials found on the site. True slabs were not sawn but split from logs cut to the required length; a metal wedge was driven into the timber, causing it to split into two or more sections, depending on the size of the log. The planks were

Yarramundi Lane, Richmond.

Orange orchards surround the house, which cannot be seen from the lane. The slabs on the near side are very wide. It is now used for storage.

When the slabs were used vertically, they were held top and bottom by horizontal timbers to which they were tied or nailed. Strong corner posts were set in the ground. Another method was to taper the slabs at the end. These were fitted into a groove on the upper surface of a heavy log serving as a ground plate and on the lower surface of a lighter wall plate, which also supported the roof. The gaps between the slabs were often covered with a clay mixture, battens or pieces of tin. The walls were seldom painted and weathered to a silvery-grey. The interior slab walls were sometimes pasted over with hessian, calico, newspapers or wallpaper. Even after years of neglect, traces of fabric and paper can be seen clinging to the walls. The original slab walls in 'Rose Cottage', Wilberforce were coated with a mixture of cow manure, wattle and clay, providing a smoother finish than the rough slab. Ceilings were formed from bark, stretched canvas, hessian or lath and plaster. Where attics existed, the boards became both the ceiling and the floor. The floors varied from packed

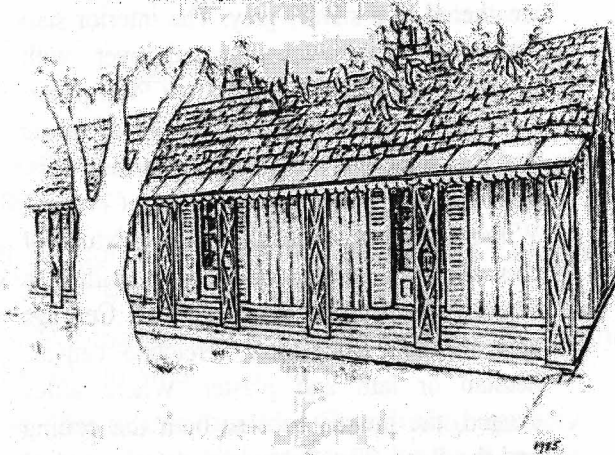
earth to hardened boards nailed in uniform logs which rested on the ground.



"Rose Cottage" Australiana Village, Wilberforce.

"Rose Cottage" was built of split ironbark by Thomas Rose early last century. It was occupied by the Rose family, father to son, up to 1961. It is one of the oldest standing timber structures in Australia. The iron on the roof was laid over the shingles in 1850. The floor is pit sawn timber. Originally the internal slab walls were coated with clay daub, but were later lined with pine board. The attic served as the children's bedroom and as a refuge when the 1867 flood rose over a metre deep in the cottage.

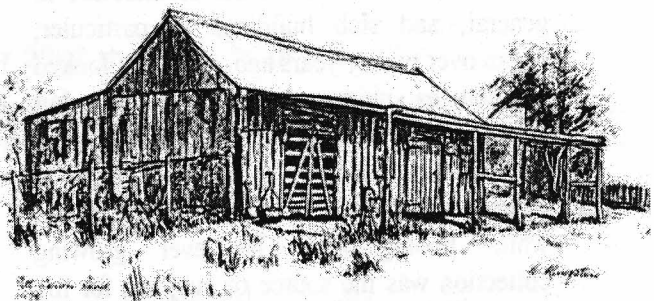
Shingles were the most popular roofing material prior to the introduction of corrugated iron in the mid 1850s, although they were liable to shrink in the sun and leak in the rain. Casuarina and iron bark were widely used. A froe, a cleaving tool with a slanting edge, was inserted into the block and given a sharp blow with a maul or hammer. Shingles overlapped each other by two-thirds and were nailed to battens. Original shingles from "Don Bank" North Sydney measured 37 centimetres by 13 centimetres.



"Don Bank" 6 Napier Street, North Sydney.

"Don Bank" is a surviving 19th. century house and garden in the commercial area of North Sydney. The original section of four cedar slab rooms may have been built in 1823 of timber from Wollstonecraft/Berry estates. Additional rooms of different timber and structure were added during the mid-19th. century. The North Sydney Council purchased the property in 1979. It has now been restored and is the Museum for the North Shore Historical Society. It is open to the public on Wednesday and Sunday afternoons.

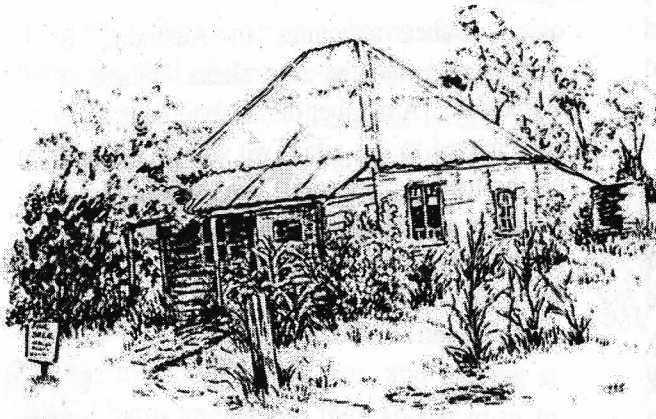
Corrugated iron made an enormous impact for it was light, cheap and readily transportable. It also simplified the construction of hip or pitched roofs, using saplings as rafters. Another advantage was its ability to collect water cleanly and efficiently into corrugated iron tanks. Many of the surviving slab buildings still carry the original heavy duty iron. Corrugated iron is frequently used to protect aging slab structures. A number of examples can be seen at Pitt Town. The corrugated iron, placed over existing shingles, provided extra insulation, often with the battens still visible at the roof edge.



Pitt Town Road, Pitt Town.

Huxley's Blacksmith's Shop has been used by the same family since 1882. It is worth stopping for a closer look.

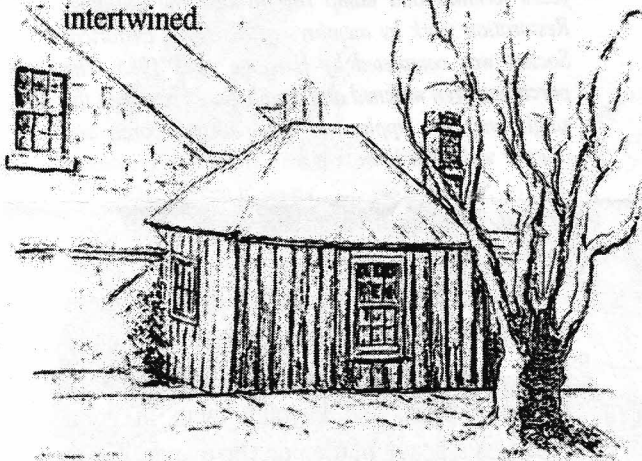
To minimize the risk of fire and isolate the heat, the kitchen was detached and where timber was used, the fireplace was lined with thick clay, bricks or sheet iron. Materials used in outside chimneys varied from brick or random rubble to wattle and daub, sandstone and corrugated iron.



7 Grenville Street, Pitt Town.

This house was for sale (April 1985), the price being \$1 000 more than the vacant block beside it. It is said to have been built in the 1820 s. The slabs are partly covered by weatherboards and corrugated iron. Small French doors are on the left side. Layers and layers of newspaper and wallpaper cover the internal walls.

It can be difficult to identify a slab house beneath the weatherboard or fibro covering, especially when the roofline has been altered. Many houses have been modified by additions and the inevitable changes during the years of constant use. The additive quality is a characteristic of vernacular architecture. Traces of garden are frequently found - old roses, lavender, geraniums, weeds, are all intertwined.

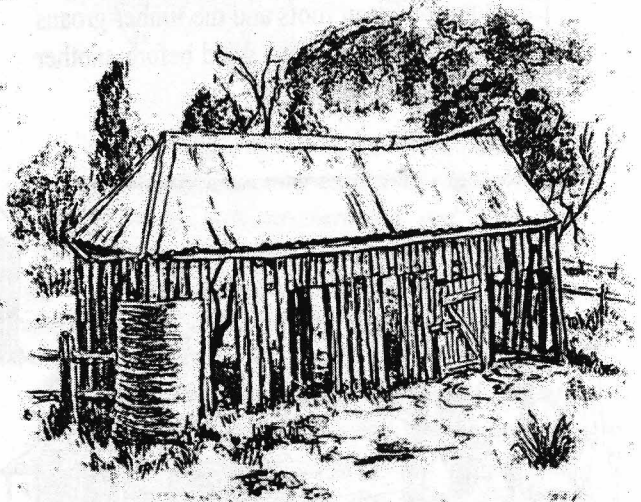


"Charleyville," Bents Basin Road, Wallacia.

The slab kitchen belonged to an earlier house. The window on the left is a recent alteration; it was formerly a door. The kitchen has been incorporated into the recently restored Charleyville.

Slab barns can also tell of a vanished way of life. They have a character and

which is sometimes lacking in the much grander buildings of their times. They are put together in ways that are easily understood and their dilapidation gives them an emotional appeal and impact. A barn relates to the farm, as a kitchen does to the house. It was a repository of farm machinery, feed and also farm animals. Their lofts also served as a refuge in times of flood.



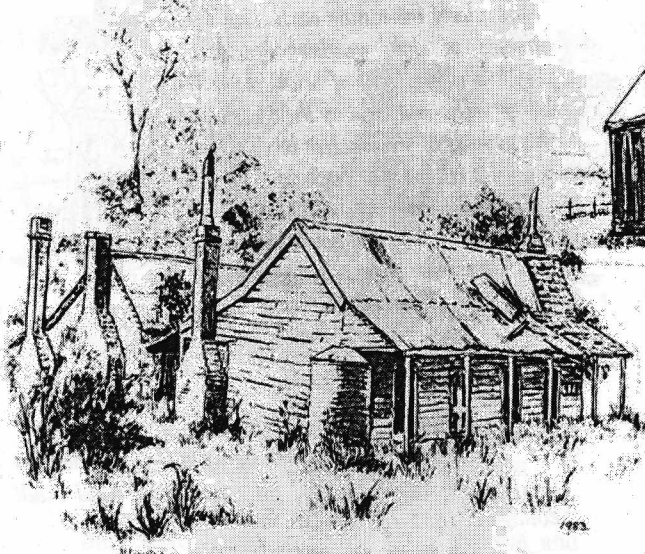
St. Albans.

The derelict barn stands close to the roadside, to the right of Price Morris' pit sawn wattle and daub cottage c. 1835-1840.

When photographing barns and houses, I take a series of photographs, rather than one or two of an obvious composition. Begin with a distant view of the building, showing general topography, then record the building in relation to other buildings and finally photograph the barn or house on all four sides. It is relevant to photograph the present contents of the building, roof construction, unusual details, perhaps hinges, etc.. Outside there may be the bonus of disused farm equipment, miscellaneous junk, plus post and rail fences. It is of course, important to note the exact location and date. The owner's permission is usually given gladly, but his interest in the buildings varies from great pride to complete indifference.

Some general thoughts on viewing barns. The hazards are few, but worth a thought;

barbed wire, snakes, spiders, savage dogs, and equally unnerving, over-friendly dogs and nudging horses. The time of year is relevant. Winter has much to offer, for the foliage is often deciduous, allowing a clearer view in winter and the grass is dry and shorter. Windy days are not to be avoided. They are full of atmosphere and both the trees and birds are noisy. One tends to think of barns silently collapsing, but on windy days they grudgingly give up their iron roofs and the timber groans with the buffeting of the wind before another piece comes adrift.

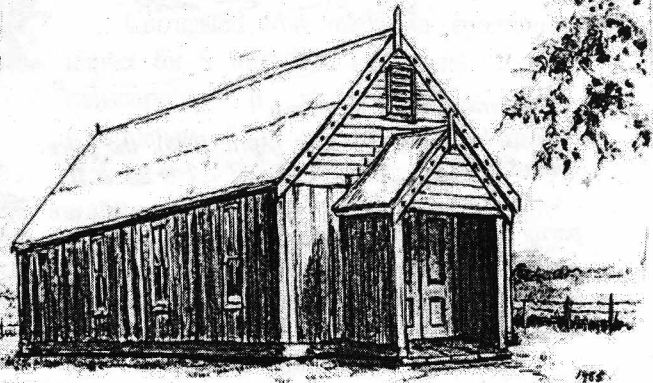


Cnr Great Western Highway and River Road, Emu Plains.

The drawing shows a derelict police station in 1983. In preparation for its restoration, a high wire fence has been placed around the two buildings. The police station, originally a home, is believed to have been built in the 1860 s from timbers of a bridge swept away in a flood. It was used as a Police Station from 1891 - 1908 and then became a home again. The home at the back may predate the building.

Fortunately there is still a variety of slab buildings left in the Sydney region. The 1836 St. Matthews Church at the Oaks is still in use. The Blacksmith Shop in Pitt Town Road Pitt Town is looking threadbare (the slab house beside it was recently demolished). "Don Bank" Museum for the North Shore Historical Society is open regularly. Part of the theatre still remains in Campbelltown; the derelict Police Station at Emu Plains is still awaiting care. "Rose Cottage", one of the

oldest timber structures in Australia, is incorporated into the Australiana Village at Wilberforce. A number of slab buildings have been moved to this site. Two slab houses are on the market at present, one at Smithfield, the other at Richmond. Along the back roads of the Hawkesbury district, slab barns and houses are tucked away.



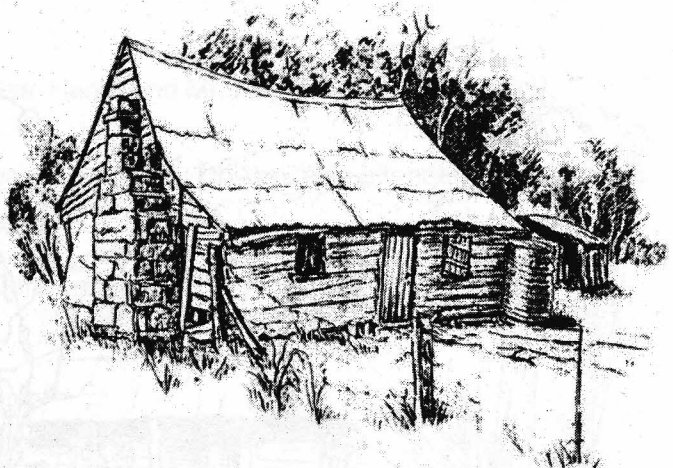
St. Matthews Church of England, Old Oaks Road, The Oaks.

St. Matthews was built by messrs Wild and Russell. The slabs and shingles were cut from the surrounding forests. The original shape of the Church may have been T shaped. A photograph dated about 1920 shows an "L" shaped building. When the Church was remodelled in 1923 the small paned casement sashes were replaced with double hung windows. Over the years termites and damp rot invaded the building. Restoration work by members of the Oaks Historical Society was completed by Heritage week 1985. The porch has been widened and double doors replaced the single one. The ripple iron lining on the porch and interior walls has been removed, enabling the slabs to be seen. Services are held on a regular basis.

Ref. The Oaks Historical Society.

As much as we would like to retain these barns and slab houses as a reminder of the old ways, the cost of labour and materials in repairing them, and keeping them in good repair, is a heavy burden on the owner. There appears to be a growing mistrust of conservation groups and the National Trust, as the owners feel they are serving their own livelihood best by simply pulling down an old barn or house and are not prepared to indulge in a prolonged hassle with someone who sits behind a desk. I had to reassure one farmer

that my interest in his barns was quite harmless and that I wasn't armed with a conservation notice. Wilberforce is one area that has changed quite dramatically even in the space of a decade. The remnants of the semi-rural life has almost gone, and no doubt in the next decade the change will be accelerated. When something changes, we become aware of what it was, and looking at the old barns and houses they appear to us to be frail and transient. While they are still dotted around our countryside, they deserve a second look, for they are a precious memento of the colonial past.

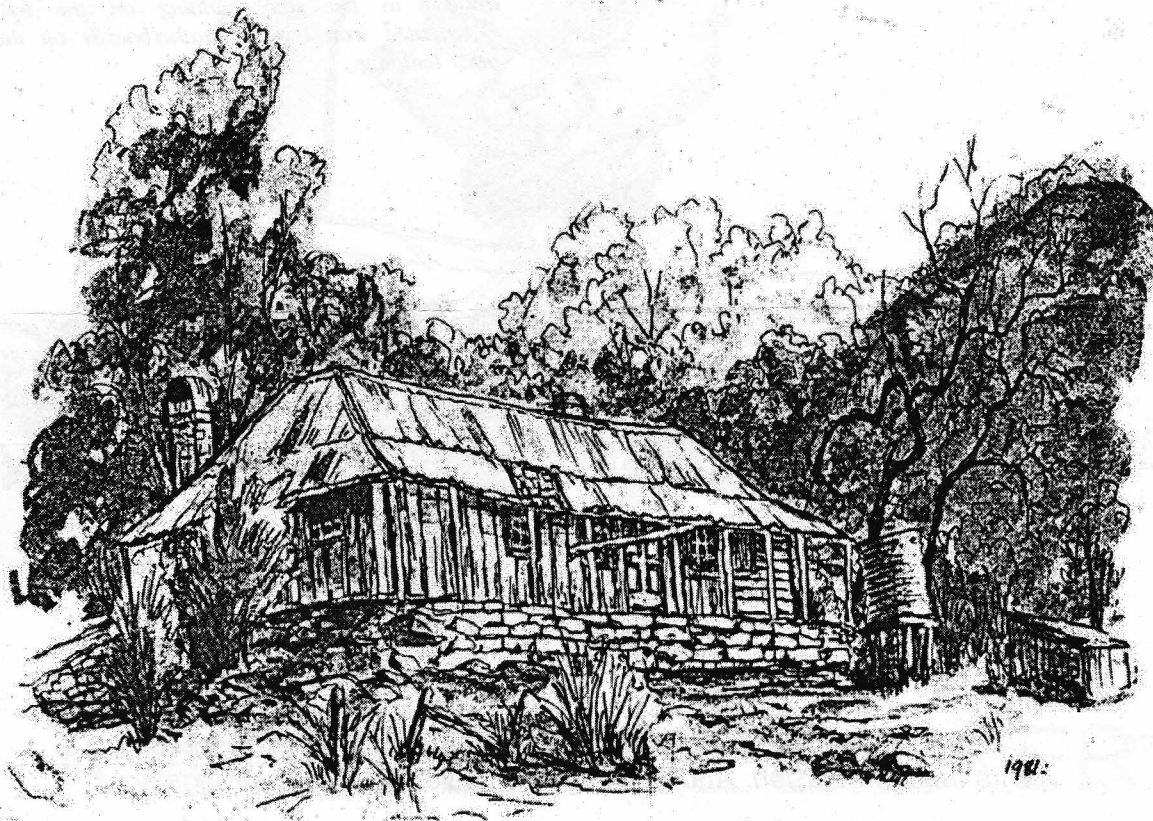


"Hillsborough" Appin Road, Campbelltown.

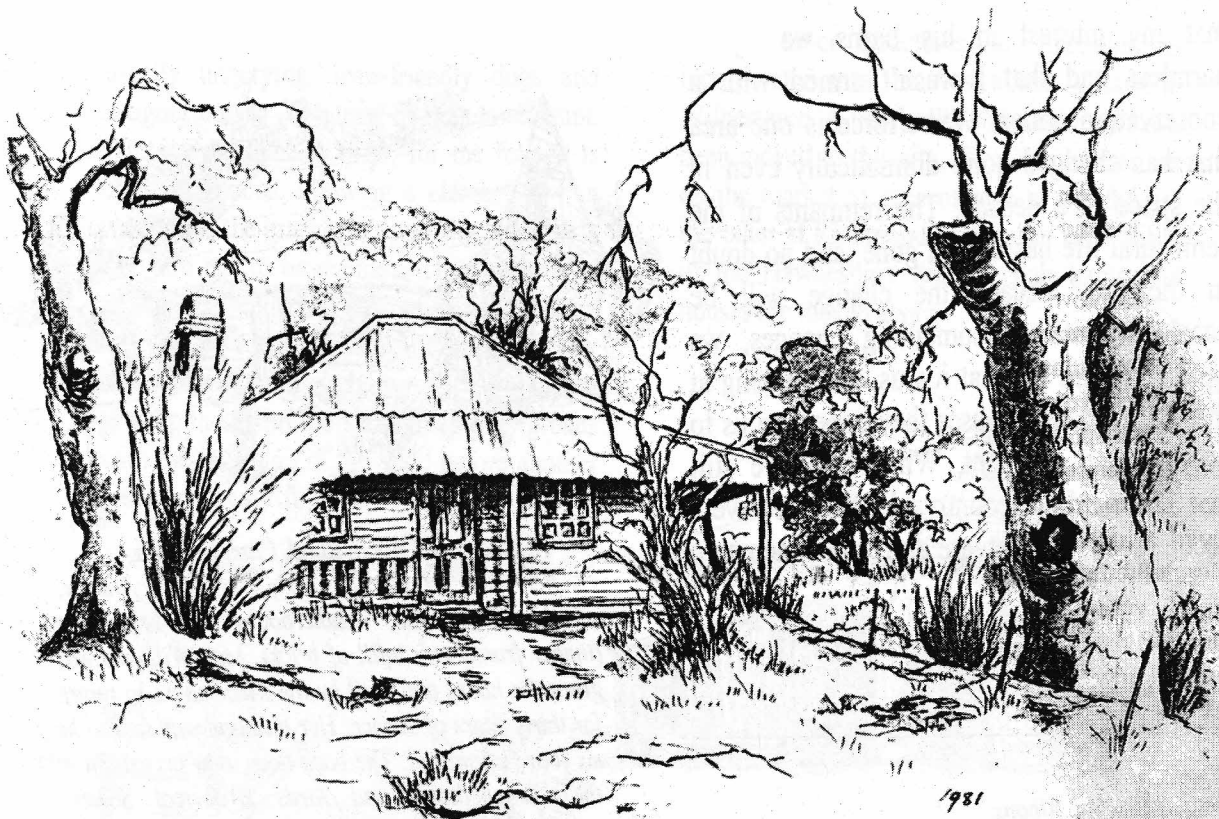
Particularly interesting early 19th century house, constructed of slab, weatherboard and brick nog (timber frame with infill of brick). Mag Williams was given the house and land by the Macarthurs in return for thirty years of service. Her husband was said to be six foot (1.8 m) tall. The back door, now on exhibit at the Campbelltown and Airds Historical Society, measures 1.4 x 0.7 m. The house was demolished in the early 1980 s; the stone chimney and a few posts remain. Ref: Campbelltown and Airds Historical Society

Below: St. Albans.

This drawing shows the main section of Price Morris's pit sawn wattle and daub cottage.



1981

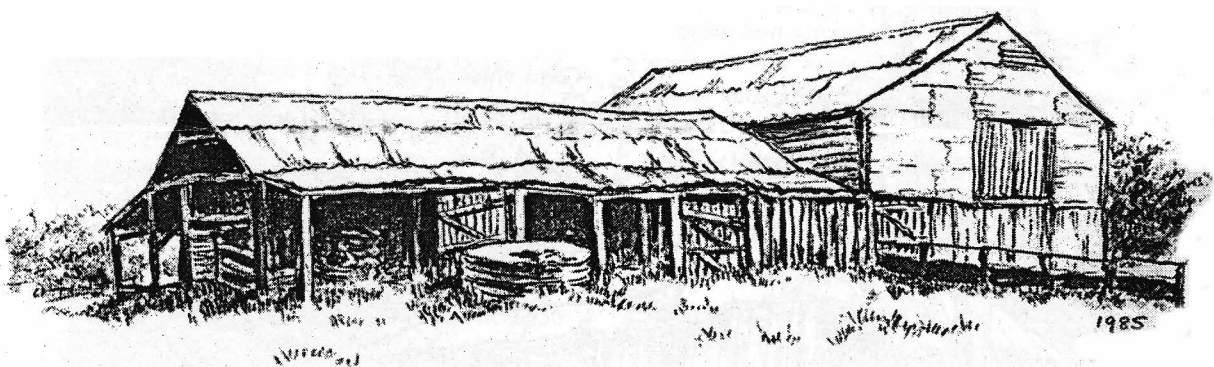


Above: St. Albans.

After crossing the small bridge near the settlers Arms Inn, this section of Price Morris's house can be seen facing the road. The missing weatherboards show the slabs beneath.

Below: "Talwa Dawra" Picton Road, The Oaks.

The mid - 19th. century dairy buildings can be seen from the road. Two long tree trunks have been hollowed-out to form splendid feeding troughs in the slab building on the left. Corrugated iron covers weatherboards on the other building.



Source: The City Of Liverpool & District Historical Society Journal 1996/96
With their permission. And Also approval given by Daphne Kingston

EVENTS AT LYDHAM HALL

On January 19th, 2008 a wedding between a Miss. Heard and Mr. Ruggles was attended by 100 guests.

On March 8th, 2008 a wedding between Mary Dowling and Jim Dix was also attended by 100 guests.

Many thanks to Dora Lenane for her help.

~//~

WE HOPE YOU HAD



A WONDERFUL EASTER

Not a Hero

The ANZAC Day march was over - the old Digger had done his best.
His body ached from marching - it was time to sit and rest.
He made his way to a park bench and sat with lowered head.
A young boy passing saw him - approached and politely said,
"Please sir do you mind if I ask you what the medals you wear are for?
Did you get them for being a hero, when fighting in a war?"

Startled, the old Digger moved over and beckoned the boy to sit.
Eagerly the lad accepted - he had not expected this!
"First of all I was not a hero," said the old Digger in solemn tone,
"But I served with many heroes, the ones that never came home.
So when you talk of heroes, it's important to understand,
The greatest of all heroes gave their lives defending this land.

"The medals are worn in their honour, as a symbol of respect.
All diggers wear them on ANZAC Day - it shows they don't forget."
The old digger then climbed to his feet and asked the boy to stand.
Carefully he removed the medals and placed them in his hand.
He told him he could keep them - to treasure throughout his life,
A legacy of a kind - left behind - paid for in sacrifice.

Overwhelmed the young boy was speechless - he couldn't find words to say.
It was there the old Digger left him - going quietly on his way.
In the distance the young boy glimpsed him - saw him turn and wave goodbye.
Saddened he sat alone on the bench - tears welled in his eyes.
He never again saw him ever - but still remembers with pride,
When the old Digger told him of Heroes and a young boy sat and cried.

Clyde Hamilton

Source: http://www.anzacday.org.au/anzacservices/poetry/not_a_hero.htm