

Bickley Vale

Steve Robinson

Bickley Vale is situated in Camden West and forms part of the South Ward in the Camden Local Government Area. It was assigned the status of a suburb of Camden in October 1991.

Bickley Vale was the name of the property owned by the Sidman family and later the name of their residence at 69 John Street in Camden which was demolished in 1984 for the erection of the Camden Senior Citizens Centre.

Not many people know of Bickley Vale since it was only recently named; it is probably still thought to be part of Cawdor. This rural area adjoins Cawdor to the south and east, Grasmere to the north and Mount Hunter to the west. Its boundaries include Westbrook Road, a line drawn north from Westbrook Road, about half way between Cawdor Road and Dowles Lane to Burragorang Road, The Old Oaks Road and Fosters Lane.

The Camden area whose original inhabitants were the Tharawal and Gundungurra people is associated with the early history of the Colony of New South Wales when it became known as The Cowpastures, named by Governor Hunter, after cattle which had strayed from the Farm Cove settlement were discovered here in 1795. Due to the early European settlers, namely the Macarthurs, who established flourishing wool, wine and wheat industries here the area is said to be 'The Birthplace of the Nation's Wealth' as suggested on the Camden sign on Camden Valley Way.

Bickley Vale is part of the area first named West Camden in 1823 after the Government Prohibition Order against the entry to lands west of the Nepean River to protect the cattle of The Cowpastures ceased and Governor Brisbane was authorised to grant John Macarthur a further 5,000 acres adjoining his Camden Park Estate previously granted in 1805.

In the early 1840s the whole of the Camden district turned its attention to wheat growing with most of the farmers sowing large areas to cash in on the high prices paid for the local flour which had established a good name in the Sydney market. Unfortunately rust appeared in the crops in 1861 and 1863 and the industry was ruined along with many farmers and land owners who were forced to turn to other means to make ends meet.

In 1885 3,600 acres of Camden Park Estate north of Cawdor were subdivided into small farms up to 130 acres each. Among the buyers were W.H. Paling, W. Stimpson, G.A. Porter, W. Carter, J.W. Cliff, A. McCulloch, Alfred Burnett and F. Ferguson.

In the 1880s Dairy Farming became the main industry in the area. G.A. Porter was the first farmer to send milk to Sydney from his property 'Corstorphine' on 6th March 1883. Dairy farming remained one of the major industries in the Camden West area until only recently as one by one the farms started to disappear under the pressures of high production costs, milk

quotas and quality, large milk producing companies and the attractive offers from developers who would transform the whole area into suburbia given the opportunity.

There aren't many signs of the not long ago thriving farming activities when you take a drive around Bickley Vale today apart from the occasional small herd of cattle grazing in the lush paddocks, a large hydroponic market garden and a poultry farm. Remnants of past farming activities remain, derelict sheds, dairies and farm houses set in their peaceful scenic surroundings awaiting their fate, the area destined to be developed in years to come.

Bickley Vale is probably the only location in the Camden Municipality to remain virtually untouched by residential development and should remain a rural haven for quite a few more years. With only a handful of occupied dwellings its population wouldn't have changed much over the past several decades.

Camden has grown and changed in fifty years from a population of 4,000 to over 51,000 now. A drive around Bickley Vale and Camden West today still has a 'country' feel and look about it as it did fifty years ago. A lot of natural forest and wooded areas remain and the ridge line along most of the length of the area running north to south offer magnificent views across the landscape towards Camden. It's what helps keep Camden a country town.

References:

Camden Council Website <http://www.camden.nsw.gov.au/>

G.V. Sidman *The Town of Camden* facsimile edition published 1995 by Camden Public Library and Liz Vincent

A summary of secondary sources on Camden can be found at <http://www.camdenhistory.org.au>