

HARTLEY HISTORY PAPER

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Historical site from 1890s in Hartley

In 1813, when the Blaxland, Wentworth, and Lawson expedition reached the point of an escarpment later named Mt. York, the explorers formed the opinion that they had crossed the Blue Mountains. They looked down upon a wooded valley from which arose the smokes of aboriginal fires. The ranges to the west were lower than anything previously encountered. However, to be sure they had crossed the formidable range, the explorers traversed the valley as far as a point later called Mt. Blaxland. They noted mounds of honeysuckle type blossoms on which the aboriginals apparently feasted.

The explorers were not aware, of course, that the valley was a meeting place for the Gundangarra, Darraagh and Wiradergi tribes, whose territories all bordered the valley. It was a point for trade and the arranging of marriages. There was a marriage place at a water hole on the river, which present day locals know as Hyde Park on the River Lett. There still exists a cave on the Mt. Clarence escarpment stencilled with hand paintings. Because of the red ochre used in the paintings this is believed to be a women's place. There may be indigenous artifacts or places in the vicinity of Lawson's Long Alley or Lockyer's Line as Pierce Collitts' son John, reported a route down the escarpment known to him as used by aboriginals.



The explorers reported to Governor Macquarie that they had crossed the dividing mountain range.

Governor Macquarie sent government cattle to be grazed in the valley below Mt. York. The herd was guarded by soldiers who established a barracks at the foot of Mt. York and, later, at the confluence of the rivers Lett and Cox. He sent William Cox to build a road from Castlereagh (now the Penrith area) to Evans Plains (Bathurst). Cox completed the job in six months.

Cox's Pass down the point of Mt. York into the valley still exists as a walking track, Macquarie, in the gubernatorial coach, with wife Elizabeth, aides, and outriders, made the first official journey on Cox's Road. They camped under canvas and played whist by lamplight. Looking down from Mt. York into the beautiful valley, Macquarie named it Vale of Clwydd, after a vale of that name in Wales. Recent settlers in the valley of Welsh origin have mentioned that the landscape reminds them of Wales, without knowing that Macquarie was of the same mind.

The Governor stayed overnight at the soldiers' barracks at the confluence of the Lett and Cox rivers, known as Glenroy. There the governor's chaplain conducted the first divine service held over the Blue Mountains. A cairn at Glenroy commemorates that occasion. Later, in 1831 the infant daughter of James Rodd, the colour sergeant in charge of the soldiers at Glenroy, died and was buried at Glenroy. Restoration of the lone grave of Eliza Rodd is currently a National Trust project.

When Macquarie decided that free settlement to the west could safely be permitted the first cattle sent to the Vale of Clwydd belonged to the colony's chief surgeon, William Redfern. The cattle were in the charge of Redfern's overseer, an Irish ticket of leave man, John Grant. Redfern and John Grant received grants of land in the area south west of Mt. Sugarloaf. Redfern Station and John Grant's Moyne Farm (named after his home village in Ireland) still exist. John Grant received his land in 1818. He built a homestead there in 1821. It was and is the oldest building in the valley. Moyne Farm, owned by the Di Falco brothers, has been brought into residential 1C zoning and is currently being subdivided. The earliest private cemetery in the valley, except for the Eliza Rodd grave at Glenroy, is on Moyne Farm.

Shortly after Redfern and John Grant received land in the valley a ticket of leave man in the Castlereagh area, named Pierce Collitts, sent his sons over Cox's Road with cattle to be grazed in the valley below Mt. York. They squatted in the remains of barracks at the foot of Mt. York abandoned by the soldiers who had moved to Glenroy. Collitts proceeded in 1823 to build an inn on the barracks site. He did not have a land grant or any permission to settle at the site. This was to be typical of Collitts' history in the valley. He obtained several parcels of land under Governor Darling on the vague claim that he had been promised grants by Governor Macquarie.

Moyne Farm (1821) and Collitts Inn (1823) are the oldest heritage buildings in the valley.

The Sydney Gazette of March 25, 1824 announced the news that a Mr. Collitt [sic] formerly a settler on the Nepean banks had opened an inn called the "Golden Fleece in the Vale of Clwydd at the foot of Mt. York. The Gazette commented:

"one thing in Mr. Collitts' favour is that he has no rivals at present, but where so much wealth is being so continuously deposited as in the case in our new country, no doubt other inn keepers will think it worthwhile also to accommodate (comfortably and reasonably) the "way worn traveler."

Emancipationist Pierce Collitts in mid 1823 had squatted at the foot of Cox's pass, the "horrific descent" down the point of Mt. York. He and his wife Mary, with 9 children, some adult, established a reputation as genial hosts providing good furnishing and food. The prediction as to "other innkeepers" seeking to rival Pierce Collitts was not fulfilled for another nine years.

In 1829, after two surveyors, had attempted to build less precipitous descents (Lawson's Long Alley and Lockyer's Line) the newly-appointed (1827) Surveyor General of the Colony, Major Sir Thomas Livingstone Mitchell, marked out a line of descent on which he was willing to stake his reputation as surveyor general.

By letter to The Colonial Secretary, dated at Bathurst on 23 June, 1830 Mitchell announced

"I have much satisfaction in being able to state, that I have succeeded also in finding a more favorable descent from the Blue Mountains, by a ridge nearly parallel to that of Mount York, but more in the direct line, so that the angle formed in the present road descending by Mount York to Collett's [sic] is cut off, by which the road is shortened considerably. The point of hill by which this descent may be effected, being parallel to Mounts York and Clarence, I have named, for the sake of distinction, Mount Victoria."

The road would continue on "an unbroken tongue of land" to the River Lett. Mitchell regretted that Collett's [sic] inn would be cut off by the new line and begged the governor to give favourable consideration to a request by Collitts for a grant on the new line. Governor Darling absolutely vetoed the descent down Mount Victoria. Mitchell proceeded to "stake his reputation as surveyor general of the colony" , and on 16 September 1830 the governor capitulated.

Pierce Collitts petitioned the governor for a grant of land on the new line of road close to or in the village special reserve right at the foot of Mount Victoria. On 1st July 1830 at Bathurst he obtained a grant of a publican's license under the sign of "The Royal Garter". In August 1830 he requested Mitchell to have the 200 acres granted by Darling measured. In January 1831 his daughter Sophia wrote that her father was planning on building another inn. Collitts expected his Royal Garter to be located in a village with streets, suburban lots, and dwellings to provide custom. A measured 200 acres for Collitts, however, was surveyed adjoining the village reserve. Its south-eastern boundary was against a steep, forested ridge. Collitts proceeded with building his Royal Garter right at the south eastern boundary of his grant adjoining the village reserve and about 160 metres back from the forested ridge.

The new building was in the Georgian Colonial style of architecture; square brick block with high hipped roof, symmetrically placed doors and windows, and infill walls under the lower surrounding verandah roof at either side to create two wings of small rooms for travellers. A lofted, kitchen with quarters for the convict assigned servants and stables with hayloft were built to the rear. The day bricks convict made on the property included batches marked with a "C" in the frog. The complex was situated, with pleasant views, on a small hill. Between the hill and the forested ridge was low-lying land along which Collitts expected the new road to be laid.

On 23 October 1832 the new governor, Bourke, opened Mitchell's Victoria Pass.

By February 1833 the road to the River Lett was made sufficiently for horse drawn traffic. But woe to mine host of the Golden Fleece and Royal Garter! Surveyor General Mitchell's road followed high ground around the shoulder of the forested ridge, up where it was nicely drained, not down on the boggy flat. The new Royal Garter was some one hundred and fifty meters off the new line of road; not a good situation when travellers wanted to turn into an inn yard right on the road.

To make matters worse a young, Irish, ticket-of-leave man, Michael Flanagan, had obtained a grant of 100 acres on the opposite side of the highway from Collitts' 200 acres.

Flanagan was sponsored by John Grant, the first settler, in 1821, to be granted land in the valley. Flanagan obtained a license for an inn, the Harp of Erin, on 24th February, 1833. He built a simple hostelry of sun-dried bricks, with skillion verandah, near where a track to Grant's "Moyne" farm diverged from the western road. Flanagan continued building. The Harp of Erin complex today is a series of hipped roofed pavilions owing its unusual colonial design to its founder and subsequent storekeeper owners.

In 1833 Mitchell's plans for the village reserve at the foot of Victoria Pass had not moved forward. A stockade, housing convict labourers and military guards was located there. He planned for a township to be laid out on the banks of the River Lett.

A decision was taken by the colonial administrators to locate a Court House at the other special village reserve where the highway crossed the River Lett. Pierce was dissatisfied now with the location of his new Royal Garter and petitioned for a grant of land on the River Lett. On 24 March 1834 he was put in possession of three acres "special Reserve for the purpose of erecting an inn, provided that you reside personally on the spot, apply it for the purposes stated, and do not convert any part of it to any other purpose whatsoever under penalty of forfeiture." Neither Mitchell nor the new governor, Bourke, were taken in by Collitt's various claims to have been promised land by Macquarie or Darling.

Collitts still conducted the Golden Fleece and was not personally occupying the Royal Garter. Joseph Collitts was working the 200 acres of farm land. The house was let out as police station and magistrate's residence. The township on the River Lett, was still in the planning stage, with the court house building barely commenced. Pierce still wanted an inn at the Mount Victoria end of the road through the valley, (soon to be renamed the parish of Hartley.)

His youngest daughter Amelia had married John Skene, a ticket of leave man and onetime overseer of convicts on the pass down Mount Victoria. A licensed public house at the foot of the pass near the convict stockade would have a captive clientele, and snare travellers before they reached the Harp of Erin The Collitts built a public house, probably mainly of timber slabs, and wattle and daub, as no evidence of it remains. Folklore locates it below and on the same side of the highway as the stockade, not far from a corduroy (log) bridge over a creek. They had no legal title to the land.

John and Amelia Skene obtained a license in 1835 under the sign of The Rising Sun. Young Michael Flanagan found both the competition and running an inn not to his liking. He did not renew the license of the Harp of Erin in 1835, married one of John Grant's daughters and devoted himself to sheep and cattle farming his hundred acres.

Unfortunately for the Rising Sun, Mitchell, riding in the company of Surveyor Govetts noted the building. Being told it was conducted as an inn by John Skene, Mitchell remarked in exasperation that Skene had been troublesome as an overseer and would now create trouble supplying grog on the sly to the convicts. As a result of official disapproval, perhaps, the license for The Rising Sun was withdrawn.

Not to be discouraged, Pierce's older daughter Sophia, married to Thomas Rawsthorne, made application to run the same building as an inn under the sign of "The Bridge." "The Bridge" was a source of trouble to police magistrate Day, residing at the erstwhile Royal Garter.

Bench books for "the Police Office, Vale of Clwydd," which was housed at the Royal Garter, include an account of a trial at which Magistrate Edward D. Day was, himself, the complainant. At about 9pm at night he found his two convict servants absent. The magistrate lay in wait where he could watch the servant's quarters and nabbed the two absentees returning, drunk, from Rawsthorne's Public house with a bottle of rum.

By 1837 Sophie Rawsthorne was a widow. She did not renew the license for The Bridge. The stockade at the foot of the pass had been partially moved west to Hassans Walls. (Although it was not completely abandoned until the 1850's. The handsome stone courthouse at Hartley was nearing completion. Mitchell ordered the land below the Mt. Victoria stockade, (about 100 acres located on either side of the road) offered for grant by purchase. The purchaser was a Sydney publican named William Cummings. Mr. Cummings built a substantial stone two storey building in the colonial Georgian style with spacious detached stone kitchen, and an inn yard flanked by coach house and blacksmith's forge.

Mr. Cummings' inn was completed in 1839 and licensed as The Coach and Horses. Its first licensee, Joseph Jagers was the last person, apart from her husband, and her murderer, or murderers, to see Caroline, the 6 year old wife of Pierce Collitts' youngest son, William, alive. And thereby hangs the tale of the ghost that was said to haunt Victoria Pass for 100 years.

Later licensed as The Mount Victoria Inn the beautiful sandstone Georgian building fulfilled its functions of refreshing the wayworn travellers until the 1870's and was the change house for coach lines from Sydney to the goldfields before the American firm of Cobb and Co. It was the private residence of the first president of Blaxland Shire, John Berghoffer who was the son of German immigrants. He named it Rosenthal. In 1914 because of prejudice against German settlers, he re-named it "Rosedale". (Rosedale at the foot of Victoria Pass is sometimes confused with an earlier "Rosedale" in Hartley Valley. That was built by the Merrick family at the foot of Brown's Gap.)

The Bridge public house had vanished. Yet in the deposition of one Patrick O'Connor in a hearing on 17 August, 1838 there is reference to "Rawsthorne's Public House at the foot of Mount Victoria." Widowed Sophia Rawsthorne, was the licensee of a public house under the sign of The Kings Arms in 1838. She was apparently keeping a respectable house with decent accommodation for travellers where Mitchell halted overnight on one occasion.

The whereabouts of Sophia Rawsthorne's Kings Arms and a similarly named hostelry The Farrier's Arms, conducted by Mr. Bergen into the 1850's and 1860's, is an ongoing puzzle for historians of the inns of Hartley and Little Hartley. The answer may lie in the foundations of Nioka, a two storey, sandstone brick house with pillared verandahs located a few hundred yards west of Rosedale. 'Nioka' was built for a local butcher Nick Delaney and offered accommodation and "teas" in the 1870's. The foundations, however, with sandstone block courses and paler, more pinkish bricks are considered to be of a much earlier building.

Some researchers have suggested that Mr. Bergen's establishment, The Farriers Arms, was located about three hundred yards west of Rosedale. Professor Ian Jack in association with roads archaeologist Dr. Siobhan Lavelle , in preparing a study of the historic buildings of the Lithgow region in 1998 surmised that Nioka may have been built on the ruins of the Farriers Arms. An interesting speculation is whether the Collitts family had again erected a slab hostelry (Kings Arms) on unassigned land. The land was acquired by Bergen by grant of purchase and he built a more substantial brick building (the Farriers Arms) Eventually both the Kings Arms and The Farriers Arms provided the foundations for Nioka.

Whatever the truth, some family circumstance caused Pierce Collitts in 1839 to hurriedly build an inn on the land that had been granted to him in the township of Hartley in 1834. His daughter Sophia married a Thomas Morris and the license for the Royal Garter was transferred to them in 1839, the same year that the imposing sandstone courthouse at Hartley was completed.

Hartley on the River Lett was a planned village with streets marked out and provision for inns and churches as well as the courthouse.. The Irish Catholic community raised funds for and had built a fine stone church. The Anglicans, not to be outdone, contributed to the building of an equally elegant church, St. John the Evangelist. Prominent in the affairs of Hartley village was John Grant, the one-time overseer of Redfern's cattle. John Grant became known as "the father of Hartley"

The days of the ephemeral shanty public houses were over but, on its own, without official planning, a village of Little Hartley had developed along the highway to serve the needs of the travellers to the west. The once Royal Garter was

vacated as a police station with the opening of the Hartley Courthouse. It became known as Collitts' Mt. Victoria Farm. In 1840-41 it was briefly the home of the ill-fated teenage couple William and Caroline Collitts. Later in 1841 Pierce's wife, Mary, died. Pierce formally leased the property to Joseph who appears to have operated a flour mill there as well as running cattle. Joseph, together with other Collitts' sons had also obtained land grants on the western plains.

Joseph was committed, under the lease from his father, to building another house on the property, apparently for use as an inn. By 1845 the new inn was completed and a publican's license granted to Joseph under the sign of The Rose Inn. In September 1848 Pierce died at the age of 85. Under his Will Joseph became the sole owner of the 200 acre grant made to Pierce in 1830. Various licensees, including Edward Field, conducted the Rose Inn on Joseph's behalf. As far as can be ascertained Joseph continued to reside in the once Royal Garter/police station, now Mt. Victoria Farm. In 1856 he increased the holding by purchase of lots to the Mount Victoria side of the property.

(The original Deed of Grant by Purchase for the 1856 acquisition was retained by Mrs. Yvonne Harris and her sister Mrs. Osterberg-Olsen when the Old System title of the property was converted to Torrens Title in 1971. Also retained was a handwritten letter from Magistrate Thomas Henry Neale to his brother, John in Sydney, requesting that the Deed be taken for registration. These documents remain in the possession of the Osterberg-Olsen family.)

Little Hartley village continued to grow, driven by the needs of those wayworn travellers to the West. A George Jarvis purchased the buildings that had once been the Harp of Erin and conducted a general store and post office during the 1860's. The Rose Inn, with an Edward Field as licensee, was the change house for the coach line of Cobb and Co. In the 1870's a Henry Williams from Wolgan Valley purchased the general store, post office and residence and the business was conducted by the Williams family for almost 100 years until 1975.

The Rose Inn was typical of the long, single story building that became the Australian vernacular country building from the 1840's, replacing the Georgian buildings. The roof was of a lower pitch. The main building was stone-faced. French doors led off the flagstoned verandah into a series of rooms linked at the rear by a long corridor.

To the west of the Rose Inn a pair of brick settlers' cottages had been built at a time of which there is now no record on land originally granted to Hugh Beattie, a farmer from Yass. Although there was no mention of buildings on that land before 1865-1867, the cottage style is reminiscent of earlier Georgian architecture. One of the cottages, which exists today, is featured in the Holtermann collection of glass slide photographs of New South Wales country villages taken in the 1860's and 1870's. It is presently the residence of Ron Fitzpatrick and Catherine Shead, proprietors of Talisman Gallery.

The other of the pair of cottages was extended into a longer brick building in the 1860's with the addition of two rooms to the north, serving as a public dining room and a taproom. The property had been acquired in about 1861 by storekeeper, George Jarvis. In 1867 the building appears in the licensing records for the first time as a public house under the sign of The Kerosene Inn.

A new prosperity had come to Hartley Vale on the far side of Mount York with the discovery of kerosene producing shale. Shale miner's cottages mushroomed. There was no licensed house in Hartley Vale, so every payday the shale miners formed themselves into a procession led by whistles and drums and marched to the Kerosene Inn at Little Hartley to deal with their thirsts. John Lewis Mead appears as licensee of the Kerosene Inn in 1872 although the property was still owned by the Jarvis family. The building is today known as Meade's Farm.

The Holtermann photographs of Little Hartley during the 1860's and early 1870's show a thriving village with the substantial houses interspersed by settlers slab huts, produce gardens and smithies. The inns that founded the village are all identifiable.

The extension of the railway around the top of the range through Clarence to the coal and iron town of Lithgow killed off trade for the village that had grown up to serve the wayworn travellers to the west. The last police magistrate to sit at Hartley Court House, Thomas Henry James Australia Neale, was appointed in 1870. Magistrate Neale, was looking for a home in Hartley Valley; Joseph Collitts was wanting to sell out and go west. He had two purchasers, Mr. Lewington, who was interested in The Rose Inn and Magistrate Neale who wanted the house and stables complex that started life as The Royal Garter. Joseph agreed to sell Lewington the Rose Inn and all the two hundred acres of the original grant except for seven acres on which the original Royal Garter and outbuildings had been established. That was to be sold to Magistrate Neale together with the land Joseph had acquired towards Mt. Victoria.

Joseph Collitts could not finalize! After 40 years he discovered that Pierce Collitts had not had title to the grant of 1830 perfected. Joseph spent three years petitioning the Commissioners of the Court of Claims before he was granted the title in his name. Lewington moved into The Rose Inn and married the widow of George Jarvis; Magistrate Neale named his purchase Billesdene (or Billesden) after a village in Leicestershire (now a town called Billesdon) from which his grandparents had migrated to Australia.

By 1878 the court at Hartley was transferred to Lithgow. The inns deprived of their custom by the railway became private houses. Even the Kerosene Inn closed its doors in 1880 owing to the opening of a hostelry The Comet, at Hartley Vale. Little Hartley and Hartley lapsed into being a sleepy farming community as the no longer wayworn travellers went west by train. Hartley Vale, on the other hand, became a thriving industrial centre owing to the operation of shale mines for the production of paraffin, or kerosene. The Comet Inn was named for a famous brand of kerosene produced in Hartley Vale. The age of gas and electricity superseded kerosene and Hartley Vale also became a sleepy farming community. The adits of some shale mines are still in existence, also remains of the cable railway which transported the shale from Hartley Vale to the railroad at Mt. Victoria.

Little Hartley had another future ahead of it as a country resort and famed apple growing area during the first 60 years of the 20th century. The substantial Georgian and vernacular colonial inns, joined by Bonnie Blink, (1874) an interesting Italianate or French style country villa, all became part of that apple growing history. Bonnie Blink, built by an English architect, John Blackmann, was later owned by the Horden family and then by the McKillops (relatives of the beatified Mary McKillop). In the 1870's a niece of Magistrate Neale married one of the Horderns. At this time two oaks were planted.

These magnificent trees still flourish one at Billesdene and one at Bonnie Blink. Bonnie Blink was sold by the McKillops to Oscar Banaar in 1916. Apples exported from Bonnie Blink won prizes in Britain and Canada. Billesdene, purchased by James Harris in 1916 from a niece of Magistrate Neale, became one of the foremost apple orchards in the valley. At the peak of its apple growing fame the produce of the Hartley Valley rivalled the apple produce of Tasmania.

The historic houses of Little Hartley remain as gems of heritage strung along the most controversial five kilometre stretch of Major Mitchell's line of road to the west.



View from Berghofers Pass

Earthworks at the foot of Victoria Pass evidence the site of the Victoria Pass convict stockade. Mounded outlines in a square remain as the base for the wooden stockade enclosing the convict huts (known as "boxes"); and also clearly defined are two man-made terraces probably site of the barracks for the soldier guards and horse stabling. These earthworks are still visible on the slope between the final straight decline of Mitchell's Pass and the marshy flat land below the junction of Mt. York and Mt. Victoria. An aerial survey by the history branch of the RTA has identified the site. It is on land now owned by Mr. Laurence O'Connell, being part of the Billesdene Grange lands acquired by Magistrate Thomas Neale, and sold to Mr. O'Connell by Mrs Yvonne Harris in 1971. It is also discussed in a book on convict stockades by Mr. O. Leckbrandt, who found some military buttons on the site, as well as horseshoes and other evidences of habitation. From 1916 to 1941 the site was part of a market garden first established by Ralph Harris of Billesdene Grange's Harris Brothers orchards and later operated by Jack Ireland of the Mt. Victoria General Store.

The triangular gully where Mt. York and Mt. Victoria conjoin is the source of Butlers Creek, which flows through the northern side of Little Hartley and through part of Hartley Vale and mid Hartley until it joins the River Lett. Prior to the 1980s Butler's Creek was joined by a creek that rose under Mt Sugarloaf, crossed the Western Highway in the hollow between Rosedale and Victoria Pass and met Butler's Creek at right angles where Laurence O'Connell's large dam is situated. From the late 1850's it was known as Chinaman's Creek, because it was a favourite camping place for the Chinese on their way west to the goldfields.

Opening up of the west was facilitated by the settlement of Hartley. The descendants of John Grant and Pierce Collitts moved out onto the western plains. A valuable history of the area is the book "Providence" by Jacqueline Grant. There are descendants of the first settlers, the Collitts, Fields, Morrises, Skenes, Rawsthorns, and Merricks still living in or associated with the area. The first settlers from these families together with Jarvises and Lewingtons, are buried in the secluded cemetery under the point of Mt. York. Merrick and Blackman graves are in a small private cemetery near the foot of Brown's Gap.

The once named Vale of Chwydd is known to the modern traveller driving from the queen city of the sea to the city of the plains by way of the Great Western Highway as the Hartley Valley. From Mt. Victoria motor vehicles drop down over Mitchell's Ridge on the two mile descent of Mitchell's Victoria Pass to a picture postcard beautiful valley. This valley of Hartley was the cradle of settlement of the western plains and the expansion that allowed the colony in New South Wales to survive. It has a historical significance to the State and to the nation.

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