

# THE SUBURBS OF SYDNEY

IV

## BOTANY, PAST AND PRESENT.

(WRITTEN FOR THE "EVENING NEWS"  
BY MARY SALMON.)



LANDING on the shores of Botany Bay, looking over its soft, opalic ripples, round the many miles of glistening beach and dark wooded headlands, to the two points that enclose its waters from the ocean beyond, it is quite easy to conjure up in one's mind the opening scene in the history of N.S.W.,

when Captain Cook and his company of scientists first set foot on the soil. Mr. Joseph Banks and Dr. Solander were in ecstasies on that late April morn, 1770, over the wonders of sea and land, and the floral beauties of which even to-day we are so proud. The wild acacia, the native heather, and the scarlet fuchsia were in bloom, as they are at present. But then parrots and cockatoos screeched overhead, and wild bush alternated with low-lying marshy swamps, teeming with swarms of what was, to them, new forms of insect life. Mr. Banks is responsible for the name Botany Bay, though it was seriously argued that Flora Harbour should be its appellation. Cook called it Sting-ray Bay, and the natives had christened it "Gwea." The burial of Forby Sutherland, a seaman from the Endeavour, May 1, gave rise to Baron Field's lines,

"The round of Christian burial better did pro-

cession, than the flag in England's name." There were on board three young artists, yet during the eight days' stay in Botany Bay not one sketch was taken of the landscape, though they had undertaken a journey of three years in search of new fields for their art. Historically their names would have been famous had they seized the opportunity of taking even indifferent pictures of the landing of the white man on our shores, and the country in its virgin state. The only relics are some curios and weapons found in a cupboard of Dr. Banks' house in Soho Square when a wall was demolished, and bought by Sir Saul Samuel to be placed in the State House Museum in N.S.W.

Dr. Johnson was a friend of Mr. Banks, and he is said to have pompously remarked to Boswell that "it was a long way to go for the collection of simples." But the result was that the Supply and Sirius, with transports, were a few years later in the waters of the bay, and the "In-

later in the waters of the bay, and the "Indians," as Cook and Tench always called the aborigines, a second time beheld the landing of a new race. "Two chiefs, covered from head to foot with pipeclay, otherwise naked, and armed with spears or womerahs, advanced to the shore, refusing to touch the offered presents," it is recorded.

But, as a matter of fact, Botany Bay was not the convict settlement; it not being until the famine years of 1789 and '90 that Governor Phillip established a convict fishing station there, under the inspection of one of the midshipmen of the *Sirius*; but the quantity of fish did not justify the expense of getting them over the wild and intricate bush, and over the creeks and swamps between the bay and the village of Sydney. Shooting parties scoured the woods for kangaroos, but in one month the public providing party only secured three.

History is comparatively silent about the next few years of Botany. A party of convicts worked under military control at Bunnerong-road. The whole land lying round the bay, including what is now Lower Botany, half of Bunnerong Flats, Captain Cook's Meadows, Sandringham, Sans Souci, Woniara, round to Kurnell, being generally known as Botany. The old farm where Mr. John Connell, grandfather to Elias Laycock, the sculler, lived, has only lately been demolished. It is said that Mr. Laycock's father used to have an original way of getting to town. He tied his horse behind his boat, and let it swim across to La Perouse; then mounted, and rode past Long Bay and Randwick heights. A few years ago some fishermen, in search of a "kellick" for their boat, pulled out a stone from the walls of the deserted farm, when they came upon a hoard of coins—crowns and half-crowns—consequence being that the building was rapidly pulled down, stone from stone, in search of another silver mine. A Mr. Simpson, ancestor to the Simpsons of Port Hacking, bought up all the cattle and horses from Mr. Laycock's farm for £30. The cattle were killed, as necessity arose, and the horses driven to Tom Ugly's Point, where the old horse yard may even yet be seen, in which they awaited sale.

With Botany proper, the name of Mr. Simeon Lord is mostly associated. He, with Messrs. D. Wentworth, James Milham, and Thomas Moore formed the first road commission. In 1823, Governor Brisbane granted 600 acres to him on the Botany side of Cook's River, near the mouth of the Lachlan stream, on which he built a tweed factory. Tradition says he employed 58 Chinamen in the works, two—"Big Joe" and "Yan Tie"—being remembered by a fellow workman, who still lives in the neighbourhood.

Mr. George Lord continued his father's works, and was an important man in Botany in all relating to its progress. His mother was, at her great wish, buried in a vault in St. Matthew's Church. Miss Lord (the fourth generation) comes of age shortly, when large estates belonging to the family will be unlocked.

Where the first great Darvall tannery stood is now Enoch Taylor's boot factory, and a suc-

where the first great Darwin nursery stood is now Enoch Taylor's boot factory, and a succession of workmen's terraces. Among the oldest residents in Lower Botany is Mr. William Stephen, for some time M.L.A. for the district,

owner of an ideal estate, known as Banks Meadows, built on the original Bell grant. A road (Stephen's) bears his name, and beautiful gardens show what enterprise and energy may do in converting a wilderness. Part of his property is over the Veteran's Swamp, a tract offered to the disbanded regiment (102nd) who had helped in the arrest of Governor Bligh. The grants were in 50 acre allotments. Some of the grantees immediately sold out, and left the country, a few making their homes on their grants. Inland from Banks Meadows were market gardens, carried on by an old resident, Mr. Lobb; and the original city florist had his home and garden there, Mr. Saxby, whose house still stands. Messrs. Searl and Anderson have

perceived the value of the protected valley plains, and have established nurseries, whilst market gardens, now cultivated by the ever-present Chinaman, stretch out in every direction in the low-lying country. Near the beach, where Elliott's woolwash now is, was the first woolscouring works of Prince, Bray, and Ogg, a factory for paper making now being close by. The church and school lands stretch right across Lower Botany, and the Banks Meadows State School occupies a splendid position on the heights. The cemetery, also at the extreme end of Lower Botany, has lately had an addition from the old Devonshire-street burial ground, a special section being added for the removed bodies.

Along the beach is the historic Sir Joseph Banks Hotel, built for Mr. Thomas Kellett, who had been canteen keeper to the soldiers in the times of Barrack Square. An oxen, roasted whole, is said to have celebrated the opening, a feast of doubtful enjoyment from a culinary standpoint—more suitable to cannibals than Christians!

Many stores are told of its hospitalities, when it was kept by Mr. Beaumont, who about two years ago died at Strathfield. This gentleman was an intense lover of animals, and had a small menagerie, the second in the colony, the first being at Watson's Bay. The first elephant was on view at Botany, and a charge of sixpence was made to see it. It was here Henry Burton opened his well-known circus, which afterwards toured the gold fields, where he trained his champion bareback riders, the first performance being on Boxing Day, 1851. Visitors came by coach from Sydney, the fare being 5s return, or in a small vessel, that left Queen's Wharf, at the foot of George-street, and plied to Botany on holidays only. Old residents will remember the beautiful gardens, and the nosegays and bouquets that could be bought in the Banks' grounds from a shilling to a sovereign in price. Mr. Charlie Connors, the gardener for over twenty years, still lives in Botany. It was in the days when Mr. John Maloney had it that the club house was most noted, and during Mr. Frank Smith's time that the great walking races and cricket matches were held; £8000 is said to have spent in prizes

last the great walking races and cricket matches were held; £8000 is said to have spent in prizes alone, and the sporting character of the hotel was established.

A beautiful pavilion was built, and yearly picnics of the Hibernian and other kindred societies annually gather in the fine grounds. For many years squatters brought their families there for a "few weeks at the seaside," honeymoon couples chose it above other similar retreats, and Parliamentary dinners and corporation banquets were given there. Footballers still frequent the grounds on Saturdays and holidays.

Generations of fishermen have found in Botany Bay a lucrative calling. For years parties of blacks came regularly to fish, outside of the tribe of whom Queen Sally was queen, who made the bush round the bay their headquarters. Queen Sally was buried on the beach many years ago, when the last great corroboree was held. The little colony of fishers at the end of Bay-street dates back nearly sixty years, though many have lately passed away. Mrs. Smith (aged 82) is the veteran lady of the camp, a hale Scotchwoman, who knew Botany when there were only three houses between the beach and the toll-bar along the main road. She speaks of the peace and security of the old times, when Botany was remote from city influences, the only disadvantages being the difficulty of getting proper education for her family. Shea's Creek (lying between Botany and Newtown) was dangerous to cross, and Newtown, where there was a good school, a long way off. The three large school structures, with spacious playgrounds, proclaim the advancement of the district. The George and Sussex streets markets used to take the fish, which were sold by the bushel. But those were good days for the fishermen, and fortunes were made.

Market gardening was profitably carried on by settlers before the "heathen Chinese" came into competition. Mr. Neild, the oldest gardener, now a well-to-do landowner, says that he clear-

ed many a dry season £500 a year out of carrots, and turnips, parsley, and peas. The Cauliflower Hotel, on the Botany-road, was built from the profits of an extraordinary crop, cabbage-growing at 1s a head being a profitable business.

When it was decided that the Lachlan Reservoir was insufficient for Sydney's water supply, the Botany Waterworks (about 1858) were erected. Mr. Edward Bell was city engineer, and it was under him that the mill stream was dammed, and the seven-acre engine pond made. So far as factory life went, this use of the Botany water threw back private enterprise for a considerable time, but the water from this source was considered the finest obtainable. Some parts of Redfern still obtain water from this reservoir.

Although poultry-keeping has always been a source of profit, it is only of recent years that it has become a large industry. Mr. Ellis has evolved a very large duck and poultry farm out of a tract of pure sandy marshland, some distance inland. At present, there are over 3000

of a tract of pure sandy marshland, some distance inland. At present, there are over 3000 fowls, and quite as many ducks. His feed bill amounts to £40 a month; whilst he, even in the scarce time, collects over a hundred dozen eggs a week. Other poultry farms are working profitably, and the clever contrivances for breeding and caring for the young birds makes one think the kindergarten system has been adopted for the care of chicks and ducklings. Tanneries are now all over the district; there are also boiling-downs, from whence unsavoury smells arise.

The first church was the small Wesleyan Chapel (now a fine new structure), built on ground given by Mr. George Lord, who also, with Mr. Stephens, originated the fund for the building of St. Matthew's Anglican Church, the Rev. Mr. Saliniere being first clergyman. A School of Arts was instituted by the efforts of these and other residents. About ten years ago (when the removal of the waterworks to the Nepean allowed the re-use of the Lachlan stream), a new impetus was given to factory trade. "Botany," grumble some of the residents, "though the first place where the white man landed, has been the last to receive Government attention." But the roads are good, the tram service very frequent, and the sewerage is said to be perfect. In 1888, Botany and North Botany were created boroughs, the first Mayor of Botany proper being Mr. Francis Luland; the aldermen, Messrs. J. Macfadyen, Samuel Daniels, John Frost, C. Luff, Joseph Pemberton, Richard Exell, Joshua Wiggins, Thomas Aug. Smith. The ratepayers were 692, revenue £2290, estimated population 2250. North Botany's first Mayor was Mr. Aaron Laycock; and, the aldermen, Dr. Heaslip, J. Pallett, J. Thornton, J. Coward, B. Reeve, Alf Sparks, H. Ramsay, and C. Brewer, the population being estimated at about 2500; total receipts for that year realised £1857.

In back years there was no road from the city direct to Botany, for The Half-way House was built on what was little better than a bush track. When one left the turnpike, at the junction of George and Pitt streets, what was called the Botany road began; but for many years what was known as a corduroy-road was all that people out in that remote and desolate part could expect. Many of to-day's residents remember walking to the Sydney Post Office and back in a day, prior to the introduction of Josiah Wiggins' bus, the fare being 2s 6d each way. In 1861, the first mail contract was signed. Before that letters might be brought by the bus-drivers as a favour, or one had to call for them at the G.P.O. The name of Gardeners-road, in North Botany, recalls the many market gardens that covered the swampy flats, which even to-day stand foot deep in water. These were, many of them, reclaimed, and the hungry soil received artificial aid to produce plentiful crops. Lucerne fields covered—indeed still cover—many acres. In 1851 Mr. Randolph I. Want had a large estate in North Botany, long since cut into streets and terraces, while the Winder grant extended over 455 acres. Byrnes' Bush was a grant to Mr. Andrew Byrnes, where children found special attractions, owing to the native currants and other wild fruits.

The suburbs of Sydney appear to be capable of

The suburbs of Sydney appear to be capable of almost indefinite expansion, and someone has compared Sydney Harbour to the axle of a carriage wheel, from whence the spokes extend and widen in expanse. The districts immediately round the harbour may become overcrowded, but there is plentiful room to extend, and in Botany there are yet miles of almost untouched country. True, in some places sea-sand is piled in hills; in others, ti-tree swamp land stretches aridly along the roads, but what has been done is so great that enterprise and natural expansion will do the rest. As a working man's suburb, and a manufacturing and agricultural district, the future of Botany is assured, to say nothing of the advantages of its maritime proximity.

---