

## **Cawdor**

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The original inhabitants were the Tharawal & Gundungurra people, while another tribe or perhaps subgroup of Aborigines in the Cowpastures area was called Cubbitch-barta, the name coming from words for the white pipe clay.

Cawdor was originally a part of Camden Park, the name for John Macarthur's extensive land holdings (25,000 acres by 1825). It lies to the west of the Great South Road (now called the Old Hume Highway or Remembrance Drive) and is bounded by Razorback Mountain & Westbrook Lane. It is 65kms south west of Sydney, situated in the two council areas of Camden & Wollondilly.. The 2001 census lists the population as 842.

Cawdor was originally part of the Cowpastures area, named after the herd of runaway cattle discovered there in 1795. The discovery of these excellent pastures encouraged interest from the settlers in the southwest, because of the heavy flooding of the Hawkesbury and depleted soils closer to Parramatta. The interest, especially in the Nepean River, increased further after the severe drought of 1839.

Cawdor was the first village to develop in the Cowpastures district. It predated Camden by more than 20 years. The name was given to the area by Governor Macquarie to honour his wife's family's connection to Scotland. (Campbells of Cawdor). This Governor established an important cattle station in 1812 at Cawdor, which subsequently grew to be a large government settlement.

The first building was a slab hut built in 1803-4, followed by several other huts for use by local shepherds and cattle overseers. In 1824 a court building was erected and became known as Fletchers Gaol. It was a Court of Petty Sessions and had a small body of police attached to it. It stood on the current Uniting Church site. The original church was probably built around 1851 and replaced in 1902 by the present building. The church is still in use and the cemetery is the resting place for many early settlers and their descendants.

Because it lay on the main road (built by convict labourers) to southern New South Wales & Victoria, the settlement grew in the early 1830's with a church and school, a store and a blacksmith shop. During this time there was a stopping place for the mail and passenger coaches at the Post office, opened in 1836.

In the 1850s, rural industries developed in the form of sheep breeding, wheat-growing and dairying. Indeed wheat from Cawdor won a Gold Medal at the Great Exhibition in London twice (in 1851 and 1855).

At the time of the Lambing Flat riots in 1861, troops with horse-drawn field guns travelled by rail to Campbelltown, then by coach via Cawdor to Young.

In 1888, a national school was established 2km from the church, along Cawdor Road, and this school is the present Cawdor Public school.

In later years the village of Cawdor faded away, due in part to the lack of a reliable water supply and the development of the village of Camden by the Macarthurs. However this district continued to thrive, with its milk being sent to Sydney town and with a creamery built at Cawdor.

In 1902, the Goulburn to Sydney bicycle race (which predates the Tour de France) began, and the riders travelled via Old Razorback Road.

In 1956-57 the film "Smiley" was filmed in part around St Jerome's church at Cawdor.

In the 1960s and 1970s, both the eastern & western sides of Cawdor Road were subdivided and sold, but in the early 1990s local residents were successful in opposing a proposed development of 7,000 houses: and it was in 1994 that locals and politicians alike successfully opposed a 4,900 lot development for the Cawdor area. Whilst housing development continues apace all around the Wollondilly and Camden council areas, Cawdor remains undeveloped, mainly due to floodplain restrictions.

Cawdor today is home to industries such as hydroponic vegetable growing, poultry farming and horse studs.

In 2001, Camden High School (built in 1956) was moved from the centre of Camden township to Cawdor Road, which enabled a sports ground and agricultural plot to be extended significantly. The school is set on six and a half hectares, with beautiful views of the Razorback Range as a backdrop

Currently a development application for a proposed Muslim school near the High School is under active discussion in the community. Since Cawdor is south of the proposed South West Growth Area and remains flood affected these new developments will not affect the suburb directly.

**References:** A useful summary of secondary sources on Cawdor can be found at [www.camdenhistory.com.au](http://www.camdenhistory.com.au) and follow the links to Camden Bibliography.