



## Aboriginal and Early European History of “Denbigh” in Cobbitty

*Written by Susan McIntosh in 2008*

“Denbigh” is a 1100 acre grazing property situated in Cobbitty, approximately sixty kilometres south-west of Sydney. It was described in 1977 as ‘one of the finest early colonial farmhouses in Australia, with important historical associations and an evocative atmosphere’<sup>1</sup>. For almost two hundred years the property has remained in the ownership of three families – the Hooks (1812-1826), the Hassalls (1827-1868) and the McIntoshs (1868-present day). For thousands of years before that, the Aboriginal People had camped on and passed through the property. The Europeans have made the most impact on the land, transforming it from woodland forest into a more park-like pastoral landscape.

From a rather isolated but increasingly self-sufficient farm in the 1820s, to a bustling self-contained village in the 1830s, rural hierarchies emerged and the way people socialised and interacted gives us an insight into an era which also witnessed the decline and degradation of the Aboriginal people. Mixed farming continued until the 1880s by which time the McIntosh family began to specialise in dairying. With machines replacing human and animal labour, the growth of country towns, and the changing social fabric of society, farms like Denbigh were no longer the ‘self-sufficient’ communities they had been in the early years of Australia’s settlement. Today, however, ‘Denbigh’ retains the ability to demonstrate all the various forms of agricultural occupation since Charles Hook, the first ‘proprietor’, took possession of his land. The homestead he began constructing in 1818 remains within a rural landscape remarkably unaltered by twentieth century pressures and developments.

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<sup>1</sup> Macarthur Development Board: Colonial buildings Macarthur Growth Centre Campbelltown, Camden, Appin, March 1977, pp.103-104.

## The Aboriginal Period

The original inhabitants of the “Denbigh” land were the Aboriginal People of the Dharug tribe (who lived northeast of the Nepean River, to Liverpool, Penrith and possibly as far east as Sydney). Their landscape was a mixture of shale woodland vegetation including grey box woodland, red gum forest and narrow-leaved ironbark woodland; and the principal water source was the Nepean River, supported by a number of feeder creeks, such as Cobbitty Creek.<sup>2</sup> The Dharug had been living and hunting in the area for thousands of years<sup>3</sup> before it was discovered by a herd of cattle which had wandered from the penal colony of Sydney five months after their arrival on the First Fleet in 1788.

What made the area especially attractive to the cattle was the Aboriginal custom of burning grass to encourage fresh pasture for game, or trapping the kangaroos by setting the grass on fire and waiting in the direction the animals were forced to pass and spearing them.<sup>4</sup> The presence of the cattle no doubt intrigued and frightened the Aboriginal People who sketched pictures of them on the walls of nearby sandstone shelters - their huge form dominating the walls of a rock shelter found in nearby Campbelltown.<sup>5</sup> That the cattle numbers multiplied (two bulls and five cows escaped from Sydney and ‘upwards of 40’ of their progeny were found thriving seven years later<sup>6</sup>) indicates that the Aboriginal People left them to graze unharmed. Living in extended family groups of between thirty to fifty people, the Dharug moved along routes determined by seasonal availability of food<sup>7</sup> catching “different species of kangaroo, possums, wild dogs, river and swamp fish and shells, lizard eggs, large ant eggs, wombats and serpents”<sup>8</sup> Whilst the men hunted for kangaroos and possums, the women harvested fruits and vegetables (especially yams which grew beside creeks and rivers) and collected water and firewood.

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<sup>2</sup> Design 5 Architects, Denbigh Curtilage Study, Report prepared for McIntosh Bros Pty Ltd, July, 2006, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Archaeological evidence indicates that the Aboriginal People have been in Australia for at least 40,000 years and for at least 5000 years in the Sydney region quoted in Rose, D.B, The Australian People, Angus & Robinson, Sydney, 1988, pp.9-13 and Mulvaney, J & Kamminga, J., Prehistory of Australia, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1999, p.175.

<sup>4</sup> From George Caley’s Journal quoted in Design 5 Architects, Denbigh Curtilage Study, Report prepared for McIntosh Bros Pty Ltd, July, 2006, p.8.

<sup>5</sup> Liston, Campbelltown - The Bicentennial History, Allen & Unwin Australia Pty. Ltd., North Sydney, 1988, pp3-4. Further evidence of the Aboriginal People trepidation of the cattle is found in Governor King’s comments that they climbed trees until the animals had passed.

<sup>6</sup> Jervis, J. ‘Camden and the Cowpastures’, Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society, Vol.21, pt4, 1935, p.240.

<sup>7</sup> Liston, Campbelltown - The Bicentennial History, Allen & Unwin Australia Pty. Ltd., North Sydney, 1988, pp1-5.

<sup>8</sup> Notes from Barrallier (HRNSW vol 5, p770) quoted in Martin, M., On Darug Land – Social History of Western Sydney, Greater Western Education Centre Ltd, St Mary’s, Sydney, 1988,p.16.

As their territories were not clearly defined, the Dharug tribe in their travels met regularly with the Gundungurra tribe (who lived around Camden, Burragorang, Picton and Yass) and the Tharawal tribe (who lived from Botany Bay to the Shoalhaven river and inland to Camden) trading their white pipe clay (which they used to decorate their bodies and tools).<sup>9</sup> Because Dharug dialect closely resembled Gundungurra, the tribes were able to converse when they came together to feast, celebrate and perform religious observances.<sup>10</sup> They carefully shaped stones for tools and weapons and used bark for shelters, canoes and water containers<sup>11</sup>.

Scattered deposits of tool making have been found on 'Denbigh' including a broken edge ground hatchet.<sup>12</sup> Several eucalypt trees that had been modified by the Aboriginal People have also been found on the property – one in particular had been scarred by cutting away its bark and wood to produce a shield,<sup>13</sup> and marks an important lookout at the conjunction and watershed of three valleys. Aboriginal relics have also been uncovered on the banks of nearby Narellan Creek (over a hundred tools at Mt Annan including a hammerstone, two pieces of broken basalt axes, one bipolar piece, scrapers and backed blades) and on the banks of the Nepean River.<sup>14</sup>

By 1795 the Aboriginal People had brought stories to Sydney of a herd of wild cattle west of Sydney. Government officers and convicts, watching a corroboree and contests at Botany Bay, witnessed a dance by Gundungurra tribesmen which featured unmistakably the actions of a charging horned animal.<sup>15</sup> Having confirmed the reports, Governor Hunter set out with a small party of men to see the cattle for himself. The trip took two days on foot and one of his men described the area as “a well watered country amply stored with grass...the finest country yet discovered in New South Wales.” Hunter recorded that the cattle “have chosen a beautiful part of the country to graze in, where I will do

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<sup>9</sup> Wrigley, J., The Best of Back Then, Camden Historical Society Inc., 2007, p.6.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p.6.

<sup>11</sup> Liston, Campbelltown - The Bicentennial History, Allen & Unwin Australia Pty. Ltd., North Sydney, 1988, p.2.

<sup>12</sup> McIntosh collection

<sup>13</sup> Design 5 Architects, Denbigh Curtilage Study, Report prepared for McIntosh Bros Pty Ltd, July, 2006, pp.6-7.

<sup>14</sup> Mylrea, P.J., Camden District A History to the 1840's, 2002, p.2.

<sup>15</sup> Recorded by Collins, 1975, 365 quoted in Design 5 Architects, Denbigh Curtilage Study, Report prepared for McIntosh Bros Pty Ltd, July, 2006, p.8.

all in my power to prevent their being disturbed, or in any way annoyed”<sup>16</sup>. He named the area “Cowpasture Plains”<sup>17</sup> and, because neither land nor livestock were badly needed in the colony, he forbade any visits to the Cowpastures or any public interference with the cattle.<sup>18</sup>

There is no doubt that the Aboriginal People had noticed the white men exploring the ‘Cowpastures’<sup>19</sup> but the first record of contact was not made until 1802 and early relations were very friendly. Francis Barrallier of the NSW Corps engaged a leader in the ‘Cowpastures’ called Cogy (who was to be associated with “Denbigh for many years”<sup>20</sup>) to accompany him on his exploration of the Burratorang Valley; and George Caley allowed the Aboriginal People to shelter in his tent during a thunderstorm in Menangle in return for information on the local geography.<sup>21</sup>

By 1803 the Cowpastures district was becoming well known and frequented by the ‘colonial gentry’ for hunting expeditions and picnics. One such excursion was noted in the Sydney Gazette of 1804 -

“Last Wednesday fortnight at five in the morning a party of Ladies and Gentlemen with servants, set off from Parramatta on an expedition to the Cow Pasture Plains. They had the pleasure of seeing in the different routes several of the roving herds of Wild Cattle, whose size and general appearance strongly indicated the more than ordinary luxuriance of the soil in those beautiful Valleys and far extended Plains, the whole uncultivated verdure indented for their support”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Quote from Hunter recorded in Jervis, J., ‘Camden and the Cowpastures’, Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society, Vol.21, pt4, 1935.

<sup>17</sup> The Cowpastures encompassed an area that lay between the River Bargo on the south, the Nepean and Warragamba on the north, and westerly as far as the Nattai Mountains and the branches of the Warragamba River – definition by John Oxley in 1820 found in Jervis, J., ‘Camden and the Cowpastures’, Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society, Vol. 21, pt4, 1935, p. 241.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p9.

<sup>19</sup> When in 1802 Barrallier met up with Cogy and Bungin and two other Aboriginal men, one of them claimed he had seen several white men while he was kangaroo hunting – recorded in Mylrea P.J., Camden District A History to the 1840’s, 2002, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Cogy was a leader of the ‘Cowpasture Tribe’ and “startled Mrs Hassall in the 1830s by popping his head in at her window” quoted in Hassall, J.S., In Old Australia: Records and Reminiscences from 1794, The Library of Australian History, Sydney, 1902.

<sup>21</sup> Mylrea, P.J., Camden District A History to the 1840’s, 2002, pp.1-2.

<sup>22</sup> Sydney Gazette, 26 February, 1804.



*View upon the Nepean River  
at the Cow Pastures, New  
South Wales 1824*

In 1806 Governor Bligh visited the area with Reverend Samuel Marsden and recorded that the Aboriginal People built a canoe for them so they could cross the flooded Nepean River.<sup>23</sup> John Warby, a convict stockman who was stationed as a cattle guard in the Cowpastures from 1802 had a good working relationship with the Tharawal tribe from whom he learnt a lot about the geography of the area.<sup>24</sup> When Governor Macquarie was making a tour of inspection in 1810 he was visited by a group of Aboriginal men, (including “Koggie, ‘the Native Chief of the Cow-pasture Tribe’<sup>25</sup>) who “honoured us with their company and attendance during our stay”- one of them “amused us very much by climbing up a high tree to catch a goanna, which he did in a very dexterous manner”. Macquarie also records being delighted by an Aboriginal corroboree performed that evening.<sup>26</sup> Early European settlers referred to those who lived in the ‘Cowpasture Plains’ as the ‘Cowpasture Natives’<sup>27</sup>

Although Governors Hunter, King and Bligh were all opposed to land grants in the Cowpastures, the wealthy settlers John Macarthur and Walter Davidson pressured Earl Camden, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies in London, and succeeded in obtaining large grants in 1805.<sup>28</sup> In the same year

<sup>23</sup> Liston, Campbelltown - The Bicentennial History, Allen & Unwin Australia Pty. Ltd., North Sydney, 1988, p.5.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p.50.

<sup>25</sup> Most probably the same ‘Cogy’ who was later associated with “Denbigh” Atkinson, A., Camden-Farm and Village life in Early New South Wales, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1988, Appendix 4, p.228.

<sup>26</sup> Macquarie, L., Lachlan Macquarie Journals of his Tour in New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land 1810-1822, Library of Australian History, 1979, quoted in Mylrea, P.J., Camden District a History to the 1840’s, 2002, p.2.

<sup>27</sup> Design 5 Architects, Denbigh Curtilage Study, Report prepared for McIntosh Bros Pty Ltd, July, 2006, p8.

<sup>28</sup> 5,000 acres were granted to John Macarthur to be called ‘Camden’ (after the Earl) and 2,000 acres were granted to Walter Davidson to be called ‘Belmont’. Land west of the Nepean River was officially named Camden country. Quoted in Appendix B, Design 5 Architects, Denbigh Conservation Management Plan, report prepared for McIntosh Bros. Pty. Ltd., 2008, p.7.

James Meehan (Acting Surveyor-General) traced a road that became known as ‘The Cowpasture Road’. Within five years smaller settlers began to accumulate in the south-west as farms on the Upper Hawkesbury became exhausted from heavy flooding and over-cropping.



Government hut

In 1809 four hundred acres of land on the east bank of the Nepean River were granted to William Emmett and Richard Wrather at ‘Copperty’. Emmett and Wrather were both free settlers who were provided with government cattle and, although absentee farmers, they went to “considerable expense in building houses and sheep yards etc. thereon”<sup>29</sup>.

This period marks the beginning of a shift from small farming by ex-convicts (the original plan for the colony) towards pastoralism (bigger grants to free settlers with capital).

When Emmett and Wrather returned to England ‘due to urgent business’ their land grants were purchased by Charles Hook alongside his own grant of 700 acres.<sup>30</sup> Hook’s 1811 grant was issued with the conditions “that no part was to be alienated or sold within five years, 75 acres were to be cleared and cultivated within five years, and quit rent was to be payable after five years”<sup>31</sup> Hook thus became the first white inhabitant of the land he was to name ‘Denbigh’.

<sup>29</sup> Account by Robert Campbell Junior (who was left in charge of their affairs when they left the colony), writing in 1810. Quoted in Appendix B, Design 5 Architects, Denbigh Conservation Management Plan, report prepared for McIntosh Bros. Pty. Ltd., 2008, p7.

<sup>30</sup> Appendix B, Design 5 Architects, Denbigh Conservation Management Plan, report prepared for McIntosh Bros. Pty. Ltd., 2008, p7.

<sup>31</sup> Grant Register Ser.7 No.56 (L& PI)

### The Hook Period (1812-1826)



Charles Hook was a Scotsman who arrived in Australia in 1808 after many years working for ‘Campbell and Company’ – a distillery in India which carried on extensive trade with NSW. On his arrival he became a partner to Robert Campbell in the Australian branch of the company, which was renamed “Campbell, Hook & Company”. He was welcomed into the ‘vice-regal’ set in Sydney, socialising with Governor Bligh and other free settlers such as the Marsdens, Hassalls, Campbells and Palmers who led a gay social life, regularly holding elegant banquets and entertainments in their respective homes<sup>32</sup>. He later married Sarah Palmer, whose sister Sophia was married to his business partner, Robert Campbell. When Governor Bligh was deposed by Major George Johnston, life became very difficult for Hook. He was imprisoned for a month by the new rebel government for distributing a proclamation that the NSW Corps was in a state of mutiny and rebellion.

Between 1810 and 1814 the colony was threatened by famine and witnessed great poverty and depression. Left in charge of the company whilst Campbell returned to England as a witness for Bligh, Hook struggled for years under very difficult conditions to keep the company afloat. According to Rowland Hassall “The House of Campbell, Hook and Company is the butt of envy for the present government who are constantly annoying their concern in one shape or other, notwithstanding they are the only respectable wholesale merchants in the colony.”<sup>33</sup> By 1815, with the firm all but bankrupt and Sydney’s commerce in tatters,<sup>34</sup> Hook was ready to find refuge from “uncongenial” Sydney society.

<sup>32</sup> Kerr, J. & Falkus, H., From Sydney Cove to Duntroon – A Family Album of Early Life in Australia, Hutchinson Group, Victoria, 1982, pp.34-35.

<sup>33</sup> Steven, M., Merchant Campbell 1769-1846, Oxford University Press, 1965, p.184.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.223.

Life on Denbigh, however, was also not without its problems. In 1813 the six hundred cattle on Denbigh (as well as those on nearby farms) were having adverse effects on the traditional Aboriginal hunting areas. Governor Macquarie had proposed “that an attempt be made towards taming the Wild Cattle, which I think may be done by Erecting Fences and Extensive Stock Yards in the Cow Pasture Plains.”<sup>35</sup> Kangaroo numbers were depleted, and fences not only alienated the Aboriginal People from their traditional food supplies, but also disrupted their movements and access to sacred sites. Three successive years of drought from 1812 also drove the Gundungurra from the mountains onto the Dharug’s traditional hunting areas, putting further pressure on food supplies. Suffering from starvation and with no understanding of white man’s conception of land ownership, the Aboriginal People began to harvest maize crops and spear cattle from settler’s farms. Assuming that the Aboriginal People were nomads and that one area of land was as good for them as another, the settlers retaliated by gunfire, hoping that they would simply move on. Tensions escalated and atrocities and revenge killings were carried out by both sides.

Governor Macquarie (recognising that the motive for many of the killings by the Aboriginal People was revenge against white men sexually violating their women), initially urged forbearance and encouraged the white settlers to permit them to take some of their crops as a small price for peace. Merciless, punitive raids by whites against the Aboriginal People however, more often than not, went unpunished by the authorities. As many of the landowners were generally absentee farmers – their hired overseers and convicts bore the brunt of Aboriginal attacks.<sup>36</sup> Hannibal Macarthur wrote in 1814,

“The natives have become extremely troublesome and amongst others we have become sufferers in the death of a shepherd’s wife and W. Baker who were inhumanely murdered at the Upper Camden Yards.”<sup>37</sup>

A letter from Samuel Hassall to his brother Thomas (who was later to purchase ‘Denbigh’) described how the family at Macquarie Grove were “alarmed on account of the desperate outrages of the natives, which are really awful”.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Historical Records of Australia Vol. 7, p.595 quoted in Mylrea, P.J., *Camden District A History to the 1840’s*, 2002, p.23.

<sup>36</sup> Lowe, D., *Forgotten Rebels, Black Australians who fought back*, Permanent Press, Melbourne, 1994, p.5

<sup>37</sup> Hassall, J.S., *In Old Australia: Records and Reminiscences from 1794*, Library of Australian History, Sydney, 1902, p. 178.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, .pp.178.

Hearing that a large group of Gundungurra People had killed three of Macarthur's servants at Camden Park and, believing that they intended to attack both the Oxley farm at Kirkham and the Hassall farm at Macquarie Grove, forty settlers set out armed with muskets, pistols, pitchforks and pikes in 1816 but were unable to extract revenge<sup>39</sup>. Macquarie finally succumbed to white pressure and sent out three detachments of the 46<sup>th</sup> Regiment "to inflict terrible and exemplary punishment."<sup>40</sup> Battles were fought in nearby Narellan, Minto, Bringelly, Mulgoa and Wallacia but the Aboriginal use of evasive and guerrilla tactics meant that the Government troops were rarely successful. After the discovery and massacre of fourteen Aboriginal men, women and children in Appin, however, (the bodies of the men hung from trees in conspicuous places as examples to their kinfolk<sup>41</sup>) Aboriginal resistance collapsed. It is estimated that from 1814 until 1816, ten Aboriginal People had died for every European.<sup>42</sup> Those that survived settled on the farms of sympathetic landowners in the district. A patrol of soldiers remained to protect farms but by the early 1820s, as more and more whites began to settle in the Cowpastures, introduced diseases such as influenza, tuberculosis and syphilis depleted the remaining Aboriginal population.<sup>43</sup>

With the abating of the 'Cowpastures War', Hook began living at Samuel Hassall's house at Macquarie Grove in 1818 'until he gets one built for himself on his own farm'<sup>44</sup>. He had a stockman and an overseer living on "Denbigh" in the fortified stone stables which housed his prize stallion<sup>45</sup>. Hook was assigned nine convicts<sup>46</sup> but his workforce varied, depending not only on the term of a convict's sentence, but also on their availability - a growing number of skilled convicts were working for Macquarie's architect (the emancipist Francis Greenway) in Sydney. Macquarie's policy of rehabilitating and employing ex-convicts caused tensions with landlords like Hook, Marsden and

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, pp.177-181.

<sup>40</sup> Turbet, P., The Aborigines of the Sydney District before 1788, Kangaroo Press, Roseville, NSW, 1989, p.172.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p.172.

<sup>42</sup> Kohen, J., The Darug and Their Neighbours, The Traditional Owners of the Sydney Region, Darug Link in association with Blacktown and District Historical Society, Sydney, 1993, p.63.

<sup>43</sup> Hassall, J.S., In Old Australia: Records and Reminiscences from 1794, Library of Australian History, Sydney, 1902, p. 187 & Atkinson, A., Camden-Farm and Village life in Early New South Wales, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1988, p.9.

<sup>44</sup> Letter from Samuel Hassall to Thomas Hassall, 19<sup>th</sup> September 1818, Hassall Correspondence A 1677 Vol.4, p.657, CY928 (Mitchell Library).

<sup>45</sup> Sydney Gazette 22 June 1816 p.2c & Sydney Gazette 2 November 1816 Supplement, p.2.

<sup>46</sup> Bonwick Transcripts Box 13, Appendix p.750 (Mitchell Library) quoted in Appendix B, Design 5 Architects, Denbigh Conservation Management Plan, report prepared for McIntosh Bros. Pty. Ltd., 2008, p.8.

Macarthur . They argued that the country could only be developed with cheap convict labour and refused to mix in private with the emancipists. Their convicts worked a fifty six hour week in return for lodging, food, clothing and a wage of ten pounds per year which took the form of an allowance of tea, sugar, tobacco and rum.



*The stone stables was the first building constructed on Denbigh*

Still wary of the Aboriginal People, Hook's original dwelling reflected a defensive 'siege style' mentality with small boarded-up windows, large storage spaces in the roof of the western service wing, and a seven or eight feet high paling fence around the entire dwelling<sup>47</sup>. By 1819 he was living at "Denbigh" with his wife Sarah, who must have found it a rather isolated and primitive life after Sydney. They had no children and neighbouring large landowners had not yet established homes on their properties. Apart from the Hassalls at 'Macquarie Grove' and one female servant, Sarah would have had no other female company and must have missed attending church (previously a major part of life for the Palmer sisters.<sup>48</sup>)

<sup>47</sup> Hassall, J.S., In Old Australia: Records and Reminiscences from 1794, Library of Australian History, Sydney, 1902, p.3. Hassall claims it was to keep out bushrangers but it was the Aboriginal People (not the bushrangers) who posed the threat to the settlers during this period.

<sup>48</sup> Kerr, J. & Falkus, H., From Sydney Cove to Duntroon – A Family Album of Early Life in Australia, Hutchinson Group, Victoria, 1982, p. 26.

Although Elizabeth Macarthur rode out from Elizabeth Farm in Parramatta to inspect the sheep on Camden Park and had complained of “having no female friend to unbend to, not a single woman with whom I could converse with any satisfaction to myself”<sup>49</sup> she and Sarah were never friends. John Macarthur had been one of the main instigators of the Rum Rebellion in which Governor Bligh had been deposed, and a supporter of the rebel government which had made Hook’s life in Sydney such a misery. Fortunately, like her sister Sophia Campbell (the first female artist in the colony) Sarah was devoted to her husband who wrote in his will that ‘her faithful friendship and affection to me has ever been most exemplary.’<sup>50</sup>



*Hook's main bungalow (1817)*



*Front door with sidelights*

With no further resistance from the Aboriginal People, Hook began constructing the main bungalow of lath and plaster walls, clad on the exterior with beaded weatherboards. The hipped roof continued in an unbroken line over an exceptionally wide front verandah, the front doorway was centrally placed with small sidelights, and there were shutters on the small-paned windows.

<sup>49</sup> Letter written by Elizabeth Macarthur quoted in Kerr, J. & Falkus, H., From Sydney Cove to Duntroon – A Family Album of Early Life in Australia, Hutchinson Group, Victoria, 1982, p.25

<sup>50</sup> Will of Charles Hook, Ser.1, No.293, Probate Packets 14/3/181 (SRNSW)



*Very wide front verandahs still serve as outdoor rooms*

It is more than likely that Hook had been influenced by the bungalows in India, the verandahs of which were more an outdoor room than a mere shelter. Although developed on the basis of the Georgian tradition, Denbigh's horizontal lines set it low on the ground - a more simplified form of the English style, which suited the Australian climate.



The kitchen remained in the old western wing – where the servants were housed – social divisions between master and servant being strictly maintained. A brickmaker and carpenter were assigned between 1822 and 1824 when the house was under construction – but Hook was obliged to return one carpenter to the Sydney barracks for not having the necessary skills, complaining that “all his knowledge in the carpentry trade has been acquired in this country and in space of only two years”<sup>51</sup>.

<sup>51</sup> C Hook to R Lowe 5 August 1822, Colonial Secretary's Correspondence 4/1761, p.93, reel 6055 (SRNSW) quoted in Appendix B, Design 5 Architects, Denbigh Conservation Management Plan, report prepared for McIntosh Bros. Pty. Ltd., 2008, p.8.



*The kitchen and service rooms in the old western wing*

The musters of 1823-25 reveal that Hook had a clearing party of seven men at Denbigh as well as sixteen men and one woman employed elsewhere on the property.<sup>52</sup> A number of slab huts would have housed the growing number of convicts but no record of them survives. Two of Hook's convicts who had served their sentences remained working for him on the property which was becoming very successful and self sufficient. By this time there were 4 horses, 65 horned cattle, 728 sheep and 30 hogs; 40 acres of wheat, 4 acres of garden/orchard and 250 acres had been cleared and stumped<sup>53</sup> in order to contrive a more park-like landscape composition.

When Hook died at Denbigh in 1826, his farm was put up for sale or lease and was described as such:

“To be let or sold, as may be agreed on, the farm of Denbigh, the property of the late Charles Hook Esq., lying in the District of Cooke, and consisting of eleven hundred acres, of which about 400 are cleared and stumped, and the land mostly enclosed. There are 60 acres of growing wheat and 22 in maize. There is a large dwelling-house and other convenient out-houses on the farm, which is eligibly situated and will prove a valuable property to the proprietors of estates in the new country”<sup>54</sup>

With its wool clip fetching good prices in London, advertisements described the estate as ‘one of the best Sheep Walks this Side of the Nepean.’<sup>55</sup> Thomas Hassall purchased “Denbigh” in 1827 and started work transforming it from a relatively isolated farm into a bustling self-contained village.

<sup>52</sup> Baxter, C.J., (ed): General Muster List of New South Wales 1823, 1824, 1825 (1999) quote in Appendix B, Design 5 Architects, Denbigh Conservation Management Plan, report prepared for McIntosh Bros. Pty. Ltd., 2008, p8.

<sup>53</sup> Baxter, C., (ed): General Muster and Land and Stock Muster of New South Wales 1822 (1988), *ibid*, p.8

<sup>54</sup> Sydney Gazette 18 November 1826, p1d.

<sup>55</sup> Sydney Gazette 3 January -1 February, 1827.

### The Hassall Period (1827-1868)



*Denbigh with Mrs Hassall seated by the house and four women playing croquet. Mitchell library*

Thomas Hassall had arrived in the colony with his parents in 1798. His father, Rowland Hassall, had been an ‘artisan missionary’ for the London Missionary Society in Tahiti and a preacher in NSW before he was made Superintendent of the Government Stock in the Cowpastures where he was granted land. Thomas grew up in Parramatta in a devout, religious household and worked briefly for Campbell, Hook and Co. (when Charles Hook was in charge of the firm). He then entered the ministry and worked as a curate to the Reverend Samuel Marsden (a close family friend) whose daughter Anne he married in 1822. In 1826 he was the chaplain in the Bathurst district and, knowing that he was to be appointed to the Cowpastures where he already held land (Stoke Farm and the farms of Arkell and Hearne which he had inherited from his father), the purchase of ‘Denbigh’ would have been a very attractive proposition. It furnished him with a ready-built parsonage nearby other family members (brothers Samuel at ‘Macquarie Grove’ and James at ‘Matavai’).<sup>56</sup>

Although Thomas’ father, Rowland, and father-in-law, Samuel Marsden, had been great friends - unlike Marsden, Rowland was always loyal to the established order. He named his property ‘Macquarie Grove’ and later wrote of Macquarie “I do not know whether the colony could have had a better man for Governor”<sup>57</sup>. Rowland served on the Committee for the ‘Institution for the Civilisation, Care and Education of the Aborigines or Black Natives of NSW’ set up in 1814, along with the

<sup>56</sup> Australian Dictionary of Biography Vol.1, Entries for Rowland Hassall and Thomas Hassall

<sup>57</sup> Hassall, D.J. & Stewart, J., The Hassall Family, Celebrating 200 Years in Australia 1798-1998, Valiant Press, Victoria, 1988, p.50

emancipist Dr Redfern<sup>58</sup>. Marsden, by contrast, had refused to sit on the board with the emancipists Andrew Thompson and Simeon Lord when they were appointed to the magisterial bench<sup>59</sup>. Marsden also joined with Macquarie's adversary, John Macarthur, and his 'exclusives' in raising concerns over Governor Macquarie's 'reasonable treatment of the convict class' and, due to his methods of magisterial justice, was nicknamed 'the flogging parson'. The men's attitude towards the Aboriginal People was also very different. Although Rowland Hassall shared the inherent racism of the white Europeans (convinced of their own vast 'superiority' over the Aboriginal People) he believed that by showing kindness and compassion the Committee would be able to assimilate them into 'civilised' society – "here commenced their dawn of civilisation .. these poor souls who have a capacity capable of much expansion."<sup>60</sup> Marsden on the other hand, unsuccessful in converting the Aboriginal People, became very critical of their rejection of the material civilisation of the European "the natives have no reflection ... they have no attachments, and they have no wants"<sup>61</sup>. No doubt he found trading with the natives in the Pacific Islands a much more profitable exercise.

Although Thomas shared Marsden's evangelical zeal and stood in awe of his father-in-law (never daring to argue with him<sup>62</sup>) it is likely he shared his own father's more compassionate views with regards to the convict classes and the Aboriginal People. He treated his convicts well, believing in their reform, and taught them the skills they needed to survive on their own farms once they gained their freedom. He applied for the mitigation of the sentences of four of his convicts and also helped them acquire land. Many of his convicts stayed in his service after having gained their tickets of leave – one carpenter remained on "Denbigh" with his wife for over fifty years.<sup>63</sup> Thomas received many letters of thanks from convicts he had helped, and loaned books to. His son James (who was four when he began living at "Denbigh") claimed in his memoirs that his father never had a man flogged, and only

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<sup>58</sup> Howe, R., Mackaness, G. (editor) *A Chronology of Momentous Events in Australian History part 1 1788-1828*, Australian Historical Monographs, D S Ford Printers, Sydney, 1952, Chronology footnotes, p. 47.

<sup>59</sup> Yarwood, A.T., *Samuel Marsden The Great Survivor*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1977, p.129.

<sup>60</sup> Howe, R., Mackaness, G. (editor) *A Chronology of Momentous Events in Australian History part 1 1788-1828*, Australian Historical Monographs, D S Ford Printers, Sydney, 1952, p.21.

<sup>61</sup> Australian Dictionary of Biography, Entry for Samuel Marsden.

<sup>62</sup> Hassall, J.S., *In Old Australia: Records and Reminiscences from 1794*, Library of Australian History, Sydney, 1902, p.66.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p.3.

returned one man (the watchman) to the Government on suspicion of stealing a gold watch<sup>64</sup>. Years later, when condemned to execution for a further crime, the accused man sent word to Thomas, telling him the whereabouts of the watch, which he'd hidden in the stump of a tree.<sup>65</sup>

In a report to the Attorney General on the subject of the Aboriginal People (and in defence of an Aboriginal man he felt had been wrongly accused of murder in Port Macquarie) Thomas wrote “that we, as British subjects and as Colonists, are indebted to the Aborigines is a fact not to be denied – and we have taken their lands by force, driven away their common sustenance, injured their fishing grounds, introduced habits of smoking and drunkenness, made them blasphemous and taught them every vice which predominates amongst the lowest class of people ...”. He advocated the establishment of native settlements.<sup>66</sup>

Having established more friendly relations with the Dhurug People on ‘Denbigh’, Thomas removed the eight foot high fence around the homestead. Despite predictions by Anthony Trollope in 1820 that “it is the Aborigines’ fate to be abolished, and they are already vanishing”<sup>67</sup> the Dhurug People on “Denbigh” were remarkably adaptable at surviving. Living in semi-permanent camps they occasionally worked for Thomas – burning off the dead timber in return for a meal. Anne provided them with soup, pudding, hominy, vegetables and ‘sugar-bag’ which was made from empty sugar bags soaked in a bucket of water which was sucked with a piece of bruised springy bark.<sup>68</sup> Thomas’s son James recalled in his memoirs “we never knew of any mischief by the blacks” and describes how his mother was startled one day by Cogy when “he popped his head in her bedroom window begging for food”<sup>69</sup>. James also described a corroboree the family witnessed ‘in which over four hundred aborigines took part’ and he numbered the Aboriginal People who congregated at Denbigh to burn off dead timber for his father at around two hundred<sup>70</sup>. As the 1828 census counted the number of people

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<sup>64</sup> Hassall, J.S., In Old Australia: Records and Reminiscences from 1794, Library of Australian History, Sydney, 1902, p.6.

<sup>65</sup> Roxburgh, R., Early Colonial Houses of New South Wales, Lansdowne Press, Sydney, 1974 (reprinted 1980), p. 98 and McIntosh oral history.

<sup>66</sup> Hassall Papers Vol.2 p.1351 quoted in Roxburgh, R., Early Colonial Houses of New South Wales, Lansdowne Press, Sydney, 1974 (reprinted 1980), p. 95.

<sup>67</sup> Dirk Moses, A., Genocide and Settler Society. Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History, Berghahn Books, New York, 2004, p.5.

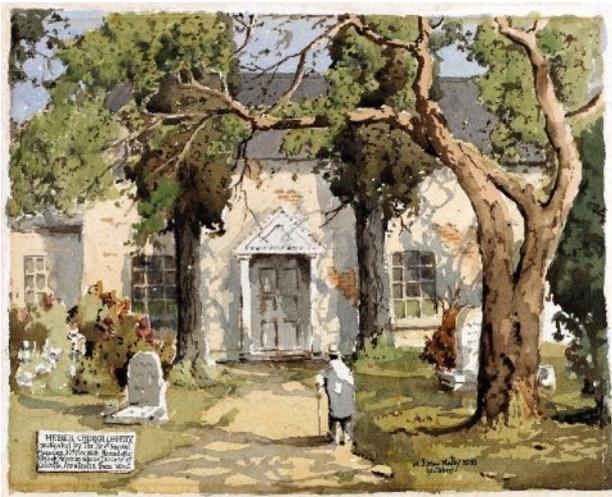
<sup>68</sup> Hassall, J.S., In Old Australia: Records and Reminiscences from 1794, Library of Australian History, Sydney, 1902,p.4. CHECK

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p.5

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p.4.

of the ‘Cowpasture Tribe’ at a mere twelve men, nine women and eleven children<sup>71</sup>, other Aboriginal People gathered together on ‘Denbigh’ for tribal meetings. Perhaps Cogy (who was a leader of the ‘Cowpasture Tribe’) organised them into working groups. Lieutenant Collins, who also witnessed a tribal meeting in 1824, noted that “the men from the Cowpastures were the most remarkable. They were rather short, stocky, strong and superbly built. The painting on their bodies resembling some kinds of coats of mail, added even more to their martial attitude.”<sup>72</sup>

When the Hassalls began living at ‘Denbigh’ in 1827 they had two small children and several indoor and outdoor servants and they undertook alterations, improvements and additions to house their growing family. A letter to Thomas from his sister-in-law, Lucy, written in 1820 from Macquarie Grove had described ‘the want of Means of Grace very hard to bear’<sup>73</sup> so she must have been grateful for the divine service that was held at “Denbigh” parsonage every Sunday evening. Thomas also held services in the loft over the stables at Kirkham for the convict servants<sup>74</sup>.



In 1827 he constructed Heber Chapel on his land in Cobbitty and, being in charge of the counties of Camden and Argyle (“all Australia beyond Liverpool”) he held divine services at Cobbitty, Narellan, Camden, Cabramatta, Mulgoa, South Creek, Fleurs, Wollongong, Sutton Forest, Goulburn, Picton and the Oaks<sup>75</sup>. In the forty years that he was a minister he only once or twice missed a service at any appointed place<sup>76</sup> and, due to the

large distances he covered, was nicknamed ‘the galloping parson’.

<sup>71</sup> Sainty, M.R. & Johnson, K., (eds) *Census of New South Wales, November 1828*, Library of Australian History quoted in Mylrea, P.J., *Camden District A History to the 1840's*, 2002, p.3.

<sup>72</sup> Wrigley, J., *The Best of Back Then*, Camden Historical Society Inc., 2007, p.6.

<sup>73</sup> Letter from Lucy Hassall to Thomas Hassall 29 May -16 August 1821 ML A1677-3, pp.1187-90 quoted in Atkinson, A., *Camden-Farm and Village life in Early New South Wales*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1988, p.33.

<sup>74</sup> Hassall, J.S., *In Old Australia: Records and Reminiscences from 1794*, Library of Australian History, Sydney, 1902, p8.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, p. 190

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p. p.190

The early 1830s were a time of prosperity for the Cowpasture farmers and ‘Denbigh’ was becoming more like a scattered village with a “carpenter, blacksmith, shoemaker, dairyman, gardener, brickmaker and schoolmaster<sup>77</sup>” as well as two housemaids, nurserymaid, cook, waiter, cow boy, overseer, washerwoman, groom, shepherd, bullock driver and watchman<sup>78</sup> They lived in the western service wing and in cottages of rammed earth (none of which survive today).

A distinctive rural hierarchy had developed. On top of his employed workers Thomas had eleven convicts assigned to him in 1829, nine in 1833 and nine again in 1837, who worked from 6am in summer and 8am in winter until sundown<sup>79</sup>. In contrast to his fellow clergymen (most of whom had to subsist on their stipends) Thomas was supplemented by the income and produce from his own farms and was comparatively well off.<sup>80</sup>

He had an excellent garden of about five acres with an abundance of fruit trees (peaches, apples, grapes and melons) a vineyard and an orange-grove.<sup>81</sup> ‘Pidgeons’ and ‘Rabits’ also formed part of the livestock<sup>82</sup> Apples were stored and other fruits (plums, apricots and grapes) were dried. Wheat, barley, oats and hay were farmed extensively, and bread was baked in the home oven.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p.192.

<sup>78</sup> Sainty, M.R.& Johnson, K. A., (eds) Census of New South Wales, November 1828 (1980) with Corrigena & Addenda (1980)

<sup>79</sup> Census Denbigh, Hassall Family Papers, Muster and account book 1822-1833, B27, CY 1223 (Mitchell Library) quoted in Appendix B, Design 5 Architects, Denbigh Conservation Management Plan, report prepared for McIntosh Bros. Pty. Ltd., 2008, p.9.

<sup>80</sup> Roach, B., “Neither bread enough nor to spare” Paying the Anglican parson in early colonial New South Wales,” Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society, vol.90, pt 1, 2004, pp.1-21.

<sup>81</sup> Hassall, J.S., In Old Australia: Records and Reminiscences from 1794, Library of Australian History, Sydney, 1902, pp. 2-12

<sup>82</sup> Thomas Hassall to his son, James Hassall 27 March 1828, Hassall Correspondence A1677 Vol.1, pp.169-171, CY908 (Mitchell Library), quoted Appendix B, Design 5 Architects, Denbigh Conservation Management Plan, report prepared for McIntosh Bros. Pty. Ltd., 2008,p.10.

<sup>83</sup> Roxburgh, R., Early Colonial Houses of New South Wales, Lansdowne Press, Sydney, 1974 (reprinted 1980), p.97.



*Hassall's two story addition to the original Hook bungalow (1838)*

With his growing family of eight children, Thomas began considerable additions to the original 'Hook' bungalow, constructing the two storey stuccoed brick addition on the eastern side (later known as the Hassall wing) in 1838. The ground floor of this addition (the oldest surviving Hook dwelling) was made into a large dining room and extra bedrooms were added on the second floor.



*The U-shaped courtyard at the rear of the bungalow*

This addition formed a U-shaped courtyard at the rear of the bungalow, being opposite the west wing which contained a bakehouse, cellar, storeroom and meat-room.

Although Heber Chapel was also used as the local school, Hassall's daughters were educated at home with a governess and were skilled embroiderers, lace makers, and competent riders. His sons were educated at The Kings School in Parramatta where they befriended the sons of other free men who had prospered in the colony such as George Rouse, Joseph Thompson, George Macarthur, John Oxley and John Antill. Family friends gathered for holidays, parties and picnics of sixty to seventy people, riding to pretty places such as Bents Basin on the Cowpasture River, Donohue's Cave, the Oaks and Razorback. The flies were often so bad that the gentlemen were "obliged to wear veils – blue being the fashionable colour".<sup>84</sup> The Hassalls frequently visited the Coxes (George at 'Winbourne' and Henry at 'Glenmore'), the Oxleys at 'Kirkham', Hannibal Macarthur at 'Subiaco' and the Antills at 'Jarvisfield'. The Hassall children favoured their cousins at 'Macquarie Grove' and 'Matavai' – their uncle James Hassall being the most popular as "he was very fond of young people and often the life and soul of our meetings."<sup>85</sup>

The free merchant, Alexander Riley described four classes of society in Australia<sup>86</sup> – firstly the civil and military officers and wealthy private gentlemen like the Macarthurs of 'Camden Park' and the Macleays of 'Brownlow Hill'. "Clergy of the Church of England also qualified for 'gentility' wherever they went"<sup>87</sup> and locals referred to Thomas as 'the Squire of Denbigh.' Next there were the free settlers of 'creditable habits' who made up most of the Hassall family and friends, followed by the traders and householders who were ex-convicts (the largest groups of free inhabitants by 1828) and lastly the labourers and prisoners.<sup>88</sup> No mention was made of the Aboriginal People- no doubt they would have made up a fifth class– marginalised and living on the fringes of white society. Even when employed by the whites, it was never deemed necessary to pay them a decent wage.

Farms like 'Denbigh' were self sufficient in food, leatherwork, woodwork and ironwork, but farmers still relied on Sydney in the 1830s for banking, shopping and insurance. The building of the

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<sup>84</sup> Roxburgh, R., *Early Colonial Houses of New South Wales*, Lansdowne Press, Sydney, 1974 (reprinted 1980), p.98.

<sup>85</sup> Hassall, J.S., *In Old Australia: Records and Reminiscences from 1794*, Library of Australian History, Sydney, 1902, pp. 15 – 26.

<sup>86</sup> Broadbent, J., & Hughes, J., *The Age of Macquarie*, Melbourne University Press & Historic Houses Trust of NSW, 1992, p.20.

<sup>87</sup> Atkinson, A., *Camden-Farm and Village life in Early New South Wales*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1988, p. 67.

<sup>88</sup> Riley's evidence to Select Committee on Gaols, 1819, quoted in Broadbent, J., & Hughes, J., *The Age of Macquarie*, Melbourne University Press & Historic Houses Trust of NSW, 1992, p.20.

Cowpasture Bridge and the construction of highways, however, led to increased attacks by escaped convicts and bushrangers. Farmers were at pains to protect their buildings and stock, particularly their horses, against theft.<sup>89</sup>

At ‘Denbigh’ the fear of bushrangers replaced the earlier fear of the Aboriginal People. Iron bars were put on the windows and the women, on witnessing the three bushrangers Jack Donohoe (“The Wild Colonial Boy), Webber and Walmsley pass along the hills fronting the house<sup>90</sup>, hid in the large roof space above the bungalow.<sup>91</sup>

Ironically it was the Aboriginal People who were employed as trackers by the Government to hunt down the bushrangers.<sup>92</sup> The famous leader “Bundal” helped the police on the Camden side of the Nepean to catch thieves and runaway convicts but, when James Macarthur tried to have him appointed as a constable on a proper wage, it was disallowed. The Aboriginal People were merely given tobacco or blankets by way of remuneration.<sup>93</sup> Nineteenth century glass bottles, flaked into cutting tools have been recently discovered on ‘Denbigh’ giving further evidence of Aboriginal presence on the farm during this period.<sup>94</sup>



By the 1840s, with the end of transportation and cheap convict labour, the prosperous years were coming to a close. Obligated to pay full wages, Thomas considerably reduced the workforce at ‘Denbigh.’ Three years of drought and a downturn in the economy combined to produce the economic depression of the 1840s. There was a decline in wool prices and, with the collapse of the Bank of Australia in 1843, Thomas, as a shareholder, had to sell two or three properties (he mortgaged

<sup>89</sup> Hassall, J.S., In Old Australia: Records and Reminiscences from 1794, Library of Australian History, Sydney, 1902, pp 190-197

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p.5.

<sup>91</sup> Oral history – Lesley McIntosh

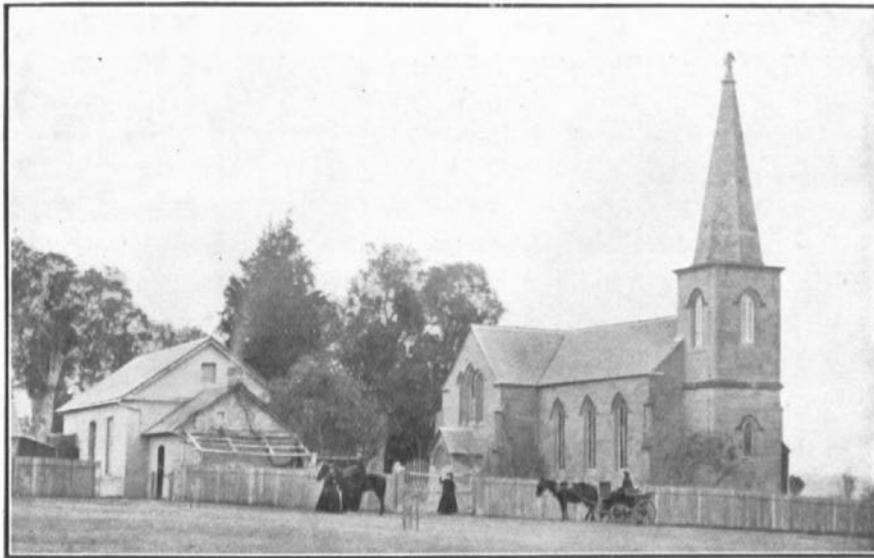
<sup>92</sup> Lowe, D., Forgotten Rebels, Black Australians who fought back, Permanent Press, Melbourne, 1994, p.7

<sup>93</sup> Atkinson, A., Camden-Farm and Village life in Early New South Wales, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1988, p. 229.

<sup>94</sup> Three worked bottle glass artefacts discovered by the Cubbitch Barta Native Title Claimants Aboriginal Corporation, Design 5 Architects, Denbigh Conservation Management Plan, prepared for McIntosh Bros. Pty Ltd, 2008, p.6-7.

his property in Camden and sold his farm on the Hawkesbury and his cattle station in Crookwell.)<sup>95</sup> He had given up farming on 'Denbigh' on his own account some years before these difficult years and had leased part of the property to tenant farmers.<sup>96</sup> Although Thomas was described as benevolent by many of his parishioners, he remained very firm when it came to his tenants' obligations. During the depression they tried unsuccessfully to negotiate reductions in their rents. The schoolmaster at Heber Chapel, John Armstrong, was refused a rent reduction and Thomas took William Vale to court for failing to pay his rent.<sup>97</sup>

Arguments over rent were not the only source of tension between Thomas and the schoolmaster. Armstrong found Thomas authoritarian and they argued bitterly over the school curriculum. Whereas Armstrong supported non-denominational schooling, Thomas was vehemently opposed to it, unwaveringly supporting Reverend Marsden and Bishop Broughton's commitment to the supremacy of the Church of England in religious and educational fields (and the subservience of the schoolmaster to the parson)<sup>98</sup>.



HEBER CHAPEL AND ST. PAUL'S CHURCH (1869).

St Pauls Church was constructed in Cobbitty in 1842 next to Heber Chapel - the stone for the church spire was quarried from Denbigh.

<sup>95</sup> Appendix B, Design 5 Architects, Denbigh Conservation Management Plan, report prepared for McIntosh Bros. Pty. Ltd., 2008, p 10.

<sup>96</sup> Hassall, J.S., In Old Australia: Records and Reminiscences from 1794, Library of Australian History, Sydney, 1902, p.CHECK

<sup>97</sup> Armstong, I. & G., John Armstrong Colonial Schoolmaster, Sydney and Cobbitty, From Original Diaries 1839-1857, Sunbird Publications, Lorne NSW, 1997, pp.76-88.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, pp.76-88.

In 1849 St Johns Church was built in Camden and landowners like Thomas and Oxley supported Marsden's constant opposition to the Catholics<sup>99</sup>. It is ironic that in 2008, many of the largely Christian population in Camden are equally suspicious of the Muslims and have successfully lobbied to prevent a Muslim school being built in the area, whilst a Catholic School has recently been approved on 'Wivenhoe' in Cobbitty.

In the 1840s, as tenants began to abandon their farms, the number of Aboriginal People in the district was also in decline. During his four years in Cobbitty (1840-1844) the Schoolmaster, Armstrong, only recorded seeing one "black fellow"- to whom he gave a shilling's worth of sugar.<sup>100</sup> In 1846 the Picton magistrate, Matthew McAlister, reported to the Legislative Council Select Committee on Aborigines that local Aboriginal numbers (including those of Camden and Cobbitty) had shrunk in the previous five or ten years, giving the total for the combined tribes as sixty-seven. These included fifteen children, of whom nine were part-Aboriginal. He reported that they could no longer find food for themselves 'because of the increased occupation of their original hunting grounds' but "a few occasionally reap, pull and husk maize, for which they are paid in provisions, tobacco, old clothes, and sometimes muskets, and fowling pieces."<sup>101</sup>

Thomas Hassall, reporting to the Committee in 1846, confirmed that Aboriginal numbers had "greatly diminished" due to the Europeans "cultivation of the soil and destroying their food, by hunting and shooting the animals which gave them subsistence." He claimed that "their actual condition is that of the greatest degradation ...in a very great measure due to the vices introduced by Europeans, particularly those of drunkenness and immorality." Although some whites had co-habited with Aboriginal People, they did not remain together for long and, according to Thomas, "more than half the children were half castes".<sup>102</sup> A group of Aboriginal People, "the Cubbich Bartha' were living on Macarthur's 'Camden Park' but no further mention of corroborees at Denbigh was made after 1850.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Atkinson, A., *Camden-Farm and Village life in Early New South Wales*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1988, pp. 152-178.

<sup>100</sup> Armstrong, I. & G., *John Armstrong Colonial Schoolmaster, Sydney and Cobbitty, From Original Diaries 1839-1857*, Sunbird Publications, Lorne NSW, 1997, p.33.

<sup>101</sup> M. McAlister, report to the Legislative Council Select Committee on Aborigines, V&P 1845, pp.975-6.

<sup>102</sup> Legislative Council Votes and Proceedings 1846, vol.2 (ML MDQ 328.9106/4, vol. 2 p.553 quoted in Mylrea, P.J., *Camden District A History to the 1840's*, 2002, p.3.

<sup>103</sup> Atkinson, A., *Camden-Farm and Village life in Early New South Wales*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1988, p232.

In 1854 Thomas removed the shingles on 'Denbigh' and replaced them with galvanised iron sheet roofing (the new technology of the gold rush era) but only he, his wife Anne and their daughter Eliza remained in the house. By the 1860s, with wheat rust ruining the local wheat industry and constant flooding of the Nepean, tenants were abandoning their farms and leaving the district. "Denbigh' no longer supported the large workforce of the 1830s and Thomas's ministry was reduced as new churches were established.

In 1868 Thomas Hassall died, marking the end of an era. The spread of education, the growing self-confidence among the working and middle classes, and the growth of a new liberal consciousness had begun to undermine both the moral authority of the old landlords and established religion.<sup>104</sup> Anne Hassall, who had the right to stay at Denbigh for the rest of her life, found "a very respectable man named McIntosh to take on the lease of the farm"<sup>105</sup> on which there was a greater reliance upon livestock and an increase in pasture and hay production.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, pp.101-105 & 180-181.

<sup>105</sup> Letter to James Hassall 8 May 1868, Hassall Correspondence A1677/1 p.1191, CY 909 (Mitchell Library).

<sup>106</sup> Atkinson, A., Camden-Farm and Village life in Early New South Wales, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1988, pp. 94-98.

## The McIntosh Period (1868-present)



Five generations of the McIntosh family have continued farming on “Denbigh” up to the present day. Charles McIntosh arrived in Port Phillip from Forfar in Scotland in 1841 at the age of twenty nine with his younger brothers and sister. They were described as ‘farm servants’ and were brought out on Governor Bourke’s ‘Assisted Migrant Scheme’- a scheme to encourage families

of agricultural workers and tradesmen to come to the colony. Charles had been farming on a property called “Eastwood” 5km north-east of “Denbigh” for over twenty years. He continued mixed type farming on his leased ‘Denbigh’ lands – dealing in farm produce, dairy cattle and breeding draught horses for Carlton Breweries. He also supplied draught horses for his brother’s horse-drawn bus service “Bow Bells” which ran along George St Sydney from Broadway to Wynyard.

*Slab horse and draught-horse stables were added to Denbigh at this time.*





For their first three years on the property, Charles and his family of six children lived in the very basic quarters attached to the stone coach-house and stables. They moved into the main house in 1871 but it was not until the death of Anne Hassall in 1886 that they were able to purchase the property they had been working.

*Living quarters above the stone coach-house*

By this time farming at ‘Denbigh’ was entering a new phase – intensive dairying and stud dairy cattle breeding. The cow bails, hand milking bails, calf shed, storage silos, feed bins and barns for hay storage were established from 1868 to 1900 and ‘Denbigh’ remained at the forefront of the dairy industry throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



*Old Coach house and dairy for storage of milk*



*Feed bin and hand milking bails at the back of the coach-house*



*Feed silo*



*Hayshed  
circa 1900*

When mechanisation of farming practices and technologies led to machines replacing human and animal labour, the old sheds and stables were re-used for storage and new machinery sheds were built. Scythes, wooden hand rakes and stooks were replaced by hay-makers, mowers and mechanical rakes and bailers; and draught horses were replaced by tractors. Most of the outbuildings built by the McIntosh family survive largely intact and demonstrate the evolution and introduction of new farming practices and technologies.<sup>107</sup>



*Machinery Shed*



*Back of the hayshed*



*Wood storage shed*

<sup>107</sup> Design 5 Architects, Denbigh Conservation Management Plan, prepared for McIntosh Bros. Pty Ltd, 2008 pp.25-26.



*Looking through a canopy of olive trees to Denbigh homestead*

The evolution of the ‘Denbigh’ homestead reveals something about the interaction between the early Europeans and the Aboriginal People, the ‘superbly built warriors’ who had lived for thousands of years in harmony with, and respect for, the landscape they inhabited.

James Hassall treasured his childhood at Denbigh and the following quote comes from his memoirs -

“Denbigh was a very pretty property. A half circle of hills in front, within a mile of the house, covered with trees, was much admired. On one of the hills, a vineyard and an orange-grove flourished in the rich soil, though they were rather exposed to depredation in the grape season. The view from these hills was magnificent. Three churches at Camden, Narellan and Cobbitty, were clearly seen, together with a wide extent of country”.<sup>108</sup>

One hundred and seventy years later, ‘Denbigh’ still fits this description. It is now the oldest working farm in Australia. Although the vineyard and orange-grove no longer flourish, a rectangle of olive trees marks their location, thanks to the birds which sat on the old fence lines and dropped the seeds that sprouted in the rich soil. The main house (which comprises the old Hook service wing and bungalow, and the later Hassall addition) remains largely as it was in the 1840s, and is still approached and located within a rural landscape – the enclosed valley retaining its serene pastoral character and evocative atmosphere.

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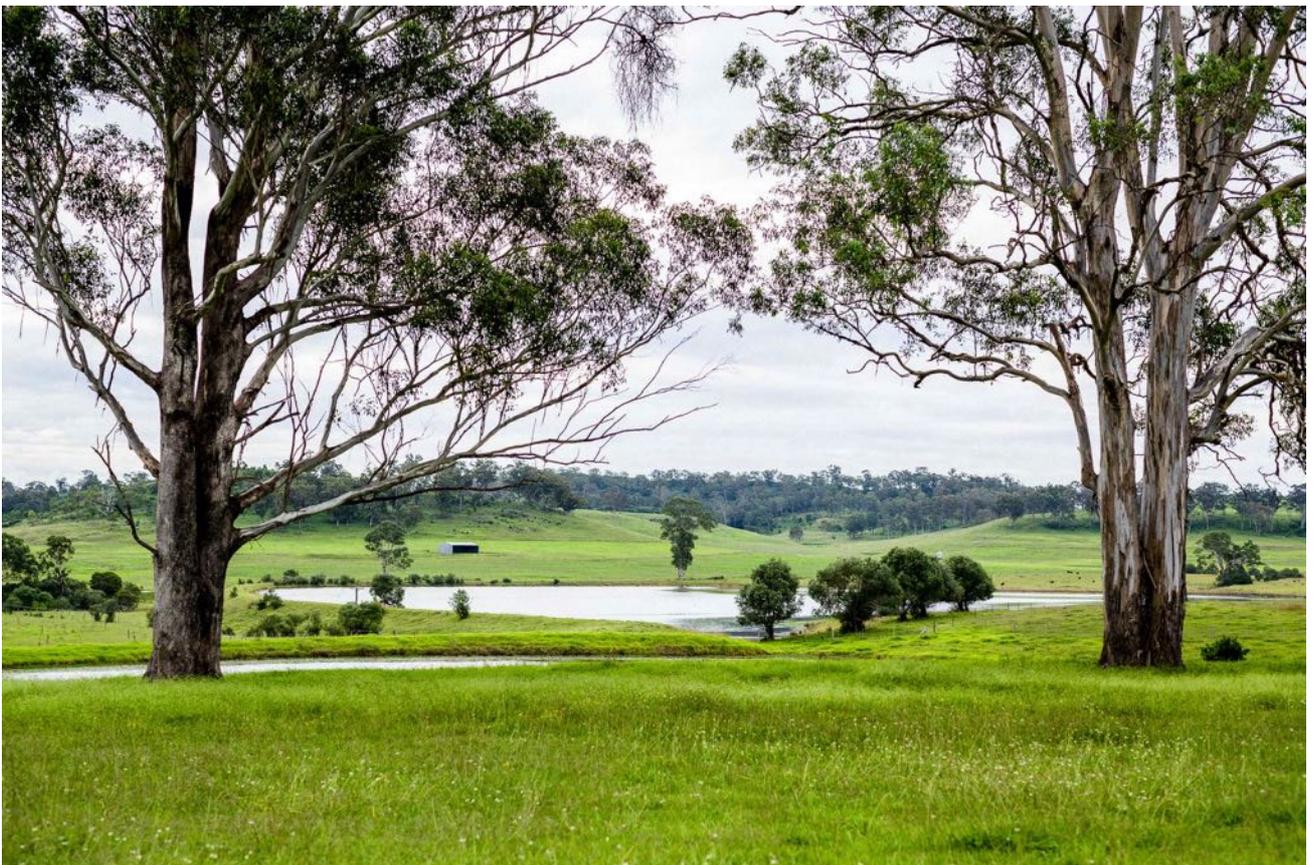
<sup>108</sup> Hassall, J.S., *In Old Australia: Records and Reminiscences from 1794*, Library of Australian History, Sydney, 1902,p 192.



*Shrubbery to the west of Denbigh*



*Fence enclosing the garden*



*Views looking north from the Denbigh garden*

With the announcement in 2005 of the south-west sector as the next ‘development belt’ in Sydney, much of the surrounding countryside will be transformed again – the impact this time will be much greater. When Denbigh was listed on the State Heritage register in 2006 a significant heritage curtilage of five hundred acres was established to protect the homestead, outbuildings complex and landscape, as well as the sacred Aboriginal sites within the valley. With this unprecedented curtilage and protection in place it is hoped that Denbigh will remain a small slice of the eighteenth century Cowpastures for hundreds of years to come.



*Cows grazing today*



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## Postscript - December 2018

Written after Transport NSW announced the proposed route of the Outer Sydney Orbital which will severely effect Denbigh and its curtilage.



*Western side of Denbigh house*

In 2013 The Hon. Robyn Parker MP (Minister for the Environment and Heritage) wrote to the McIntosh family congratulating them on the extensive heritage conservation works they had undertaken at “Denbigh”. She noted “they have been completed to a high standard and provide an excellent outcome for this important heritage property”.

A 2004 Heritage Curtilage Study by Design 5 Architects (required and endorsed by the Office of Environment and Heritage) identified the important Aboriginal and early European sites and buildings to be preserved on Denbigh. The following quotes are taken directly from this study -

*“Denbigh is sited in a very rare and intact early colonial landscape of great beauty and integrity and is of exceptional cultural significance to the state of NSW”*

*“Denbigh depends upon retention and respect for its curtilage in order to retain this significance. Denbigh and its curtilage as defined in this report must therefore be retained, protected and conserved” ... “If this curtilage is compromised or lost, Denbigh itself will be diminished.”*

*“There is firm archaeological and historical evidence of the Aboriginal association with Denbigh. This evidence includes activities associated with tool and equipment-making and ceremonial activities”*

*“The historical references to ceremonies clearly indicate a spiritual association with the place for the Aboriginal people of the area”*

*“Further archaeological investigations and field survey are likely to provide evidence of extensive Aboriginal use of the area, particularly the ridge system and the Cobbitty creek valley floor.”*

*“The physical evidence of Aboriginal occupation of the estate, both prior to and after European arrival, backed up by documented evidence of this including ceremonial use (Corroboree’s and tribal rites,) strengthens the integrity and rarity of the continuous physical record of the place.”*

*“Any future works in the vicinity of the known Aboriginal sites and artefact locations should be preceded by an Aboriginal heritage impact assessment”*

*“A major consideration of the aesthetic setting of Denbigh is that the properties to the north west, and west play a crucial role in the open and undeveloped rural character of the place, and any development or change in these areas must consider their impact on Denbigh”*

*‘Views which connect Denbigh to other significant properties must also be retained and respected’*

*“No new dwellings or large structures are to be constructed in the area north east to west of the homestead”*

It was therefore with great dismay and distress that the McIntosh family read about the proposed route for the Outer Sydney Orbital (M9) - a two hundred metre wide concrete monolith encompassing an eight-lane motorway and two freight train lines - to be constructed west of the homestead just metres from the curtilage, along the Cobbitty Creek valley floor.

If this proposed M9 motorway and freight train was to go ahead Denbigh’s five hundred acre curtilage, a legacy to the community which was welcomed and endorsed by one government department, would be ruined by the ill considered actions of another government department.

Over the past hundred years Denbigh has opened its doors to history and gardening groups, local schools, choirs, international agricultural organisations, Ayrshire and Friesian cattle groups, church groups, the Red Cross, Probis, the National Trust, the Historic Houses Association, Mount Annan Botanic Gardens, Vintage Car Associations and the Garden History Society. Fundraisers for local charities have been held in the old hayshed raising money for Healthhabitat, Cobbitty Church, Turning Point Camden, the Cobbitty Rural Fire Service, Africa Aids Foundation, and the Wangan and Jagalingou people of the Northern Territory in their fight to preserve their lands from the destruction of a major coal mine.



*Fundraising functions are held inside the Denbigh hayshed*



Much of Denbigh's serenity and charm comes from it being encircled by hills and a nineteenth century landscape protecting it from any signs of modern living. Hundreds of people have come to work on the farm, perform in the hayshed, potter, paint and draw in the coach house studio, make films in the paddocks, or simply to sit in the garden and enjoy the sound of bellbirds carried in the clear air across the valley. They leave inspired by the time-worn buildings, the peacefulness and unspoiled rural setting.



*Denbigh Coach-house Studio*





*NIDA students working at Denbigh*



Experiences like these will come to an end if the Outer Sydney Orbital (OSO) takes the current proposed route. And the landscape that the Aboriginal People respected and nurtured for tens of thousands of years before that, gathering in their hundreds for corroborees, will be permanently scarred.

The OSO will also sever Denbigh from Cobbitty village and the church Thomas Hassall built with stone quarried from Denbigh one hundred and eighty years ago.

The many descendants of Reverend Thomas Hassall as well as descendants of blacksmiths, brickmakers, carpenters, dairymen, gardeners, stonemasons, vigneron and others who have worked at Denbigh enjoy returning and then continuing their pilgrimage to St Paul's Church. They are invariably delighted to find it as charming as the history books promise, and to discover the names of their ancestors engraved on the lichen-covered gravestones. The inaugural partnership between Denbigh and St Paul's Cobbitty has been furthered through Church open days at Denbigh.

If Cobbitty Road becomes an interchange for traffic to access the orbital, the rural charm of Cobbitty village will be forever destroyed.

There has been community outrage that the OSO will destroy so many homes, historic farms, villages and landscapes, as well as flora and fauna in the Macarthur region.

The NSW Government, in recognition that the Cumberland Plain Woodland is at risk of extinction, sensibly put in place the Cumberland Plain Recovery Plan in 2011. This plan, prepared by the NSW Department of Environment Climate Change and Water provides for the long-term survival and protection of seven threatened species, four endangered populations and nine threatened ecological communities listed in the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995 that are found only on the Cumberland Plain.

In support of this plan the NSW State Government pledged \$530 million over thirty years to secure the protection and management of the Cumberland Plains - an unprecedented investment in recovery efforts in the region.

The proposed OSO would run right through the heart of the Cumberland Plain Woodland. That the current Government can blithely ignore the Recovery Plan when a competing proposal arises is completely unacceptable on moral grounds - not to mention a complete waste of tax payer's money.

Transport NSW has received over 60,000 submissions from the people of the Macarthur area - most of them vehemently opposed to the current OSO route.

Attached are just some of the submissions sent to Transport NSW about Denbigh.