THEMATIC HISTORY OF PARRY SHIRE
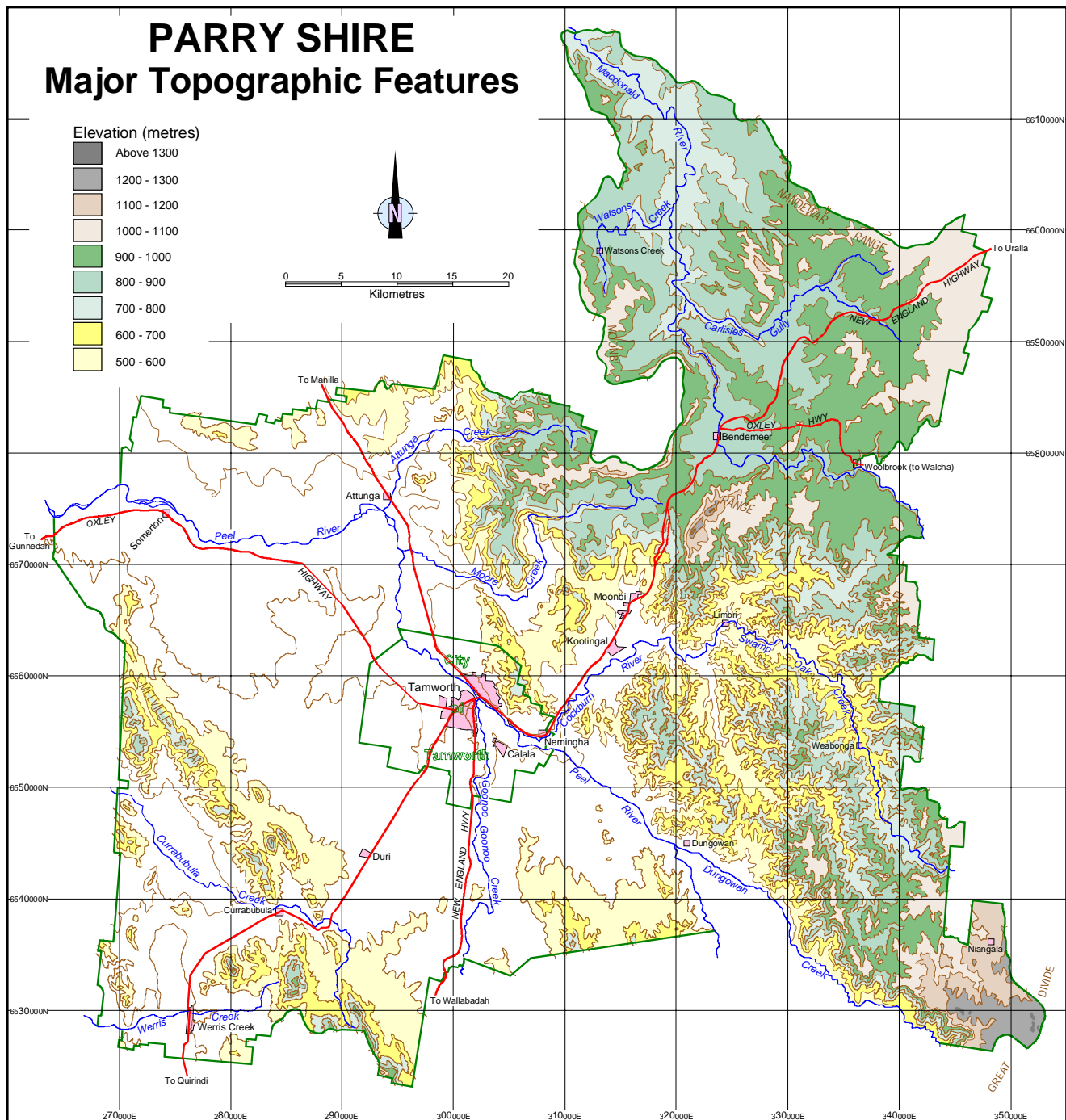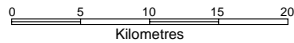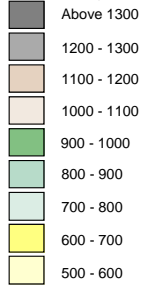
Final Draft

John Ferry

PARRY SHIRE
Major Topographic Features

Elevation (metres)

- Above 1300
- 1200 - 1300
- 1100 - 1200
- 1000 - 1100
- 900 - 1000
- 800 - 900
- 700 - 800
- 600 - 700
- 500 - 600

N

0 5 10 15 20
Kilometres

Macdonald River

NANDEWAR RANGE

Watsons Creek

Watsons Creek

Carlisles Gully

To Uralla

NEW ENGLAND HIGHWAY

6610000N
6600000N
6590000N
6580000N
6570000N
6560000N
6550000N
6540000N
6530000N

To Manilla

Attunga Creek

Peel River

Attunga

OXLEY HWY

Bendemeer

Woolbrook (to Walcha)

RANGE

To Gunnedah

OXLEY

Somerton

HIGHWAY

Moore Creek

Moonbi

Limbri

Swamp Creek

Kootingal

Peel River

Cockburn

City

Tamworth

Nemingha

Calala

Weabonga

Tamworth

Goonoo Goonoo Creek

NEW ENGLAND HWY

Duri

Dungowan

Dungowan Creek

Currabubula Creek

Currabubula

Niangala

Creek

GREAT DIVIDE

Werris Creek

Werris Creek

To Wallabadah

To Quirindi

270000E 280000E 290000E 300000E 310000E 320000E 330000E 340000E 350000E

16

Introduction

LANDSCAPES OF THE SHIRE

Parry Shire covers the rich agricultural country surrounding the city of Tamworth in northern New South Wales, and, as well, the extensive rugged mountain country to the east of the city. The variations in topography and scenery in Parry Shire are dramatic from mountain tablelands to broken ranges with snow-prone peaks, from the narrow valleys of highland creeks to the flat alluvial plains of lowland rivers. The basic drainage pattern is in a north westerly direction and the core of the Shire is the valleys of the Peel River and its major tributaries the Cockburn River, Dungowan Creek and Goonoo Goonoo Creek. The Peel in turn is a major tributary of the Namoi River which it joins just beyond the Shire's western boundaries. The Peel Valley is the heart of the Shire's productive economy.

The valley is defined to the east by the rugged Moonbi Ranges, a spur of the Great Dividing Range. It is in these Moonbi Ranges that both the Peel and Cockburn Rivers rise and set off through gorges and narrow valleys. Just behind Tamworth the Moonbis afford a pass to the New England Tableland beyond, but to the south and north of the Moonbi Pass, the country is rugged, broken, heavily wooded and remote. At the top of the range and within the Shire's boundaries lie small highland villages like Niangala, Weabonga and Woolbrook. These small villages are well accustomed to heavy winter snowfalls, and in exceptional seasons the Moonbi Pass itself can be closed by snow or ice.

The escarpment of the Moonbis is spectacular and affords splendid views of the valley beneath. From lookouts in the hills the valley of the Peel can be encompassed in a glance. It is obviously rich and fertile. The quilt of grey green pasture, yellow fields of grain and the chocolate browns of ploughed paddocks stretch down the valley. The mountains meet the plains here with a touch of spectacle. This is a type of Australian landscape beauty that is not rare, but nor is it common. One has to travel to see this type of country. For a visitor it is memorable.

On the western side of the valley there is another narrow range of flanking hills. Due west of Tamworth these hills are known as the Melville Range. They are much lower than the Moonbis, in fact they are the well-worn residue of an ancient range.[1] But in themselves these hills are quite dramatic since they seem to rise abruptly from the plains. Quaintly named peaks such as Mount Terrible or Terrible Billy, Mount Duri and Slippery Rock Hill stand out on the skyline, and can be seen from far away.

Beyond this residual range to the west lies the pretty valleys of Werris Creek and Currabubula Creek, fitful westerly flowing streams marked more by gullies and waterholes than a permanent flow.

The northern part of the Shire is dominated by the Peel River as it turns due west to make its junction with the Namoi. It is joined on its right bank by tributaries, Attunga Creek and Moore Creek, both rising in the northern reaches of the Moonbis. This, too is fertile country, with generous deposits of alluvium from thousands of years of flooding from both the Peel and the Namoi.

Beyond the boundaries of the Shire, the larger picture is defined by the Great Dividing Range, with its rich New England Tableland, separating the New South Wales north coast from the western slopes and plains. To the south the great divide becomes the more definable Liverpool Range that separates the Hunter Valley from the Peel and Namoi Valleys. These geographic barriers have defined a lot of human activity and development in the area. It is the interaction of humans with their landscapes which is the focus of this study. So the scene is set to pursue that main objective.

*A remoter section of the Moonbi Range north west of Niangala.*

KAMILAROI LANDS

This land of mountains, valleys, plains and rivers, diverse in geological forms, diverse in soil types, diverse in vegetation was part of the lands of the Kamilaroi people (pronounced Kám-'l-a-roi with the emphasis on the first syllable and a very weak second syllable. The initial sound is somewhere between a 'g' and a 'k').[2] The changing language spoken by hundreds of generations of Kamilaroi people over thousands of years, finally came to rest in some of the place names now intimately associated with this land. In 1855 an astute English observer noted that the Kamilaroi, like all Aboriginal people, 'have given names to every turn of the rivers, every hillock and gully'.[3] Europeans picked up some of these place names and planted them permanently on the landscapes they were creating. In the vicinity of the Shire, known Kamilaroi words include Namoi, from ŋamú meaning the breast since the river curves like a woman's breast; Gunida (Gunnedah) the place of white stones; Biridja (Breeza) place of fleas; Worra (Warrah) on the left hand; Munila (Manilla) where the river goes round about; and Mukai (Mooki) flinty rocky river bed.[4] Within the Shire Turi (Duri) is a water reed;[5] Tuckramah (Tucker-aman) is a resting place or camp;[6] Callala (Calala) was the Kamilaroi name for the Peel River,[7] and Goonoo Goonoo was the place of faeces or excrement.[8]

Carrabobbila (Currabubula); Werries Creek and Wallamoul (Woolomol) were Kamilaroi words whose specific meaning is now uncertain.[9]

Most of Parry Shire lies within the lands that once belonged to the Kamilaroi people. These lands were extensive making the Kamilaroi one of the largest and most influential cultural groups in Aboriginal Australia. The lands of the Kamilaroi stretched roughly from the Upper Hunter Valley along the western escarpment of the Moonbi and Nandewar Ranges as far as the upper reaches of the Gwydir River, then along the Gwydir to about where Moree is today. From there a rough boundary could be defined as moving northwest to take in all the lower McIntyre and Mooni Rivers and both sides of the Barwon River as far as Walgett, then down to the Warrumbungle Ranges and back to the Liverpool Range and the Upper Hunter Valley.[10] This vast area takes in the modern towns of Tamworth, Werris Creek, Quirindi, Manilla, Barraba, Bingara, Gunnedah, Narrabri, Wee Waa, Coonabarabran, Coolah, Cassilis, Baradine, Pilliga, Walgett, Collarenebri, Mungindi, and Moree.
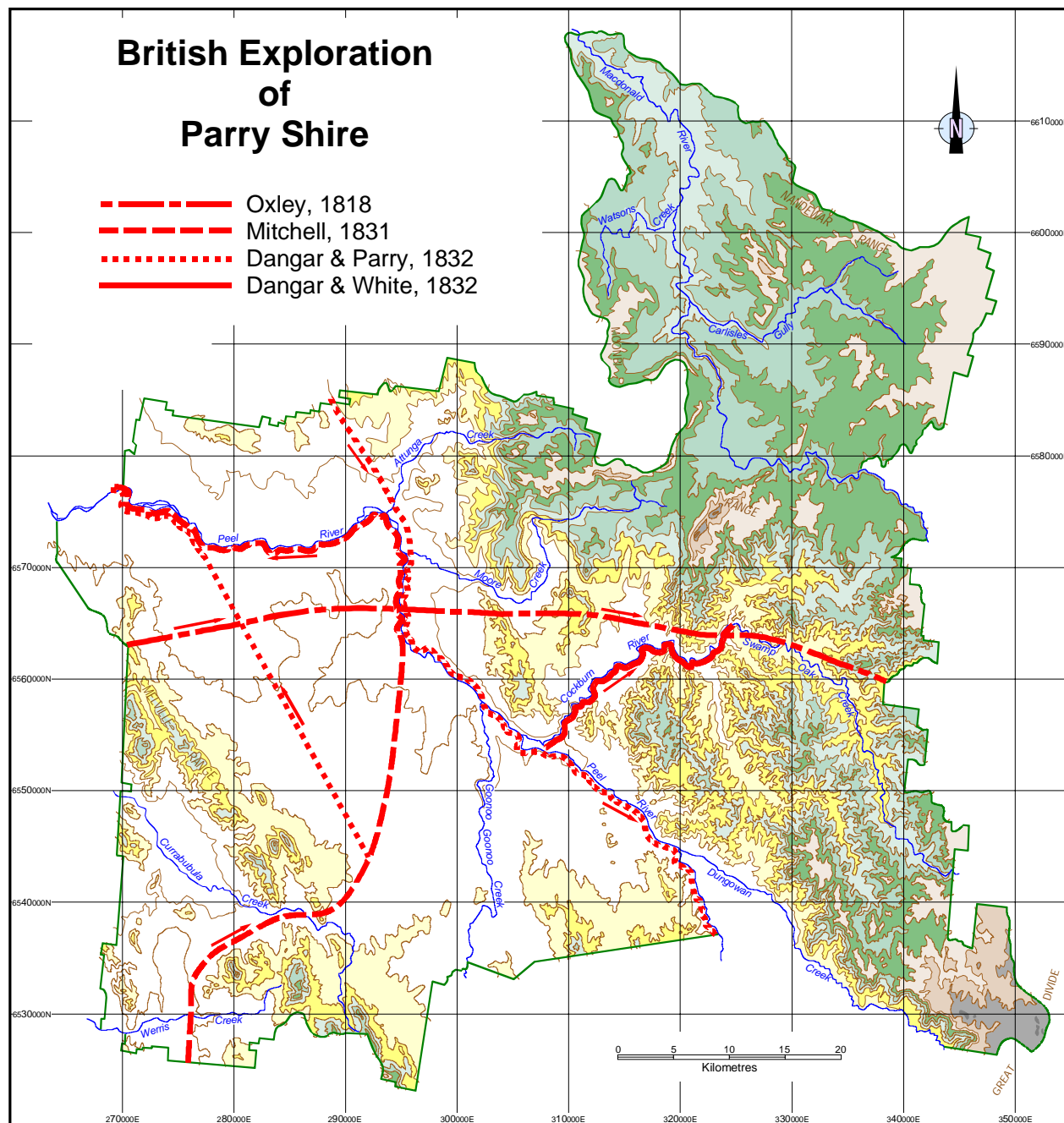
Trade amongst Kamilaroi people and between the Kamilaroi and other groups was extensive, and as might be expected, trade routes existed to bring
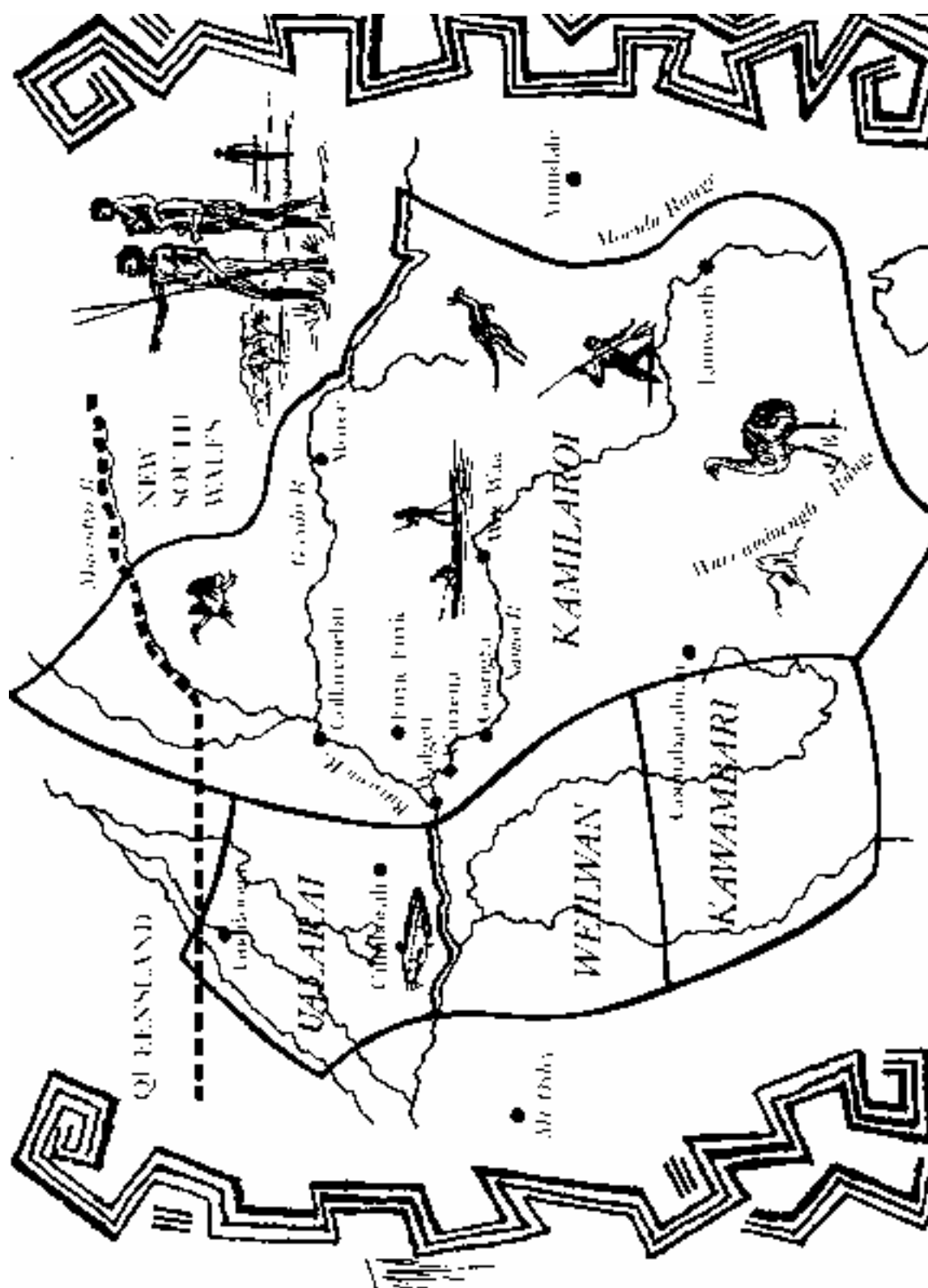
the resources of one area to another. Much of the western Kamilaroi lands consisted of black soil plains where suitable stone for axe heads, knives and spearheads was not available. In the east, however, in the area now known as Parry Shire, there was good quality stone that was easily quarried. The most impressive of such stone quarries was at Moore Creek on the saddleback ridge separating the Moore Creek Valley from that of the Peel.[11] Axes of the material ground at Moore Creek were traded extensively along the valleys of the Namoi and Gwydir Rivers and artefacts of such material have been found as far away as Wilcannia in western New South Wales.[12]

Indigenous rock art is also associated with Parry Shire. Most is executed in red ochre on granite and consists mainly of human figures accompanied by gird tracks, direction signs, circles, lines and dots. About five kilometres west of Moonbi township, are two large granite rocks showing paintings. In the Moore Creek Valley further to the west there are more paintings of similar type. In the Moonbi Ranges a number of sites have been located near Bendemeer. On Haning near Watson's Creek several figures are represented, and high in the mountains sixteen kilometres west of Bendemeer is a cluster of sites representing some of the finest rock art sites on the tablelands.[13] Clearly, Parry Shire has some very significant sites of pre-European occupation, and further investigation of this heritage should be seriously considered.

British Exploration of Parry Shire

Legend:
- Oxley, 1818
- Mitchell, 1831
- Dangar & Parry, 1832
- Dangar & White, 1832

Major Theme 1

EXPLORATION

T he first Europeans to enter Kamilaroi lands were members of John Oxley's expedition into the northern interior of New South Wales in the year 1818. This was followed by Allan Cunningham's expedition that skirted the western edge of Parry Shire in 1827, and Thomas Livingstone Mitchell's expedition of 1831. All of these expeditions were of national historical significance. However, their passing through Parry Shire was incidental. Oxley was winding up his expedition and heading for the coast when he passed through the Peel River Valley from west to east in 1818.[14] Allan Cunningham and Thomas Mitchell were just setting out on their journeys, having crossed the Liverpool Range from the Hunter Valley.[15] The lands of the Peel River Valley were not an objective for any of these expeditions. Nonetheless, explorations of national significance had passed through the region and local historical societies and historically minded individuals have sought the places associated with these nationally important events. Finding explorers' campsites and calculating the crossing points of rivers has been an avid project because of their association with being 'first'. The first crossing place of a river or mountain range by whitemen, or the first overnight camp erected by explorers in a locality could well be marked by a cairn or sign or other sort of permanent memorial.

Apart from the interest in 'firsts', there are other significances in these initial British expeditions through the southern lands of the Kamilaroi. They deposited names on the landscape. Surveyor General John Oxley approached the Peel Valley from the west, as he headed for the coast after his unsuccessful search for a great inland sea in the interior of Australia. On 29 August 1818 Oxley saw a range of hills before him to the east which he named the Melville Hills[16] in honour of Lord Melville, First Sea Lord of the Admiralty.[17] Oxley was after all a naval lieutenant. On 1 September he crossed a rich and beautiful plain and the following day came to the anticipated river which watered it. He named it Peel's River in honour of the Right Honorable Robert Peel, at that time a very young Chief Secretary for Ireland in Lord Liverpool's government.[18] Pressing on to the east over the next few days Oxley discovered and named the Cockburn River and then headed up and across the ranges ever eastward until he reached the coast at Port Macquarie.

Oxley's successor as Surveyor General of New South Wales, Thomas Livingstone Mitchell, was quite different

John Oxley, Surveyor General of New South Wales who led an exploration expedition through Kamilaroi lands in 1818.

Thomas Mitchell, Oxley's successor as Surveyor General who led an expedition in 1831 through Kamilaroi lands in search of a great inland river. That river, of course, did not exist

in his naming of places. He frequently preferred the indigenous names. Mitchell crossed the Liverpool Range in December 1831 on a journey of exploration in search of a fantastic river said by a convict to exist in the northern interior of New South Wales. His route took him northerly skirting Oxley's Melville Hills. On 9 December 1831 he passed a prominent mountain which he called Barragundy, the indigenous name, and a little beyond came across a deep waterhole known as Carrobobilla.[19] The latter name, slightly altered to Currabubula, survives to this day. Mount Barragundy was recorded by Mitchell as Warrigundi on his 1834 map of his journey, and this was the official name for 130 years. Commonly, the mountain was known as Terrible Billy, thought either to be an English convict's corruption of Carrabobbila, or to be the name of a wild frontiersman who terrorised the Aboriginal people of New England. All these names are historically interesting, but in 1967 the New South Wales Geographic Names Board bestowed the more prosaic Mount Terrible on the landmark, and so it remains, at least officially.[20] The day after he left Carrabobilla, Mitchell passed a mountain which he confirmed in its native name of Turi (later Duri) and reached the Peel River at Wallamoul north of present day Tamworth. Here he recorded that the native name of the river was 'Callala'.[21]

In September 1918 on the centenary of Oxley's crossing of the Peel River, the Premier of New South Wales, W. A. Holman unveiled a memorial in the form of an obelisk (later replaced with a ship's anchor) at Wise's Corner on the Tamworth Manilla Road. This was thought to be the nearest accessible

spot to where Oxley had crossed the river. Premier Holman spoke from the back of a dray to an audience that included six of John Oxley's direct descendant, and paid tribute to the discoverer of 'this beautiful vale'.[22]

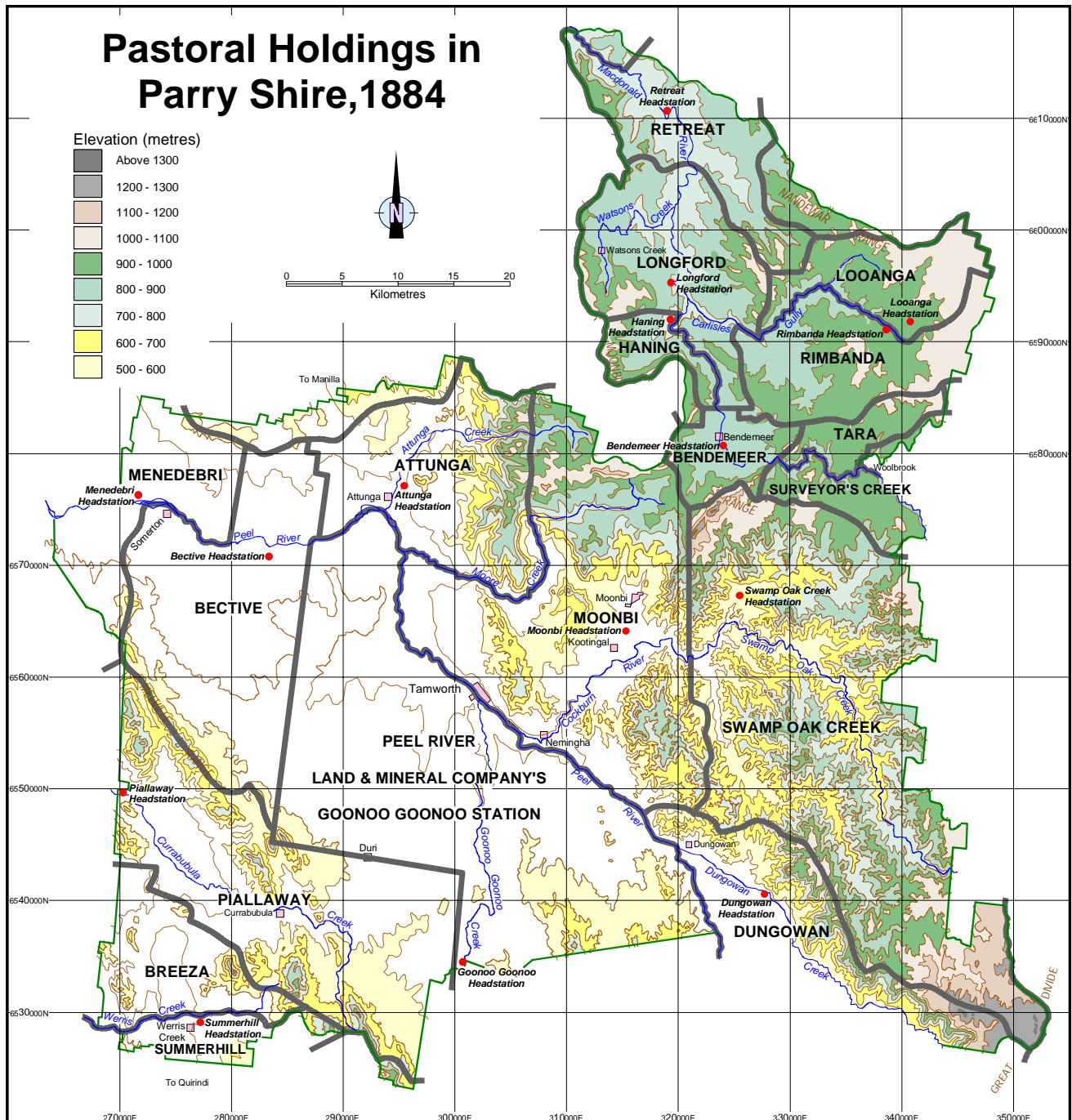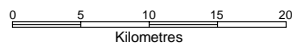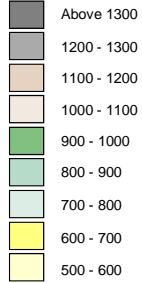Of the three first English explorers, Oxley, Cunningham and Mitchell, only Cunningham's expedition was regarded by contemporaries as a modest success. Oxley and Mitchell had both failed in their primary objectives. But it is worthwhile remembering their greater achievements in finding paths across uncharted plains and through formidable ranges, and in recording in detail and accuracy where they had been. Their work was built upon by those British pastoralists who followed them.[23]

In 1918 a Tamworth local historian points out what was believed to be Oxley's crossing place at the Peel River north of the city. The centenary that year was marked by the erection of an obelisk on the Tamworth Manilla Road near the crossing place, and in 1926 the obelisk was replaced by a ship's anchor to remind people of Oxley's naval career. Here is a very early and rare example of how people commemorated their Australian history.

Pastoral Holdings in Parry Shire,1884

Elevation (metres)

- Above 1300
- 1200 - 1300
- 1100 - 1200
- 1000 - 1100
- 900 - 1000
- 800 - 900
- 700 - 800
- 600 - 700
- 500 - 600

N

| 0 | 5 | 10 | 15 | 20 |

Kilometres

RETREAT

Retreat Headstation

LONGFORD

Longford Headstation

Watsons Creek

LOOANGA

Looanga Headstation

Haning Headstation

HANING

Rimbanda Headstation

RIMBANDA

TARA

MENEDEBRI

Menedebri Headstation

ATTUNGA

Attunga Headstation

Attunga

Bendemeer

Bendemeer Headstation

BENDEMEER

Woolbrook

SURVEYOR'S CREEK

Somerton

Bective Headstation

BECTIVE

Moonbi

Swamp Oak Creek Headstation

Moonbi Headstation

MOONBI

Kootingal

Tamworth

PEEL RIVER

Nemingha

SWAMP OAK CREEK

LAND & MINERAL COMPANY'S

GOONOO GOONOO STATION

Duri

Piallaway Headstation

Dungowan

Dungowan Headstation

DUNGOWAN

PIALLAWAY

Currabubula

BREEZA

Goonoo Goonoo Headstation

Werris Creek

Summerhill Headstation

SUMMERHILL

To Quirindi

To Manilla

6610000N
6600000N
6590000N
6580000N
6570000N
6560000N
6550000N
6540000N
6530000N

270000E 280000E 290000E 300000E 310000E 320000E 330000E 340000E 350000E

Major Theme 2

PASTORALISM

O xley had written enthusiastically of the Liverpool Plains and the Peel Valley in his journal, published in 1820 and avidly read both in New South Wales and in Britain. Of the Peel Valley he wrote:

> It would be impossible to find a finer or more luxuriant country the [Peel's River] waters: north and south, its extent is unknown, but it is certainly not less than sixty miles. This space between the bounding hills is not altogether level, but rises into gentle inequalities, and independently of the river is well watered; the grass was most luxuriant; the timber good and not thick: in short no place in the world can afford more advantages to the industrious settler, than this extensive vale.[24]

He found potential even in the hills and declared that they 'appeared well calculated to afford an ample range of sheep pasture'.[25]

Corporate pastoralism:

Not only did Oxley provide effusive praise of these northern plains and vales, he was also the Surveyor General of New South Wales, a position of some influence. As well, the remote convict colony of New South Wales was about to change direction. Men of means were taking seriously its potential for agriculture and particularly for wool growing. In 1824 an Australian Agricultural Company was formed in Britain, and was granted various conditional powers and consequent privileges in New South Wales.

The Australian Agricultural Company was the first major corporation to enter the wool industry. Its influence was profound and enduring, and it was associated with the Peel River Valley for just over 150 years from 1834 to 1985. This unbroken association over so lengthy a period of time is of national heritage significance.

The agent for the Australian Agricultural Company, Robert Dawson, arrived in New South Wales in November 1825 with sheep cattle and choice plants. Early the following year, on the advice of John Oxley,[26] he made the less than inspired choice of one million acres (405,000 hectares) in the hinterland back from Port Stephens. It contained some good pasture, a lot of scrubby coastal land, and a great deal of broken heavily timbered mountain country. It was soon realised that the company's fortunes would be better served by selecting land elsewhere.

Dawson was dismissed as company agent in 1828 to be replaced

the following year by Sir Edward Parry, renowned arctic explorer and naval officer.[27] Before he left Britain, Parry had taken notice of a young surveyor named Henry Dangar, then in England, who had worked for a number of years in the New South Wales Surveyor General's Department under Oxley, and who had recently published an impressive book on the colony. Parry appointed Dangar company surveyor and Dangar returned to Sydney in April 1830 to take up his new appointment.

In 1831 Dangar set off from Port Stephens, the A. A Co. headquarters, to search for better lands for the company's flocks. He crossed the Great Dividing Range from the headwaters of the Manning River to the headwaters of the Peel, and followed the Peel downstream until he came to those rich open plains extolled by Oxley twelve years earlier. Dangar was impressed with the country along the Peel River and with the fertile Liverpool Plains just north of the Liverpool Range. In March 1832, Dangar returned, this time with Parry himself, and convinced his superior of the value of the Peel River and Liverpool Plains lands.[28]

After protracted negotiations with Governor Bourke in New South Wales and the Colonial Office in London, Parry was able to cut a deal. In exchange for half a million acres (200,000 hectares) of coastal and mountainous lands that would revert to the Crown, the A. A. Co. was permitted to select new land as a replacement in the Peel River area. Parry's successor, Colonel Henry Dumaresq, chose two sites in January 1834. One was in the form of a rectangle at Warrah on the Liverpool Plain, and the other, of more interest to

Sir Edward Parry, arctic explorer and company agent in Australia for the Australia Agricultural Company 1828 to 1834

Henry Dangar, free Cornish immigrant and former surveyor in the government employ whom the directors of the Australian Agricultural Company secured as their surveyor in 1830.

this study, was on the Peel River. The Peel River Estate covered 126,480 hectares and encompassed all the fertile lands to the west of the river. It stretched from the virtual headwaters of the Peel above Nundle, along the river past its junction with the Cockburn, and past Attunga Creek, to a point due north of Mount Duri. From there the estate boundaries followed the line to Mount Duri, then took a series of zigzags due east and due south until meeting up with the Peel again at its headwaters near the Crawney Pass.[29] Thus the very best of the Peel River Valley, exclusive of any hilly or poorly watered land, had been selected.

In June 1834 Colonel Dumaresq visited the Peel estate and selected a site for its headquarters at the junction of the Peel River and Forest Brook, now known as Goonoo Goonoo Creek. Dumaresq proposed that the site should be known as 'Tamworth' reminding the London directors of the obvious connection between the illustrious politician, Sir Robert Peel, and the Borough of Tamworth in Staffordshire

where the Peel family had their properties.[30]

Dumaresq died in 1838 of war wounds received at the Battle of Waterloo over twenty years earlier. He was succeeded as commissioner by Phillip Parker King, son of Governor King, third governor of New South Wales. This began a long association of the King family with the Peel River Estate. It was King who decided that the Tamworth headquarters of the company were not well situated. There was too much traffic crossing the Peel River at Tamworth on its way to the New England tablelands and beyond, and the site had suffered in the 1840 flood. Late in 1840 King decided to move the headquarters up Goonoo Goonoo Creek to a point eleven kilometres above Mount Dumaresq where there was abundant water for sheep washing, and some freedom from travellers. He instructed bricks and lime to be procured for the erection of buildings at the Goonoo Goonoo site.[31]

The Australian Agricultural Company's headquarters at Calala erected in 1834. The site was later abandoned in favour of Goonoo Goonoo Creek.

In 1842 King wrote to the directors justifying the costs of erecting substantial buildings for the superintendent at Peel River Estate and for the stores. Three years later he described the house at Goonoo Goonoo as, by no means large, but substantial in character, convenient without ornament. The equivocation done with, King admitted to it having been somewhat costly. He explained that it was, after all, intended to house the superintendent, a resident clergyman and a storekeeper.[32]

In 1851, Archibald Blane, Deputy Governor of the Company and acting commissioner in New South Wales visited the Peel and described the Goonoo Goonoo headquarters thus:

> The situation of Goonoo Goonoo house is well chosen – and although not so extensive a scale as might be supposed from the money spent upon it still it is out of character with the generality of houses in the country. It is brick built and commodious, but it is to be regretted that less money was not spent on the house and more on suitable buildings such as shearing shed and wool store … Besides the buildings used for shearing purposes which are in the immediate vicinity of Goonoo Goonoo house, there is a store, from which rations are issued and slops and other goods used by the Servants of the Company are retailed, and beyond the store a small building for fell-mongering the skins of the slaughtered sheep.[33]

In 1855 Goonoo Goonoo house was valued at £1,500 for insurance purposes.

The Australian Agricultural Company lost its status as a chartered company in 1847, which was more a blessing than a setback, and was thereafter an ordinary business firm. In 1854 the company was restructured, and an independent company was formed called the Peel River Land and Mineral Company. This new company had control of the Goonoo Goonoo Estate, and could mine for gold on company land. Gold had been discovered two years previously at Hanging Rock above Nundle just adjacent to the company's land, so the prospects were good. Ultimately, mining made little money for the company, but the gold discoveries in Australia ushered in that long economic boom when pastoralism was so profitable.

The great days of wool at Goonoo Goonoo were presided over by Phillip Gidley King who succeeded his father as general superintendent in 1854 and remained in the position until 1904. P. G. King took a great interest in Tamworth and was mayor from 1876 to 1880. It was he who built Calala Cottage near the town for his political convenience. Today it is the Tamworth and District Historical Society's museum. Under P. G. King's superintendence, the Goonoo Goonoo estate was fenced beginning from the mid 1850s. Fencing did away with the old practice of shepherding sheep and was therefore very cost effective. Shepherds were replaced by a smaller number of boundary riders, and a very few of their more substantial cottages may be seen on the old company lands.

The shearing shed at Goonoo Goonoo was added to in 1857 and again in 1866. In 1875 a brick building was erected to hold a wool table, bins and press, and this building is still standing. For the shearing season of 1889 the shearing floor was completely rebuilt to allow for the installation of 42 Wolesley machine shearing stands. As well as the alterations and additions to the shearing

Above: *Goonoo Goonoo headstation photographed from the south in 1921; and* **below**: *the same photographed from the north east.*

Two closer views of the buildings at Goonoo Goonoo. **Above:** *The Rev. Higgins arrives at Goonoo Goonoo house for a luncheon in October 1921; and* **below:** *a boundary rider's hut on Goonoo Goonoo.*

shed, a new store cum post office was erected in 1865, by an architect named Mr. Grace. It was of two storeys with rubble walls and galvanised iron roof.

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the great days for Goonoo Goonoo Station. The number of sheep peaked in 1899 at 212,000, just before the great drought of 1900 – 1902 necessitated a reduction in numbers. Thereafter the estate came under increasing pressure from closer settlement schemes and bit by bit it was sold off. In 1908 the Wade Government in New South Wales imposed a Compulsory Purchase Order on the company for 40,342 hectares in the vicinity of Tamworth. Under threat of resumption, the company sold off a further 32,805 hectares between 1925 and 1935, and a further 9,720 hectares were compulsorily acquired for War Service Land Settlement in 1952. In 1985 the company sold at auction its remaining 4,853 hectares thus bringing to an end its 151 year association with the Peel River Valley.

This was an extraordinary association over a very long time. The company remained not only viable but highly profitable throughout. It was a significant breeder of both sheep and cattle and was an innovative player in the Australian wool industry. The Goonoo Goonoo Estate is probably the best known example of corporate pastoralism in a country that for decades 'rode on the sheep's back'. The cluster of buildings that survives as a reminder of the company's activities is undoubtedly the greatest item of significant national heritage in the Parry Shire.[34]

Individual Pastoralism:

Corporate pastoralism was the rare and distinctive feature of Parry Shire's history. However, individual pastoralism was a feature of that history as it was in most other parts of the inland of New South Wales. The story of such pastoral enterprise in Parry Shire will be similar to other parts of the state. Unlike the story of Goonoo Goonoo, there will probably be nothing of outstanding national significance to record. Nonetheless there will be remnants of much earlier times in the form of ruins, sites, structures and substantial buildings that will be of local and regional and even state significance. Intactness of a site showing pastoral activity over a century and a half or more might well produce a precinct of considerable significance.

As has been shown above, the valley of the Peel River was dominated by the Goonoo Goonoo estate of over 121,500 hectares held on freehold title from 1834. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about Sir Edward Parry's victory in convincing the colonial and home governments to exchange half a million acres (200,000 hectares) of poor coastal land for the equivalent in rich interior land was the fact that this flew in the face of clearly established government policy. Since the late 1820s, the government in Sydney, encouraged by the Colonial Office in London, had tried to restrict settlement within certain Limits of Location based roughly on a 320 kilometre radius from Sydney. Officially, no one was to settle beyond those limits, and the Peel Valley was clearly in the 'no-go' area.

The Australian Agricultural Company's grants at the Peel River and at Warrah, apart from making a mockery of government policy, simply encouraged others to move beyond the Limits of Location and take up pasture. Settlers had no legal title to such lands beyond the limits. They simply made a claim to a tract of country and sent their sheep and cattle there to depasture. In effect, they squatted on Crown Land and were known colloquially as squatters. By this process, most of the remaining lands of the Peel Valley and the adjacent Moonbi Ranges had been occupied by squatters by the late 1830s. The government was unable to stop this spread of settlement, spurred on by dramatic rises in the price of wool on the London markets. Admitting defeat, Governor Bourke recognised the squatting phenomenon, and sought at least to control it by issuing annual licenses for squatting runs in 1836, and instituting a system of surveillance and adjudication in the form of a commissioner of Crown Lands for each of the remote pastoral districts. Commissioner Alexander Paterson followed by Commissioner Edward Mayne, were the first two Commissioners of Crown Lands for the vast Liverpool Plains Pastoral District, stretching from the headwaters of the Peel along the valleys of the Namoi, Gwydir and McIntyre Rivers to their junctions with the Barwon River and beyond. In 1840 Mayne set up his headquarters at Somerton, on the Peel River just below the company's lands, and the remains of the original building can still be seen.[35]

By 1848, the following runs had been formed in the Peel Valley and on the adjacent Moonbi Ranges by the following squatters.[36]

Attunga	John Bossley	16,589 hectares
Bendemeer	Thomas A. Perry	6,640 hectares
Bobbogullian	Robert Pringle	58,880 hectares
Cuerindi	George Hall	20,460 hectares
Currabubula	John Eales	7,600 hectares
Congi	Abraham Nivison	6,640 hectares
Dungowan	Isaac Haig	10,240 hectares
Duri	John Eales	16,000 hectares
Hanging Rock	Nathan Burrows	6,144 hectares
Haning	Robert Murray	3,840 hectares
Longford	George L. Gibson	8,000 hectares
Looanga	C. H. Buchanan	14,000 hectares
Menedebrie	John Cobcroft Jnr	8,800 hectares
Moonbi	Henry Dangar	10,240 hectares
Moore Creek	Charles Hall	8.000 hectares
Nemingha	Samuel Cook	5,364 hectares
Piallaway	George Curtis	6,216 hectares
Piallamore	R. L. Jenkins	2,560 hectares
Retreat	Robert Pringle	13,280 hectares
Rimbanda	C. H. and W. F. Buchanan	15,360 hectares
Summer Hill	John Single	4,000 hectares
Surveyor's Creek	G. C. Turner	16,000 hectares
Swamp Oak Creek	Peter Brodie,	20,480 hectares
Tuckeraman	David Cohen	1,554 hectares
Walhallow	John Eales	20,000 hectares
Weia Weia Creek	Rev. F. Vidal	13,280 hectares
Wollomol	George Jenkins	4,800 hectares
Woolomin (Duncan's Creek)	R. L. Jenkins	10,240 hectares

The runs were open range country. They were typically managed by an overseer who supervised a number of shepherds or stockmen depending on whether sheep or cattle were depastured. Each run would have a head station that was the heart of the enterprise. Here would be the overseer's hut, together with a station store, a farrier, a butcher, a gardener and perhaps a dairyman. Scattered across the run at permanent waterholes would be a series of shepherds' or stockmen's huts. Often convicts or ex-convicts in the early days, these shepherds and stockmen were responsible for looking after livestock on the open range. Because the headstation contained stores and usually dispensed hospitality, travellers frequently stopped there. In fact, some towns and villages often began at or near a headstation and this is how Tamworth, Quirindi, Currabubula, Bendemeer, and Attunga came to be.[37]

Without any security of tenure beyond an annual licence, squatters simply depastured their stock. They did not invest in improvements to the country they claimed because they could be put off it if their licence was not

renewed. Therefore no substantial buildings or other structures would be erected on squatting runs until after 1852 when squatters won limited security of tenure in the form of a fourteen year lease. These leases were created by an Order-in-Council of Queen Victoria in 1847, but due to problems with implementation, the leases did not begin until 1 January 1852. Under the Order-in-Council, squatters could purchase freehold title to their headstation block, and many did so after 1852. With freehold title to the headstation at least, they might then have erected more substantial dwellings, outbuildings and stockyards.

The squatters continued in occupation of their runs on leasehold throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, but most were able to secure more and more of their run on freehold title. Typically, most investment money from 1860 until about 1884 was spent on purchasing freehold title to the best acreage on the run, so headstation dwellings usually remained basic throughout this period. But these were the great days of wool and beef, and governments recognised this. A Crown Land Act of 1884 gave squatters (or pastoralists as they were now generally known) better security to the Crown Lands still on their runs, and with high profitability, it is from this time that large pastoral mansions began to appear on the better properties. Moonbi House, and the headstations at Bective, Haning, Longford and Retreat, all contain significant buildings from this period of high pastoralism.

The success of Australian pastoralism had rationalised the pastoral industry by the mid 1880s. Most small, marginal graziers were gone, and the remaining stations were substantial and well capitalised. The 1884 Crown Land Act required pastoral run boundaries to be surveyed formally for the first time and so we get a snapshot of pastoralism in the mid 1880s as most pastoralists sought to comply with the legislation. The accompanying map of stations in the Parry Shire area for 1884, shows how the runs had been consolidated by that time.

The pastoral runs had come under considerable pressure from small farmers wanting access to arable lands from the early 1860s. Backed by legislation they were able to select up to 320 acres (130 hectares) of land that was still, officially crown land. However, in the Tamworth area they had no access to the freehold estates of the Peel River Land and Mineral Company at Goonoo Goonoo. The small maximum acreage allowable under the act meant that most selections were taken up with intensive crop farming in mind. Therefore, any land selected in the rugged Moonbi Ranges would not be economically viable and this area, too, remained largely unchallenged pastoral country. The free selectors concentrated in the Nemingha and Dungowan areas, and to a much lesser extent around Attunga and Bective. It is possible to see in these areas, farmers' homesteads that date from the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, free selection in the Tamworth area was not successful, especially since the best arable land was unavailable.

It was not until the first decade of the twentieth century that considerable government pressure was brought to bear on the Peel River Land and Mineral Company to begin selling off its best lands to small farmers. In 1909 the government in Sydney forced a Compulsory Purchase Order on the Company and 100,000 acres (40,500 hectares) of best land closest to Tamworth was put on the market. It is from this time that Tamworth 'took off' as a major regional centre,[38] and in the following five decades all the large old pastoral runs, most especially Bective, Attunga, Piallaway and Walhallow, were broken up under a variety of schemes collectively called 'closer settlement'. It was only the rugged mountain country that remained immune to these processes, and is pastoral country to this day.

A section of the original Great North Road between Currabubula and Duri. This section is now part of the Currabubula – Duri travelling stock route

Major Theme 3

TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATION

The geographic nature of Parry and adjacent shires chanelled communication lines in quite distinct pattern in the mid nineteenth century and basically these patterns have persisted to this day. Passage over the Liverpool Range to the south and the Moonbi Range to the east was governed by the best possible pass through the hills. On the plains the Peel River had to be crossed and this tended to concentrate traffic on Tamworth. To the west, the Melville Hills could be crossed with the greatest ease at Currabubula. As well, the existence of the Peel River estate of the Australian Agricultural Company (later Peel River Land and Mineral Company), acted as a hindrance to transport and communication in the middle decades of the nineteenth century at least.

Throughout the nineteenth century, most of the wealth of New South Wales derived from primary production or extraction (specifically wool, beef and minerals). There were, effectively, only two sea ports, Sydney and Newcastle, for the export of these products so it made sense that all major land communication emanated from the two ports and followed lines into the interior of the colony. The coast was difficult, broken by wide rivers and blocked by thick sub-tropical rainforest, so it was not seen as a transport corridor as it is today. Besides, what little traffic passed between Sydney and Brisbane could and did go by sea. This national pattern made the Peel River Valley very important, and any sites or structures that tell the story of transport and communication through the valley will be of more than local or regional significance.

From the 1820s and 1830s, road communication with the northern interior started at Maitland and later Newcastle. Traffic headed up the Hunter Valley and then over the Liverpool Range at Nowland's Gap. Generally the route passed through the village of Quirindi where very early the quaintly named 'Who'd-a-thought it' Inn was established. From Quirindi teamsters and horsemen could head west across the Breeza Plains to the middle reaches of the Namoi River, or north over Werries Creek to Currabubula and then through the Melville Hills to Tamworth. The town on the Peel concentrated traffic. From Tamworth teams, horse riders, travelling stock and later coaches could head west following the course of the Namoi, north through Manilla to Barraba and Bingara and then down the Gwydir River, or north east up the Moonbi Ranges to New England, the Darling Downs and Moreton Bay.

In 1844, William Telfer, then a young lad, described the main road from Tamworth to Currabubula as follows:

> Starting from Tamworth in the month of September it was warm weather at the time the only traffic was bullock Teams or a solitary horseman along the road or a spring cart no buggies or sulkys those days … there was one coach in the Tamworth district Charles hall Goonoo Goonoo manager for the AA Company they made a splendid team of bays the roads were very bad and it took a good driver as they had to get acomodation or else camp out … at this stage there was a large forest extending from Tamworth to Carububula a distance of twenty miles some parts of it very dense with the undergrowth or small scrub … a year before this time two men and a boy were lost in this forest and perished for want of water when found by the blacks and police were partly Eaten by wild dogs … there was no water from Tamworth to Carububula and not a great supply there only in Mr Daviss well at that place where the carriers and travellers had to get water for themselves and their stock also acomodation which was very good at this time … going from Carububula passing over small plains with some dry grass on them went through a dense scrub for about four miles Passing mount Terrible Enroute which was Called after a stockman named Terrible Billy in the old Times who was a Terror to the aboriginals in the New England districts he after committed suicide on Glydes Corner in 1851 Tamworth thence to Weiris Creek the timber was all dead along the road the only Green trees were a few Myalls or a solitary apple tree here and there all flat country plains with belts of Myall on the outskirts mountains in the back ground.[39]

Another significant early road in the district was that which connected the headquarters of the Australian Agricultural Company at Port Stephens to its Peel River estates. The line had been surveyed as early as 1832, the year the A. A. Co. selected its Peel River lands.

In 1836 company overseer, William Telfer marked a better road, and by this route the company's stock moved down to the coast and rations moved up to the back country.[40] However, the road remained little more than a marked tree line running up the valley of the Barnard River, past Giro to Nowendoc then crossing the range and descended to Dungowan and the Peel River. This road, such as it was, was generally known as the Port Stephens Line. Through the 1840s and 50s the company spent money on the road, but it remained a minor route used mainly for travelling stock.[41] Nonetheless, remains of the Port Stephens Line can still be seen in Parry Shire today.

These vital communication links remained little more than tracks, and as late as 1852 Surveyor G. B. White declared that 'there is no system observed in the Road-making of the Northern districts just now'.[42] All this was to change with the gold rushes. The discovery of gold at Hanging Rock near Nundle in 1852 directed more traffic through the A. A. Co. lands, and gold discoveries at Rocky River near Armidale in 1852 and again in 1856 produced huge volumes of traffic along the northern roads. The government decided to extend the Great North Road from the Hunter Valley to the New England tablelands.

During 1859 tenders were called for the clearance and ballasting of a road from Tamworth to Moonbi. By 1863 the road from Tamworth to Bendemeer had been cleared fenced and metalled and work was continuing rapidly towards Armidale.[43] With the building of a good road, vehicular traffic increased, one of

the important forms of such transport being the passenger and mail coaches.

John Gill of Moonbi Run was the first major coachman of the district. As early as 1855 he had £9,948 worth of mail contracts and by the early 1860s was at the height of his coaching and mail contracting career. Thereafter, with better roads he faced some stiff competition, losing both the Tamworth to Warialda mail run to Joseph Chaffey and the Tamworth to Armidale run to Cobb & Co. in 1871. By 1876, Cobb and Co. dominated the coaching services out of Tamworth, and even had a coach factory in the town. But the coaches could not compete with the railways on long routes, and by 1888 Cobb and Co. had ceased operations in the district.[44]

The challenge on the Great North Road to New England, for coaches, bullock teams and any form of vehicle was always the Moonbi Range. The original road followed the trail blazed by pioneer squatter, Edward Gostwyck Cory, in 1832 and there exists today on the First Moonbi Hill a granite column, known as Cory's Pillar, said to be where he sheltered on his expedition. It was this route that the Great North Road took in 1863.[45] In 1872 the road up the Moonbis was moved further to the north away from Moonbi Creek, but still the climb was daunting.

The difficulty of climbing the first and second Moonbi Hills entered Australian folklore, in the days when bullock teams gathered at the little village of Moonbi awaiting the best weather to make the ascent. A story developed that the name Moonbi originated with these early bullock drivers. It was the custom amongst teamster, so the story goes, to keep a watch for a rising moon so the night ascent of the mountains could commence. The first man to spot the moon's glow over the hills would cry "moon Boys!" and the teams would roll out.[46] The story is probably apocryphal but it was repeated often enough.

Roads from the Cockburn Valley up the notorious Moonbi Hills. By 1938, when this photograph was taken, three roads could be traced.

In 1879 a travelling reporter for the *Town and Country Journal* passed up the Moonbis and left his readers with a vivid description. He began with the legend:

> The name appears to be the only remarkable thing about [the village of Moonbi]. It originated in a party being encamped there. One of the members who was asleep, suddenly woke up, and seeing the goddess of the night rising in usual splendour over the mountains awoke his mates with the cry "Oh! Look at the moon, boys!", which name, slightly altered to Moonbi has stuck.[47]

The seasoned traveller had been down the Moonbis before but never up. Going up, as he said, was a different matter.

> It is not so much that the Moonbis are steep, but the continual rise through, in most places pulverised dust. We had unfortunately started rather late and the sun was what might be termed blazing hot before we rose the first pinch. From there for miles it was one continual sweltering drag, the animals (poor brutes) smoking and panting between the clouds of dust which rose from their steaming feet and the hot rays of the almost burning sun.[48]

It was, after all, February.

Some years later Banjo Paterson penned a poem called 'Over the Range' in which the Moonbis became a metaphor for the great barrier to be overcome between the earthly life and heavenly paradise. In the twentieth century, the Moonbis became notorious amongst truckies just as they had been amongst the teamsters a century before.

In 1933 the name of the Great North Road was changed to the New England Highway, and four years later, in 1937, the road up the Moonbis was altered again, this time even further to

Motor vehicle traffic endured the old Moonbi Road for some time before this new section up first and second Moonbi Hills was completed in 1937. It, too, was to be replaced 40 years later.

the north, and a lookout was formed at the top of the First Moonbi Hill. A notorious 'S' bend was eliminated by this new road, and the whole was surfaced with tar.[49] The fourth and final road up the Moonbis was begun in 1975 to provide a dual carriage way, initially on the First Moonbi Hill which was more notorious than its nearby cousin. Today, there is dual carriage way right to the top.

The engineers of these great road works, constructed over the course of almost a century and a half, confronted topographic problems and devised engineering solutions. Bridges are the most obvious remains of these early endeavours. At Bendemeer a bridge across the Macdonald River was an absolute necessity. Numerous stories of floods and drownings demanded action and pressure was brought to bear on government from the late 1850s. Eventually a bridge across the Macdonald River at Bendemeer was opened in May 1865 as part of the new Great North Road. This bridge lasted for thirty years when in 1895 it was condemned and closed, and all traffic had to revert to the old crossing place. A new bridge, built on the same foundations as the old 1865 structure, was completed in September 1905. That bridge stands today in Bendemeer although the New England Highway now bypasses the town.[50]

Apart from bridges more humble evidence such as culverts, drainage systems and other works attest earlier times and earlier efforts. On the Moonbi Hills, for instance, there was a notorious section of the 1872 road known as the Pinch. Here the original metalling was first laid, and consisted of small knapped

(handbroken) stonework on a foundation of larger stones. The Pinch was by-passed in 1937, however, stockmen and timber-getters continued to use the old road, thus keeping it clear of regrowth. Today one can still see the remains of a wooden culvert some pieces of stonework, a hand packed retaining wall and two logs placed to act as markers to confine and direct the traffic.[51]

Intimately associated with these old roads were the wayside inns. They invariably sprang up where road routes converged to cross a creek or river or to climb a mountain pass. Very early, inns had been established at Currabubula, Tamworth, Nemingha, Moore Creek, Moonbi and at Bendemeer. All these inns were significantly placed to pick up trade from converging traffic. But there were more inns along the way. Ideally they were spaced about an average day's journey apart. Most of these wayside inns have gone. North of Bendemeer, for instance, on Carlisle's Gully on the Rimbanda Run there once stood an inn conducted by William Stitt, the lessee of Rimbanda.[52] The site of that original inn today shows nothing to indicate its past. With the building of the new Great North Road in 1864 the inn was moved to a new roadside location. Here it traded until about 1920. Today, virtually all that remains of the old Carlisle's Gully Inn are the English trees, now overgrown, by the side of the New England Highway.

Inns that were located in villages and towns were more likely to survive. Currabubula boasts the first licensed hotel in the district. In 1838, John Davis rode across country to Port Stephens to get a publican's licence and shortly after opened his Freemason's Arms Hotel at

Currabubula. The hotel became the focal point of the village that developed around it. The hotel continued in the Davis Family for many decades. In 1910 the front part of the old hotel was demolished by Robert Davis and the present hotel, designated the 'Locomotive Hotel' was constructed. The back of the old hotel and its original outbuildings remained on the site until at least the 1930s. Thus the present Currabubula Hotel, known once more as the Davis Hotel is of considerable regional significance.[53]

Similarly at Moonbi cellar rooms and other remains of an early inn can be found. Nearby, the overgrown remains of the Tintinhull Inn dating from 1876, can be seen on the old Tamworth to Armidale Road.[54] This is probably one of the best examples of a vernacular wayside inn from the nineteenth century in the entire region. Another very fine

example, even older than the Tintinhull Inn, is the Australian Arms at Moore Creek on the road from Tamworth to Manilla. This inn seems to have been first licensed in 1876,[55] but the building itself could date from the 1840s.

At the top of the Moonbi Range at Bendemeer there was a cluster of hotels catering for the travelling public. By the 1860s there were five hotels in the village. One of these was the Macdonald Inn built by John Glover in 1864 as part of the boom accompanying the construction of the Great North Road. Glover remained the publican for eight years but then leased the hotel to a Lloyd Barlow who ran it until 1897. During that time a second storey was added to the building. The freehold was then sold to the O'Toole family who changed the name to the Federal Hotel. In 1927 Archie Hamilton, a son-in-law

The Federal Hotel, Bendemeer, in June 1924. For over sixty years a hotel stood on this site near where the bridge across the Macdonald River had been constructed for the Great North Road in the 1860s. This was a good example of the intimate connection between public houses and transport routes.

The Bendemmer Hotel, formerly the Federal Hotel in 1939 after its remodelling and extension in 1927. The beer garden for which the Bendemeer Hotel was famous can be seen on the river side.

of the O'Tooles built major extensions to the building. In 1946 the O'Toole family sold the freehold to Arthur James who established the first beer garden outside the Sydney Metropolitan area. Major internal renovations were carried out in the 1970s and the hotel, now known as the Hotel Bendemeer stands today, its fabric attesting a history going back to 1864.[56]

Roads and all their associated works are the obvious focus for a heritage study. However, another form of thoroughfare that converged on mountain passes and stretched across the plains were the Travelling Stock Routes (T. S. R) known colloquially as the 'long paddocks'. These were well established across New South Wales by the 1880s and were absolutely essential for the movement of livestock in the days before road or rail haulage. They promoted rural harmony by putting an end to the intense conflict that often developed between squatters and travelling stockmen over depasturing rights for stock moving to market. The Travelling Stock Routes were actually Crown Lands resumed permanently from a pastoral run. They snaked across the landscape from waterhole to waterhole, from pasture to pasture, and are occasionally in use even today in times of drought when stock have to be moved by a less costly means than road carriage.

The great revolution in transport in the nineteenth century was undoubtedly the advent of the railway. Steam technology came quickly to Australia, and less than 60 years after Oxley first saw the Peel Valley, steam locomotives were chugging across the plains to Tamworth. They were a symbol of remarkable development.

By the mid 1850s, immature colonies with limited political experience launched whole-heartedly into railway projects. Railway tracks cut across terrain as difficult as anywhere in the world, crossing vast expanses of Australian bush and linking remote rural settlements that had only been founded a few decades before.

There were many times when the dreams faltered. Breaching the ranges beyond Sydney seemed an insurmountable difficulty. Then the vastness of the interior seemed unbeatable. Nervous politicians in the mid-nineteenth century advocated light horse-drawn tramways to connect with main rail terminals. Others advanced the claims of narrower gauges for the inland slopes and plains to increase cost efficiency by linking to the standard gauge at terminus towns such as Bathurst, Goulburn and Murrurundi. But the grand project went ahead relentlessly, and was not adulterated by these cost cutting schemes. Three great standard gauge trunk lines crossed New South Wales – the grandly named Great Southern Line, the Great Western Line and the Great Northern Line. In the economic boom of the 1880s each of these lines was completed. The Murray River at Albury, the Queensland border at Wallangarra and the Darling River at Bourke were reached before the boom decade had run its course.
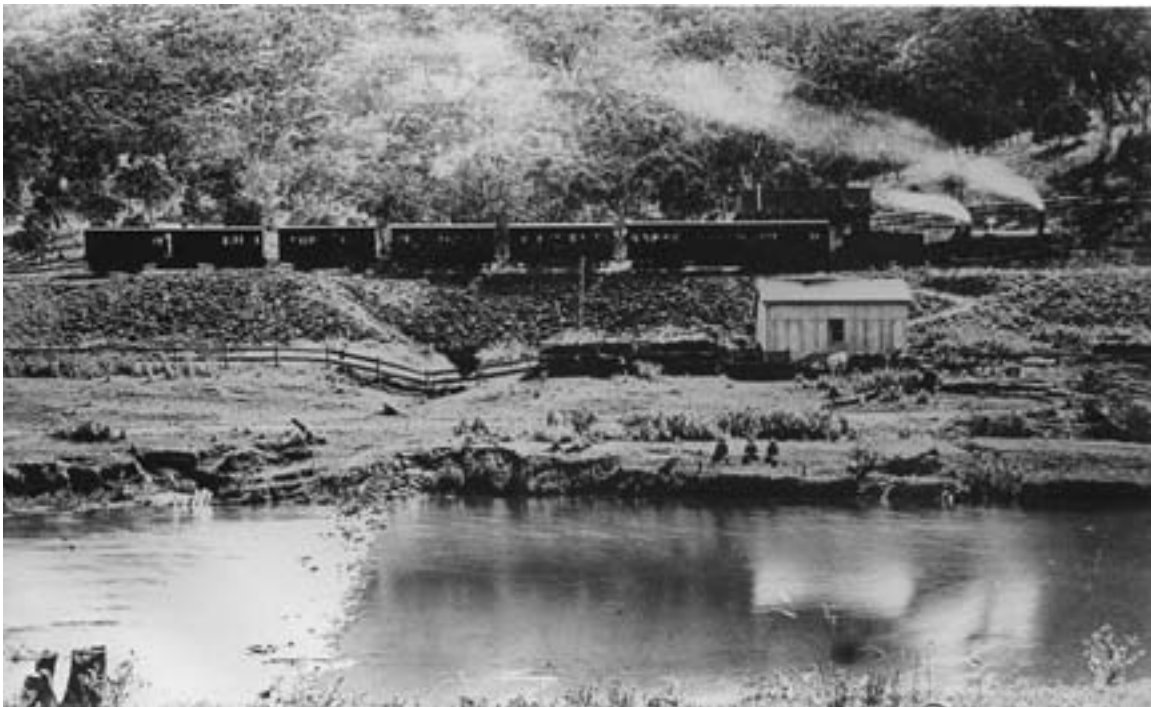
A train chugging up the Cockburn Valley to Limbri in 1886. Once the Moonbis were scaled the line pushed through quickly to Armidale and Glen Innes

The story of the railway line across Parry Shire began in the early 1870s when the construction of the Great Northern Line had stalled at the foot of the Liverpool Plains. It waited for a treasury with funds and politicians with will. From 1876 the line pressed on over the range and down onto the plains below. Quirindi was reached in 1876, Werries Creek was crossed in 1877. The main line headed up to Currabubula, through the Melville Hills, and across that trackless wilderness that Telfer had referred to only thirty years earlier, then on to Tamworth which was reached in February 1878. From there the line pressed on up the Cockburn River and a station at Moonbi was opened in January 1882 (this station was renamed Kootingal in 1914). The line went up the Cockburn Valley to Limbri and then climbed the range on a steep gradient.

Once on top of the range the line moved forward rather rapidly reaching Uralla late in 1882 and Armidale in February 1883. Eventually the line reached Tenterfield in 1886 and the Queensland border at Wallangarra in January 1888, its completion a very fitting centenary project. Until 1930 with the opening of a North Coast Railway Line through Grafton and Casino, the Great Northern Line was the only railway linking Sydney and Brisbane, and was truly a major part of a national route.

Parry Shire not only hosted a major rail trunk line. There was another significance to railway construction in the area. On the evening of 26 April 1877 the parliament in Sydney decided to build a branch line from the major trunk in the direction of Gunnedah. The

The view from the east of Werris Creek railway station and refreshment rooms shortly after completion in 1885

Werris Creek railway station and refreshment rooms from the west in 1885. As can be seen from this photograph, women were travelling more frequently because of the speed and safety of the railways.

branch was to start in an open paddock owned by John Single near Werries Creek, and thus the town of Werris Creek (slightly different spelling) had its beginning. It was the first railway town in New South Wales starting from a broad-acre site and developing exclusively to service the railways. It remained a railway town for the next century and a quarter with railway work being the overwhelming form of employment.

The branch line from Werris Creek was commenced late in 1877 and reached Gunnedah in September 1879. The original station at Werris Creek was about half a kilometre south of the present junction. However, with the opening of the line to Gunnedah and the splitting of the mail train from

Newcastle at Werris Creek, it was necessary to have a station nearer the actual branching of the line. The platform for the new station was finished by October 1879. From the new platform was to rise a magnificent station and refreshment room complex. It was to be a remarkable building that could easily grace a city, a monument to railway confidence and bureaucratic power, yet, incongruously, a lonely citadel in the middle of the bush.

Two contracts were let for the job, one for the Railway Refreshment Room and one for the station building. Tenders for the refreshment room were called in February 1884 and were initially awarded to Samuel Lambert & Sons of Tamworth, but after some delay in commencement of the work the

tender was awarded in late March to Messrs White & Coghill. By early May the brickmaker John Cannon of West Tamworth had sent a sample of bricks to Werris Creek where they had not only been approved by the government inspector but were admired for their quality, and Cannon was commissioned to burn two hundred thousand bricks for the job. By October 1884 the refreshment room was nearing completion and a five year lease had been awarded to a Mr. Quinn of Singleton who had already imported furniture and fixtures to Werris Creek for the new building. The refreshment room was opened for business on 19 November 1884 and in its first fortnight Mr. Quinn boasted sittings of from 40 to 50 people at dinner.[57]

The new building was an impressive structure in the Victorian Free Classical style. A lavish effect was achieved by contrasting rich red bricks in tuck-pointed Flemish bond with crisp stucco embellishments. The strongly decorated astylar facade facing the eastern platform, with its quoining, pronounced cornices with paired brackets, and moulded grouped windows was not unlike a city bank, at least until it was covered in its first of many layers of railway soot.

With the completion of the railway station next to the refreshment rooms in 1885, a town began to rise on the eastern side of the line. The importance of the railway complex at Werris Creek was gauged by the fact that the government established a major locomotive depot on the site, and erected a rather impressive gas plant on the western side of the line in 1888. The main gas works building still stands. In 1918 the whole station yard went over to electricity and not far from the old gas works stands a weatherboard building housing a rare 3 cylinder 2 stroke diesel engine, possibly fired with heavy oil, and manufactured by Ruston Hornsby of Lincoln U.K.

In 1925 the office of the District Superintendent of Railways was moved from Murrurundi to Werris Creek and a second story was added to the original station building to accommodate the new staff. Werris Creek remained an important rail junction until the advent of diesel electric engines replacing steam engines in the 1960s. Together with the decline in rail travel and rail freight, and the economic rationalising of the 1980s and 1990s, the town of Werris Creek lost much of its importance as a railway hub. But nonetheless its railway significance is its heritage, and indeed an important part of the heritage of Parry Shire.
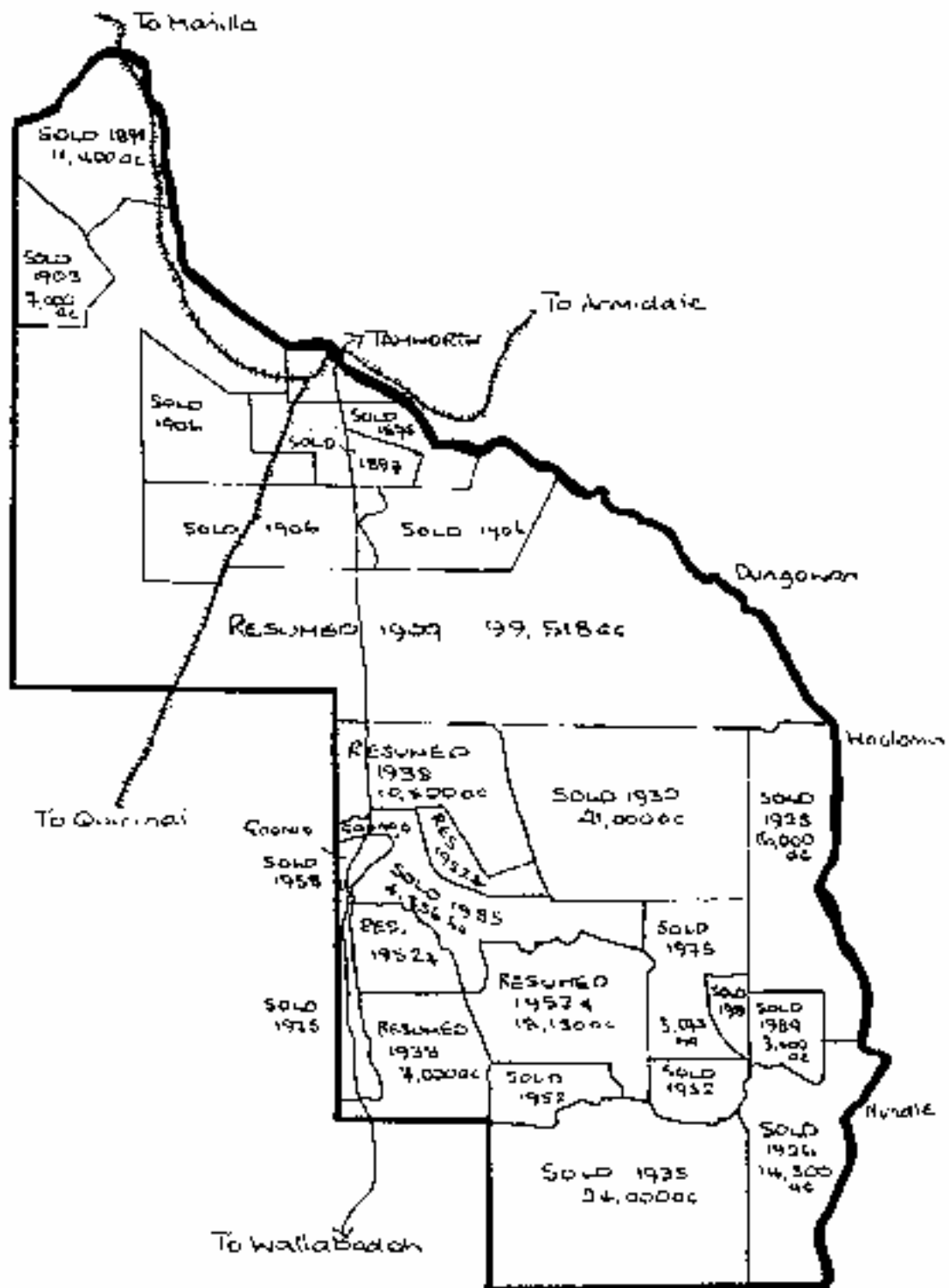
The subdivision of the Goonoo Goonoo estate between 1898 and 1985. The bulk of the land in the vicinity of Tamworth was sold between 1906 and 1909 under threat of forced resumption.

Major Theme 4

AGRICULTURE

For some parts of New South Wales, most especially the Riverina, the coming of the railways signalled a rapid change from pastoralism to agriculture. Within a decade the lands surrounding towns like Wagga Wagga, Albury, Junee and Cootamundra were given over to wheat and other crops. These towns grew rapidly in size as a result. But this was not the case in the north. The railways did not see any major shift away from pastoralism. This was particularly so in the Peel River Valley where ideal agricultural land remained resolutely pastoral. It is not hard to find a reason. One hundred and twenty one thousand hectares, including some of the most arable land in the valley, was held under freehold title by the Peel River Land and Mineral Company, and the neighbouring sheep stations were held firmly by families with capital to invest and no incentive to move out of wool.

Ultimately Tamworth was to become the heart of a rich agricultural region with much of the Peel Valley and large areas of the Liverpool Plains given over to a great variety of crops. But that was a twentieth century phenomenon. The fact that dramatic change did occur in land use in the valley is indicative of a struggle that was, in the final instance, highly political. The Peel Valley in the first decades of the twentieth century was the centre of a major political battle between rural conservatives and rural radicals over who should own the land. In fact the Peel Valley was the key battle ground in a state-wide campaign. Therefore this aspect of Parry Shire's history is of state significance.

Throughout the middle decades of the nineteenth century large pastoral estates became a target for political radicalism. Many people, especially those of Irish descent, despised the notion of large estates especially those with absentee owners. They remembered too well what the system of landlordism and absenteeism had meant in Ireland. After the initial gold rushes of the early 1850s, a political campaign was mounted to 'unlock the lands' in the interior of the colony. Two hundred families, it was said, dominated the entire colony with their vast pastoral runs held only on lease from the crown. Unlocking the land meant throwing these vast runs open to small farmers.

In 1861 the Robertson Land Acts were passed in New South Wales. The express purpose of these acts was to open the pastoral runs to selection by bona fide small farmers. It was idealistic legislation, and quite naïve. Its drafting was too simple, and there was too much compromise as it passed through the two houses of parliament. But the passage of

these acts set up a popular expectation that small farmers would displace large pastoralists, at least in the most fertile parts of the colony. There was a romantic vision of the interior of New South Wales dotted with small farms, cosy farm cottages and the smoke from thousands of chimneys drifting across a landscape tamed at last for civilised farming. It ignored the reality that Australian climate and soils could not support such a dream. It ignored the reality that Australia was already one of the most urbanised countries in the world with wealth increasingly concentrated in large port cities. It ignored the reality that wool was the mainstay of the colony's economy. But the image persisted and the dream was cherished.

The Robertson Land Acts allowed any person to go onto Crown Land and select up to 320 acres (130 hectares) to form a small farm. Crown Lands included, after 1866, the squatting lands held on fourteen year leases that dated from 1852. The small farmer, or free selector as he was known, had then to register his claim, pay a 25% deposit based on a price of £1 per acre, and then live on his land. Over the course of the next three years he had to effect improvements to his farm in the form of fencing, buildings and cultivation to the value of a further £1 per acre, and prove to the satisfaction of an inspector that the farm was his permanent residence. Thereafter, if the free selector paid the remaining 75% of the purchase price of the land he would be issued with freehold title.

The major flaw with the scheme was that pastoralists, at the very time when their flocks and herds were

The more primitive type of bush hut erected to comply with the residence provisions of the Robertson Lands Acts. It was the same type of vernacular as seen on the early squatting runs of the 1840s. This particular hut was on Bright's selection on Nulla Creek.

A more substantial free selector's homestead but nonetheless built in a vernacular tradition with vertical slabs and shingled roof. This particular selection was in the Dungowan Valley, and the photograph was taken in the early years of the twentieth century.

realising comfortable profits, could also secure lands under the Robertson Land Acts. Many of them had the money to do so, and felt that gaining freehold title to the best parts of their pastoral runs was a good investment. All sorts of devious means were used by squatters to fulfill the residence and improvement requirements of the acts, but they usually got away with it since the legislation was very hard to police, and it was very hard to effect a prosecution. It was not only the squatters who were cheating to get around the legislation for their own benefit. Many of the small farmers whom the law was supposed to benefit were doing the same. The maximum 320 acres (130 hectares) was often not big enough to allow them to operate profitably so they, too, sought out the

loopholes in the law to increase the size of their farms. Basically the Robertson Land Acts were well intentioned but became an administrative mess.[58] They certainly led to conflict between squatters and selectors that became a celebrated feature of nineteenth century rural culture. Poetry, songs and short stories were written about the antagonism between squatter and selector, and a seemingly endless debate was carried on in the newspapers.

The timing of the Robertson Land Acts was also unfortunate. They were introduced in 1861 when transport was still slow and costly. Bullock teams from the inland could take weeks in fair weather and months in foul to reach city markets. Thus potential crop farmers

were hindered in their aspirations by poor transport. All perishable produce, such as eggs, milk, butter, vegetables and most fruits had to be grown reasonably close to metropolitan markets. In most areas even wheat could only be grown for regional markets because freight costs to the cities were prohibitive.

The coming of the railways, of course, altered the equation. Perishables could now be grown in the inland and reach a city market in a day. Cheap freight rates meant that wheat could be grown not only for a city market but for export. The Riverina capitalised on the new opportunities from the time the railways appeared in the late 1870s, but not the northern districts, and certainly not the potentially rich agricultural areas of the Peel Valley and the Liverpool Plains. In the Tamworth district, for instance, in 1876, after fourteen years of operation of the Robertson Land Acts, there were only 576 free selections with 52,374 hectares under cultivation,

mostly given over to wheat. Most of this agricultural activity occurred around Nemingha and the Dungowan Valley. On the other hand 124 pastoralists or their family members or employees had secured over two hundred thousand hectares under the Robertson Land Acts and of this area only a little more than 400 hectares was cultivated, the rest held solely as pasture.[59] In 1882 the *Tamworth Observer* declared that 'after twenty one years experience of the most utter and ignominious failure' of free selection, there had never been 'so much turmoil over the land question as there is now'.[60]

The following year, the Robertson Land Acts, repeatedly debated in parliament and the press, were the subject of a full commission of enquiry. The so called Morris Ranken enquiry collected evidence from all over New South Wales, and delivered a report damning the legislation and its effects on the colony. They pointed to a few areas where the legislation had achieved some

The arrival of the first train in west Tamworth in 1878. The coming of the railway gave a great impetus to crop farming in the district.

limited successes, such as the Armidale, Glen Innes, Tenterfield districts or the far south coast. But across the inland slopes and plains the legislation was seen as not only ineffective, but productive of the opposite outcome from the one intended. More land on much more secure title had fallen into the hands of pastoralists.

In substantiating their claims, the commissioners, Morris and Ranken, provided examples from all over the colony. One particularly pointed example of how the Robertson Land Acts had failed came from the Tamworth district. The commissioners referred in their report to one run where originally there had been 112 selectors laying claim to over 12,150 hectares. But of those 112 free selectors, only four remained, the rest having sold out to the local squatter who had purchased some lands himself in his own name and held other large areas under lease. The property was not named but the report contained a detailed map and it was obvious to most people in the Tamworth district that the property was Attunga held by Alexander Rodgers who had bought it from the Burdekin family.

Rodgers defended himself in the *Tamworth Observer,* claiming that the report was entirely false and providing counter evidence. The editor of the *Observer* supported him and maintained that the Morris Ranken report was full of inaccuracies and therefore worthless. Morris and Ranken for their part decided to defend themselves in the rival newspaper, the *Tamworth News.* For the best part of a year an acrimonious debate raged in the Tamworth newspapers. Eventually the local District Surveyor, Arthur Dewhurst put the matter to rest

by pointing out that Morris and Ranken had got their information from him, and although they had made some errors in their report, the picture they painted was generally correct.[61]

The Robertson Land Acts were repealed in 1884 to be replaced by a new Crown Land Act that continued the idea of free selection, but gave added advantages to the pastoralists. There was nothing radical in the new legislation that would force a significant change from pastoralism to agriculture in the inland of New South Wales. In the Tamworth district land settlement stagnated and this was reflected in the slow growth of the municipality itself from 4,096 people in 1881 to 4,602 people in 1891.[62] If Tamworth were to grow, the lands of the Peel Valley would have to be turned to agricultural uses.

From time to time radicals in parliament and in the press suggested that the 121,500 hectares held by the Peel River Land and Mineral Company should be confiscated. The company was an ideal target for populist attacks. It was owned by British shareholders, none of whom came anywhere near the property. The image of the absentee landlord could be easily evoked. Although radical demands for confiscation were usually howled down, there was still considerable pressure on governments to put more people on the land and to develop family based agricultural farming. As the new century dawned and federation of the Australian colonies was achieved these pressures increased. In 1904 the New South Wales government introduced quite extraordinary legislation giving it power to compulsorily resume private land if the value of that land, without

improvements, exceeded £20,000. Thus the big estates were targetted. The Closer Settlement Act of 1904 was a spur for the formation of Closer Settlement Leagues in country areas and one such league was formed in Tamworth in 1905 presided over by the mayor of the city himself. The focus of attention, of course, was always the Goonoo Goonoo Estate, but other properties such as Attunga came under scrutiny.

In 1905 the conservative Carruthers government approached the Peel River Land and Mineral Company to acquire the estate under mutually convenient terms. The pressure was on. The company immediately decided to put up 2,835 hectares, known as the Tangaratta Subdivision for sale, and the following year put another 4,050 hectares on the market. Much to the consternation of the company the government reacted unfavourably and demanded that 12,150 hectares be put up for sale. The company acquiesced and in 1906 the Peel, Oxley and Philip subdivisions came on the market. The sales were phenomenally successful indicating the pent-up demand for agricultural land. It was also pointed out that the prices achieved by the sale were high and that only well cashed buyers would succeed. The small man was not going to get much of a 'look-in'.

These actions only brought the company the briefest respite. Almost as soon as the sales were over the Tamworth Closer Settlement League passed a resolution calling for the resumption of the whole Goonoo Goonoo estate. The government approached the company shortly after and asked it to name a price for the

The throwing open of the A. A. Company's lands to crop farmers quickly produced impressive levels of farming on a small to medium scale, as here with Britten's farm photographed during the wheat harvest.

whole estate. Negotiations broke down after a few months and the company decided to dig its heels in and call the government's bluff. The existing legislation only allowed governments to resume entire estates. Would the government therefore compulsorily resume the whole Goonoo Goonoo estate, much of which would not have made good agricultural land? The company calculated that the government would not. However, Carruthers' successor, C. G. Wade, amended the act giving the government power to resume only part of the estate, and in 1908 served notice on the company of its intention to resume 40,500 hectares in the immediate vicinity of Tamworth.

After further negotiations and dispute the land was subdivided into 234 farms and the sales went ahead in 1909 and all blocks were snapped up in a very short space of time. These sales changed the nature of land use in the Peel Valley dramatically and were the impetus for the rapid growth of Tamworth in the next decade.[63] The forced sales on the Peel River Land and Mineral Company's estates at Tamworth were the biggest of such sales in New South Wales. Thus these events not only have very significant regional impact but state and national significance as well.

This interesting decade (1904 – 1914) of radical solutions to persistent problems has left markers in the physical environment. In Parry Shire that vast tract of land released from company control in 1909 is still given over largely to crop farming. Throughout this area south and west of Tamworth one might expect to find any number of farm houses with those distinctive federation architectural features – bull nosed verandahs; 'L' shaped plans with a front room protruding; small panes of coloured glass as highlights in windows; wide chamfered weatherboards; art nouveau valences and brackets on verandahs; window hoods, and small gablets for roof ventilation. Outbuildings and other structures could well date from this period of agricultural foundations. Along the Dungowan Valley and around Nemingha one might expect to see housing stock, out-buildings and structures from an earlier period, for if the mid nineteenth century Robertson Land Acts had any impact, it was here. The physical environment will reflect the vagaries of agricultural farming in the Peel Valley, and the remains of earlier times will often hint at a story of profound national significance.

The Peel Valley lands released for agriculture after 1907 were largely given over to wheat. However, tobacco was a significant crop, and in the severe drought of 1919 when only 326 millimetres of rain were recorded between October 1918 and September 1919, tobacco was the only crop to do well.[64] In the 1920s, wheat still predominated but tobacco remained a good dry season crop. As well maize, barley, oats and lucerne were grown in significant quantities and honey and bacon made an appearance in the district.[65]

The egg industry had its beginning in the inter-war period. At first poultry was a supplementary crop on more traditional wool beef and wheat farms. However, the industry became much more important in its own right with the establishment of the Egg Marketing Board in 1940. Chicken meat farming became profitable and more and

more poultry farmers emerged, especially in the Moonbi Kootingal area. Baiada Poultry was one well-known company to emerge in the 1950s and for most of its life had a strong presence in Parry Shire.[66] The early mode of production was open range, but this gave way to the caged system of farming in the 1960s. In 1958 a poultry abattoir known as the Kootingal Freezing Works was established to provide 'Dixie' brand frozen chickens to the market. The next twenty years was the peak period of production, but by the 1980s the industry was contracting, and in 1982 the Freezing Works closed its doors and went into receivership.[67]

Major Theme 5

TOWNSHIPS

Including such related themes as commerce, mining, transport, communication, education, law and order, social institutions, sport, religion, death, and housing

Because of the geography of Parry Shire, together with the fact that it was crossed by major road and rail routes, quite a number of small towns and villages had emerged by the beginning of the twentieth century. These small communities include Werris Creek, and Kootingal, the largest towns in the Shire, together with Currabubula, Duri, Somerton, Attunga, Moore Creek, Nemingha, Moonbi Dungowan, Limbri, Weabonga, Niangala, Woolbrook, Bendemeer, and Watson's Creek. As well, there are many small rural communities in the Shire such as Timbumburi Pialamore, Ogunbil and Tintinhull. The existence of such communities is not, in itself, a feature of national significance, but the number of such small communities and their diverse history and nature makes Parry Shire different from most other New South Wales shires.

Historically these communities can be grouped according to origin. Some places are clearly associated with the Great North Road from its earliest days as an unformed track to the highlands. Currabubula, Nemingha, Moonbi, and Bendemeer fall into this category. The origins of Werris Creek, Attunga, Duri, Kootingal and Limbri were clearly dependent on the Great Northern Railway Line. Some villages began near the headstations of squatting runs, such as Moore Creek. Niangala and Weabonga were initially associated with nineteenth century gold mining, and villages like Dungowan grew as service centres for rich agricultural lands nearby. Somerton stands alone as being a very old settlement, chosen by Commissioner Mayne as the headquarters for the vast Liverpool Plains Pastoral District in 1840.[68] In the centre of the Shire, under separate local government administration is Tamworth, an economically strong regional city that saw its most spectacular growth in the first quarter and the third quarter of the twentieth century.

Commerce:

The first beat of life for many of these small communities was usually commercial. Mention has already been made of the wayside inns that were spaced along the Great North Road. Around some strategic points a village grew in association with the inn. This same process occurred on lesser roads. Attunga developed not far from the pastoral headstation at a point where the road between Tamworth and Manilla crossed Attunga Creek. Somerton was firstly an administrative centre, but was relocated on the road that followed the Namoi River to Gunnedah, Narrabri and beyond. Dungowan grew on the road up the Dungowan Valley that eventually

Above: The Dungowan Hotel in 1940 showing the original premises to the left and an extension built about 1910 to the right. Below: The same hotel in 1949 after modernist renovations to the front.

headed to the goldfields in the mountains. These towns, too, had prominently located hotels. The Dungowan Hotel was constructed in 1878, and was extended and altered many times over the years. However, parts of the existing fabric of the building date from the earliest construction.[69] The Australian Arms hotel at Moore Creek is another very significant early hotel, and one of the oldest intact buildings in the Shire. Only a short distance away, Attunga had its hotel entirely rebuilt in 1955 after the old hotel burnt down, and the new building was a rather unusual round turret-like structure.[70]

All these villages, but especially those on lesser transport routes, depended for much of their economic well-being on surrounding farmlands.

Stores grew up largely to provide for locals. A traveller for the *Town and Country Journal* described Bendemeer in 1879 as having two stores, two hotels a handful of houses and an impressive bridge across the river.[71] One of those stores, built by John Glover in 1872, still stands, one the oldest, largely intact, commercial buildings in the villages of the Shire. If a village grew to any size it might eventually boast a butcher a baker and a blacksmith, and remains of these erstwhile enterprises may still be evident in villages like Dungowan and Attunga.

Mining:

Mining in the Shire was rather small scale. There were no great rushes although there had been some rather impressive finds at Hanging Rock and Bowling Alley Point, just outside the present Shire boundaries in the 1850s. In 1872, however, tin was discovered at remote Watson's Creek on Longford Pastoral Run.[72] In 1890, gold was discovered at Bungadore (later named Niangala) and Top Station (later Weabonga) both outstations of the Swamp Oak Creek Run.[73] These were typical small mining towns that experienced an initial rush followed by many years as a village where intermittent prospecting still occurred, but where other industries such as timber getting kept the community going. These small mining communities could well have remnants of mine workings and associated operations, and this would certainly be the case with Niangala and Watson's Creek.

Mention should also be made of an ephemeral copper mine near Dungowan. The owner of a copper bearing block of land, a Mr. Fisher,

Niangala about 1920. The best days of mining were in the past but the cattle industry was still a stable economic base for the local community

began mining the mineral in 1899. During the next twelve months he was able to send some good quality ore to the English & Australian Copper company's smelter at Newcastle, but in 1900 mining on Mr. Fisher's property ceased. In 1968 the mine was reopened by Janko Krco, and during the peak year of 1972 he was able to send 150 tons of copper ore to Port Kembla, but this latter day venture ceased, too, in 1974.

Another important extractive industry was the Sulcor Limestone Quarry near Attunga. The arrival of the railway from Tamworth to Manilla and beyond was the first necessary step for the limestone quarry to be realised. But it was not until the 1920s that the Sulphide Corporation of Newcastle decided to invest in infrastructure on the site. Production began late in 1924 and over the next decade a million tonnes of material had been removed. Quarrying was by open cut process using conventional pneumatic drill technology. The main power source was electricity drawn from Tamworth.[74] Much evidence of this historical industrial activity can be seen in the area today.

Transport (Railway Towns and Railway Centres):

Parry Shire contains one undeniable railway town, Werris Creek, and a number of small railway centres. These latter grew in size as a result of the coming of the railways and were the focus for the receipt and despatch of freight rather than passengers. Kootingal is an example of a railway centre. The Great Northern Railway Line was not going to follow the route of

the Great North Road up first and second Moonbi Hills but would divert up the Cockburn River, ultimately climbing the range above Limbri. There was a need for a railway station at the foot of the range which was accessible to the farmers in the district. Thus, from 1882 a town grew up around the railway station not far from Moonbi. In fact, the station was originally called Moonbi, the name being changed to Kootingal in 1914.[75] Similarly, Attunga grew after the arrival of the railway in 1899. Within a decade and a half it had a full range of commercial enterprises, educational, religious and recreational facilities like most other reasonably sized villages.[76] At Limbri, a local pastoralist built a stock loading ramp by the railway line in 1885, and the Railways Department elevated the importance of the site by constructing a siding. At this siding in 1892, a village was laid out which came to be known as Limbri.[77] Duri was a little different in that the school came first and a small village grew around it. The reason for the school's establishment was a change in train timetable which prevented local children from getting to the school at Currabubula so the parents petitioned successfully in 1887 for their own school.[78] In that sense Duri, too, was a creation of the railways.

But the quintessential railway town was Werris Creek. Railway towns like Werris Creek were economically dependent on the railways with up to 60 per cent of the local work force directly employed by the Railways Department. Historically, the true railway towns had not existed until the coming of the railway line, and more importantly the railway junction. There were few such towns which fitted this profile, but in New South Wales, Junee, Harden and Werris Creek were undoubtedly railway towns.

Railway towns were highly susceptible to changes in railway technology and policy. This was particularly so if there was no other major employer in the district. One crude measure of the dependency of railway towns is the census statistics. The figures for Werris Creek for every census in New South Wales since 1891 are shown below.

WERRIS CREEK POPULATION

YEAR				
1891	1901	1911	1921	1933
POPULATION				
329	503	1083	1540	2247

YEAR				
1947	1954	1961	1966	1971
POPULATION				
2348	2409	2299	2123	2034

YEAR				
1976	1981	1986	1991	1996
POPULATION				
1999	1924	1819	1566	1484

These simple statistics reflect the fortunes of Werris Creek since the end of the nineteenth century. Initially the town supported only a small population. But it doubled in the first decade of the twentieth century with the location of a locomotive sub depot at the junction, and an increase in through traffic, especially passenger traffic, following the opening of a number of important

A busy scene at Werris Creek Railway Station in 1983. But already diesel engines had replaced steam and consequently the locomotive depot had a reduced workforce. The next decade would see a major cost-cutting rationalisation of the state's railways which would have a considerable impact on Werris Creek.

branch lines in the north west at that time. The relocation of the main northern depot of the Mechanical Branch from Murrurundi to Werris Creek is reflected in the substantial rise in population in the decade of the First World War. In the 1920s, Werris Creek again experienced a substantial increase in population following the opening of the third line into the junction from Binnaway in 1923, and the relocation of the Traffic Superintendent's Office from Murrurundi in 1926.

For the next thirty years the town enjoyed a stable population which reached its peak in the 1950s, but from the end of that decade, the population began to decline. In the 1960s the decline could be basically attributable to the replacement of steam locomotives by

diesel electric engines. That process was effectively completed by April 1972. The town continued to lose population steadily in the 1970s, but the contraction in the 1980s was sharp, particularly in the last five years of that decade, a contraction felt most keenly in the younger age groups.[79]

Werris Creek's special place as a railway town had some resonance in the built environment. The town was provided with a Railway Institute for the education of the adult population. But the Railway Institute building in Werris Creek is quite extraordinary. The Department of Railways simply and suddenly ran out of money and will for the completion of the project, and the existing building clearly reflects this.

Communication:

Absolutely essential to the smooth economic and administrative functioning of a district was an efficient and reliable mail service. Equally important, at the personal level, the writing and receiving of letters was central to community and familial well-being. Letters were the only means of alleviating the despair that often accompanied remote living. In most town histories the author usually highlights the establishment of a post office and postal communications as the first government service to be provided.

The town of Werris Creek for instance was established in 1877 when the building of a branch line to Gunnedah was commenced. In that very same year the residents of the tent town petitioned the government for a post office, citing the inconvenience of travelling to the nearest post office at Quipolly. The residents even put forward a solution. They wrote in their petition:

> Your petitioners believe that some one of our Storekeepers, residing here, would be glad to take charge of postal matters if entrusted to him.[80]

As it turned out, this was not to be the solution for Werris Creek and the town had a long battle to get what it ultimately wanted – a purpose built post office.

But the general store cum post office was a typical solution to the need for postal services in a small town or village. Somerton's post office, for example, was invariably associated with the general store from its beginning in 1896,[81] as was Limbri's from 1916.[82] Similarly, in Kootingal, when the post office was removed from the railway station it was re-established in 1913 in Langston's general store where it was to remain for the next 40 years.[83] A feature of many small villages in Parry Shire is the clear evidence of the post office attached to or immediately adjacent to a general store.

Another significant aspect of the arrival of a postal service was the changing of the name of a town or village. The original village near the Swamp Oak Creek headstation, for instance, had been gazetted as Buri, but this would have caused obvious mail confusion with Duri. So the name of Buri was changed to Limbri. For the same reason, the name of Bungadore, which would obviously be confused with Bungendore in southern New South Wales, was changed to Niangala in 1890.[84]

Education:

It was a sign of the thinking of people in the late nineteenth century that schools became so important to all these small communities. In the case of Duri the school was the reason for the emergence of a village. Other small communities fought hard to get schools from the 1870s, and once obtained, the schools were cherished. They added significantly to community cohesion and a sense of identity. Many social events centred on the school. The school teacher was often expected to take a major leadership role in the community.

There was a very large number of schools in Parry Shire reflecting the extent of small farming in the valley and small scale mining in the hills. But most of these schools were ephemeral, closing

when a particular family left the district or when the children of a large family had all passed through the school. For instance, just in the Attunga area alone there were once such schools as Attunga Springs, Bona Vista, Midway, Garthowen and Sulcor. All are long since gone.[85] The following list of the small schools in Parry Shire comprises only the more enduring ones.

Attunga: provisional school April 1868 to December 1871, public school from June 1881.

Bective: provisional school from July 1893 to April 1895; public school from April 1895 to September 1957

Bendemeer: public school from December 1860.

Currabubula: public school from September 1882.

Dungowan: provisional school from June 1876 to September 1880; public school from September 1880

Duri: provisional school from April 1887 to June 1894, public school from July 1894.

Goonoo Goonoo: provisional school from July 1869 to December 1871; provisional school again from January 1876 to 1881; public school from 1881 to July 1915; provisional school from September 1930 to November 1957; public school from November 1957 to May 1966.

Kootingal: provisional school from June 1870 to March 1878; public school from April 1878.

Limbri: provisional school from January 1900 to March 1900, public school from April 1900 to August 1905; half time school from February 1908 to 1910; provisional school from 1910 to December 1915; public school from January 1916 to December 1934; provisional school from September 1939 to August 1949; public school from September 1949.

Moonbi: Public school from May 1882

Nemingha: public school from May 1877 to May 1878; public school from May 1878.

Niangala: public school from November 1891

Somerton: public school from February 1860 to December 1886; provisional school from November 1889 to December 1890; public school from January 1891.

Timbumburi: provisional school from February 1911 to December 1916; public school from January 1917.

Tintinhull: public school from August 1882

Watson's Creek: provisional school August 1886 to January 1887; provisional school again from March 1900 to March 1907;

public school from April 1907 to February 1987

Weabonga: Originally called Rywung public school from January 1892 until December 1968.

Werris Creek: public school from December 1883 to December 1943; central school from January 1944 to December 1970; public school from January 1971.

Most of these small schools started as provisional schools. This meant that the local community had to supply the grounds and the building for the school, and the Department of Public Instruction would supply the teacher. In due course, if school numbers stabilised and the community seemed to have a future, the provisional school would be upgraded to a full public school with all educational requirements supplied by the government. Half time schools existed where not even provisional schools were possible. In scattered communities, there might be two small school buildings, erected by the community, and the teacher would visit one for three days a week and the other for two days. Half time schools in other words were always paired. In some places such as Watson's Creek, there were even house to house schools for a teacher who would follow an itinerary covering a wide area, visiting children in their homes. Thus Parry Shire reflects, in its educational history, all those strenuous efforts and diverse means by which Australian governments brought education to children no matter where they lived.

Although there were large injections of money into the educational system in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, especially for capital works, very early school buildings were often retained in use. At Attunga, for instance, there is a brick classroom dating from 1881 and an attached weatherboard room dating from 1910.[86] Currabubula, too, retains its original brick classroom from 1881 (the school was not actually opened until September 1882 so the date on the building clearly reflects when the plans were drawn up).[87] In areas where schools have closed such as Weabonga, the old school with its distinctive departmental architecture can still be seen.

Law and Order:

A significant struggle in the history of small communities was the ceaseless attempts to gain and retain government services. Education, of course, was important, as were postal facilities. But the provision of police and perhaps minor court facilities was also of crucial importance to small communities. Communities saw their needs as great, governments saw those needs as statistical. Services were most likely based on crude population figures, but sometimes political pressure could carry a battle.

The earliest form of policing was provided at Somerton when, in 1839, Commissioner Mayne was provided with a small contingent of border police to help him maintain order over his vast north western district. A regular police presence was established in Tamworth in the 1840s, and the Australian Agricultural Company built the first

lock-up in the district on company land in its west Tamworth village in 1842.[88]

Tamworth was to remain the police headquarters not only for the immediate district, but, after 1862, for the entire north west region. However, with the growth of population in the rural areas surrounding Tamworth, village police stations began to appear, usually under the control of a senior constable. Most such establishments were set up in the late 1870s and early 1880s. Both Somerton and Currabubula had a police presence from 1879, Kootingal from 1882, and Attunga about the same time. Swamp Oak, later known as Weabonga had a police station from 1891.

The major police presence in the district was, however, at Werris Creek. The town had a police station from 1884, and by 1898 the station had become a two-man station. In 1910 the station was further up-graded and a sergeant appointed. A court house and sergeant's residence were erected in 1910 – 1911.

Police station architecture is rather interesting. Whether the station be in a metropolitan area, or in a major provincial city, or in a small town or village, police buildings, at least until World War II, tended to look like ordinary houses. It is not known why police stations did not adopt a more recognisable institutional form of architecture as other public buildings did. There was no mistaking the local school or court house or hospital, but the police station was usually quite domestic in appearance. In larger centres the lock-ups were usually incorporated into the main station building, at its rear, but in smaller centres, portable wooden lock-ups often sufficed. If older police

stations were superceded, or if a police station shut down altogether, it was not difficult to sell the building as a house, and this was the fate of most of the small town police stations in the district.

Social Institutions:

The local Progress Committee or Progress Association was an important feature of most small communities. They focused community attention on worthwhile projects and they were often adept at putting pressure on local and state governments. It was often the Progress Association that built the case for the extra teacher, for the connection to electricity or for the granting of lands for recreational facilities. The Progress Association was often the organisation to make grant applications. Most communities saw the need for a public hall as a major focal point of community activity from the political through to the recreational. Balls and more informal dances were held in the community halls, as were fetes and bazaars and in the 1920s and 1930s travelling picture show men would bring silent movies to the remotest rural villages. In Currabubula, movies from the Tamworth Picture Theatre came once every three weeks.[89]

The period during and just after the First World War saw many community halls built. At Weabonga a fund raising campaign took place during the war, and by 1916 the community had a hall.[90] The other period for such building was just after the Second World War. At Currabubula local committees had sufficient funds on hand to erect a brick front to the existing hall as a memorial to those from the district who

The people of Currabubula were able to secure a war memorial loan to build a front to their community hall in the1950s. The style has some very definite art deco features including the lettering above the entrance.

had served in both world wars.[91] The façade was completed in 1955, interestingly in an art deco style with art deco lettering, a style that had been in fashion before the war. Communities without sufficient funds on hand could apply for a government grant to build a hall or make additions, provided they designated their hall a 'war memorial' hall and maintained an honour board for the fallen. This offer was available long after the war was over. For instance, as late as 1967, a public meeting at Niangala requested that Cockburn Shire release war memorial trust funds for the construction of a brick foyer as an addition to the existing hall, the foyer to include the obligatory honour roll.[92]

Sport:

Australians have always been keen on sport due in very large part to a prevailing fine dry climate, an abundance of open space, and the fact that the continent was colonised by the British, whose sense of team sport in particular was very well refined in the nineteenth century.

In small communities sport was an integral part of social life. It may surprise many people to know that usually the first organised sport in any district was horse racing. This was because horse riding prowess was an important skill for rural workers, and horse breeding and ownership was important for many wealthy landed families in the nineteenth century. As well, horse racing lent itself easily to gambling.

As early as the 1840s a racecourse had been established on the Australian Agricultural Company's estate opposite the government town of Tamworth.[93] Race days were a major event on the social calendar for those communities that could organise them. Currabubula was well noted for its race meetings in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, and up in the mountains, Weabonga was staging horse races from 1893.

By the late nineteenth century organised team sports were becoming popular, particularly cricket and football. Improved transportation made inter community competition possible. As a major social sport, nothing could beat tennis and most small communities and many rural properties boasted their tennis courts especially in the early twentieth century.

Often not much remains of these important cultural sites. Sheds and grandstands and fences were often rudimentary. But a lack of physical remains does not gainsay the importance of sport in small rural communities.

Religion:

Another major organisation struggling to get established in most of these small communities was the churches. The Church of England and the Roman Catholic denominations felt under particular obligation to reach isolated communities. Their parish system usually allowed a minister or

The oldest church in the district, the Presbyterian Church at Bendemeer, completed in 1865.

priest to make monthly visits to isolated rural communities for the celebration of mass or for a family service. Small community churches were attached to parishes such as Walcha or Tamworth. In some agricultural communities, the churches could be built in brick in picturesque Gothic style, thereby becoming one of the main symbols of settled comfortable rural ideology in a very English setting. In less prosperous communities, weatherboard churches in a 'Carpenter Gothic' style were the most common visual expression of faith. However, as the twentieth century advanced, better communications and declining village populations meant that some churches were sold off. These often became private residences, and can be seen in various parts of the Shire. At Werris Creek, the first Roman Catholic Church dating from 1884 is now a private residence making it the oldest building north of the creek.

Other churches were simply moved to address changing needs. At Limbri, St Barnabas Church of England was built in 1906, but was removed to Moonbi in the 1930s where it is still used as a house of worship.[94]

Some of the many churches in the Shire are listed below with their dates of construction:

Attunga

St Patricks Roman Catholic   June 1904

Christ Church (Church of England) 1913

Bendemeer

Presbyterian Church   June 1865

Roman Catholic Church   May 1968

St Stephens Ch. of England   July 1923

Currabubula

Union (Protestant Church)   July 1883

St Michaels Roman Catholic Oct. 1907

St Matthews Ch. of England   Sept 1900

Kootingal

St Marie Therese Roman Catholic 1931

St Lukes Uniting   April 1937
(formerly Presbyterian)

St Andrews Ch. of England March 1898

Niangala

Church of the Sacred   Dec. 1964
Advent (Anglican)

Weabonga

St George Ch. of England   Nov. 1912

Our Lady of Perpetual   Nov. 1929
Succour (Roman
Catholic)

Werris Creek

St Bedes Ch. of England   May 1884
New church opened   June 1932
(old church used as a
supper room off the
parish hall that was
built in 1939)

Roman Catholic   c. 1884
Church (now a
residence)

St Thomas Roman Catholic	May 1914
St Thomas More Roman Catholic War Memorial Church	Aug. 1971
St Andrews Pres. Church	Feb. 1915
Werris Creek Methodist Church	Sept. 1902

Death:

Two major locations in each of these small communities commemorated the dead. The local cemetery, usually dedicated not long after the village was officially proclaimed, has served communities for many years. However, after the dreadful losses of the First World War when so many young men were killed and their bodies interred in France or Turkey, there was a need for a symbol of mourning and commemora-tion other than a grave. In most communities some sort of memorial to the war dead was erected. These, too, were very important focuses for community ceremonies and the expression of community values. As well as these formal cemeteries and memorials, the old squatting head-stations might also have a cluster of very old graves. These are likely to be scattered throughout the Shire, but basically they will be close to a former head station. They, too, are a very important record of a community's history and an important part of its heritage.

Housing:

Another signpost to a community's history and heritage is its housing stock. Local history can often be read through surviving houses from many different eras.

A splendid example of an inter-war bungalow (sometimes known as a Californian bungalow) at Werris Creek. This together with many other examples of this style of house demonstrate the boom that Werris Creek experienced in the 1920s.

The interesting aspect of this inter-war bungalow from Woolbrook is the material from which it is built. The concrete blocks are a feature of the town, and are indeed unusual and rare as a building material. A number of buildings in Woolbrook in the 1920s were constructed with this material.

For instance, railway towns and railway centres in particular experienced periods of boom and contraction. In terms of the built environment this meant that the housing and commercial stock would reflect a style of architecture appropriate to the time when most building activity occurred. In Werris Creek there is a good range of houses showing clear stylistic elements associated with the federation era (before 1918) mixed in with a great many bungalows dating from the 1920s. Werris Creek also had a number of more extensive more prestigious houses built for senior railway officials such as the Station Master, the Mechanical Engineer and the District Superintendent, and

these, too, reflect the time in which major administrative changes were made. Thus Werris Creek's boom times can be read from the existing townscape. The same is so for Kootingal and Attunga. The latter village has quite a good crop of federation era housing obviously related to its emergence as a railway centre after 1899.

Other housing is more timeless. The fitful nature of the local economy in small mining villages is often reflected in their building stock. Original vernacular buildings were often simply added to over the years. There are few examples of an entire house being erected at a particular time with

contemporary stylistic pretensions. What remains is a tribute to a succession of owner builders, whose contribution to our built environment has been little recognised. Niangala and Weabonga in particular can boast a type of house rarely seen in larger more prosperous communities where stricter building codes and covenants prevail.

Endnotes

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