

Camden West

By Steve Robinson

Camden West as the name implies takes in areas to the west in Camden Municipality comprising about one third of South Ward in the Camden Local Government Area. Sickles Creek to the west, a large loop in the Nepean River to the north and a creek running north from Cawdor into Matahil Creek and eventually the Nepean River form natural borders and the man made borders of Westbrook Road, Fosters Lane and The Old Oaks Road separate this rural area from the rest of Camden and the Wollondilly Shire.

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.

West Camden was first named 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 October 1991 Camden West was divided into three separate localities when Ellis Lane, Grasmere and Bickley Vale were assigned the status of suburbs of Camden.

Ellis Lane named after Solomon Ellis who arrived in Australia in 1855, was originally known as Cobbitty Paddocks, the area of land surrounded by the large loop in the Nepean River south of Cobbitty Village and west of Camden Airport. Solomon's son Samuel took up farming on the property 'Fernleigh' at Cobbitty Paddocks.

Grasmere was the name of William Henry Palings property of about 450 acres which he gave in 1888 to form the Carrington Hospital, named after the Governor of NSW, The Right Hon. Charles Robert Barron Carrington P.C. G.C.M.G. Carrington Retirement Village has been developing and growing there in recent years with a long waiting list of Camden residents planning to retire there. Carrington Hospital including Grasmere Cottage, the former Gardener's Cottage, Masonic Cottage Hospital, the former Morgue and Front Garden is listed on the NSW Heritage Register. Our Boys Home, now known as Macquarie House situated in Ferguson Road was built in 1890 on land also donated by Mr Paling to "The Society for Providing Homes for Neglected Children".

Bickley Vale, the area directly north of Cawdor between Westbrook Road and Burraborang Road 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.

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.

Probably the most visible and important industry in Camden West today is one that affects the whole of Camden's population. Sydney Water's water treatment works is a magnificent industrial feature in the rural landscape and a sign of the growth expected in the Camden area.

Camden West retains its rural air in spite of the development taking place which is restricted to larger acreage allotments and residential areas with large blocks of land and prestige homes mainly in the Grasmere and Ellis Lane areas. Bickley Vale remains virtually untouched by residential development. With a population of about 1900 in 2007 and development being carefully maintained by Camden Council, Camden West should remain a rural haven for at least a few more years.

Camden has grown and changed in fifty years from a population of 4,000 to over 51,000 now. A drive around 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

R.E. Nixon *Carrington 1890-1990 The Centre of Total Care*. Published 1990

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