

Grasmere

By Steve Robinson

Grasmere 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. It is separated from its immediate neighbouring suburbs Ellis Lane to the north by Werombi Road and Bickley Vale to the south by Burragorang Road. A creek running parallel to Cawdor Road joining Matahil Creek which runs into the Nepean River is the eastern boundary to Camden and Cawdor. Sickles Creek to the west forms a natural border with Wollondilly Shire.

Grasmere was the name of William Henry Paling's 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".

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.

Grasmere 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. McCullock, 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 disappeared 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.

Grasmere could probably boast having in its precinct the most visible and important industry 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.

Not much remains of the once thriving farming activities in Grasmere today apart from the odd derelict shed and the occasional horse. Grasmere is being developed as an exclusive rural residential estate. The area retains its rural air in spite of the development which is restricted to larger acreage allotments and residential areas with large blocks of land and prestige homes. With the population almost doubling in twelve years to about 1000 in 2007 and development continuing, with careful management by Camden Council Grasmere will remain the rural haven it is today.

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

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>