

'Geringong' Roadstead

The Coastal Traders - 1840s

In the early days of the Colony, the Governors issued free land grants to encourage enterprising pioneers to leave Sydney and venture out to different parts of the country to clear their grant for the cultivation of crops - vital for the survival of the new settlement.

On 19th April, 1825, Governor Brisbane promised the first free land grant in the locality we now call Gerringong, to William Smith – *'some 600 acres, more or less'*.¹ [The Title was granted to William Smith on 1st May, 1833]²

By 1827, the free land grants had been replaced by clearing-lease grants and the next Gerringong locality grant was a clearing-lease grant of 640 acres, promised by Governor Darling to Michael Hindmarsh in 1827.³ [The Title was granted to Michael Hindmarsh on 30th May, 1840]⁴

Finally on 16th January, 1829, Governor Darling promised Lt. Thomas Campbell a clearing-lease grant of 1,280 acres.⁵

Once the grants were occupied, the men enthusiastically set about making improvements to their property.

By the early 1830s however, all three men were struggling to make ends meet.

Thomas Campbell's 'Bark-Hill Farm',⁶ which extended west along the northern ridge of today's Mt. Pleasant towards Saddleback Mt., was perpetually being raided by bushrangers (escaped convicts) who took great delight in sampling his cows, pigs, potatoes and corn.

Campbell employed a couple of the local aborigines – *'Joram and Black Harry'*⁶ - to work for him as look-outs in order to try ward off *'these villains'* (1832)⁶.

Michael Hindmarsh of 'Alne Bank' – located to the west of Smith, had *'for the present almost given up farming. It pays so badly'*⁷ and turned his hand to transporting cedar (1833).

William Smith, whose grant was in the middle of a swamp, found it too difficult to work the land under such trying conditions and decided to advertise his property for auction: *'About, 120 acres are cleared. Two Paddocks of about Twenty Acres Fenced, and in Cultivation: A GOOD WEATHER-BOARDED COTTAGE, Stock-yard, excellent Timber for Building...and a good supply of water (a nice way of putting it!) are upon the Property.'*(1834).⁸

By the end of the 1830s however, there was a resurgence of activity throughout the entire Geringong area.

Thomas Campbell had transferred his grant to his brother-in-law, James Mackey Gray, who renamed the property 'Omega Retreat'. [The Title was granted to James Mackey Gray on 30th June, 1840.]⁹ James immediately stripped out all the cedar from the property and divided the *'otherwise useless land'*¹⁰ into a series of small tenant farms which he rented out on an annual negotiated rental. The initial 20 tenant farmers,¹¹ *'who were once seekers of bread only,'*¹⁰ were compulsory required to clear the land before being allowed to cultivate it for their own use. At the end of a seven year

lease, they could choose to continue working their small farm on a new negotiated lease or revert it back to Mackey Gray.¹²

William Smith had sold his grant to Charles John Campbell¹³ (no relationship to Thomas) who in turn, on-sold it in 1837¹⁴ to Robert Miller who renamed the grant 'Renfrew Park'.

Robert's first priority was to dig a series of canals to drain 'Smith's swamp' out to sea. [The positioning of the current Highway sign listing Ooaree Creek as being to the south of the Omega Railway Crossing is incorrect. The

'Ooaree Creek' as sign-posted, is actually one of Robert's original drainage canals. The correct 'Ooaree Creek' is further to the north of the current crossing and flows down from the upper reaches of Rose Valley.]¹⁵



Robert was soon amply rewarded for all his hard work by growing prize winning potatoes and cultivating abundant crops of wheat in the rich soil of Miller's Flats which by the 1840s was renowned as *'the most advanced patch of land in the country.'*¹⁶

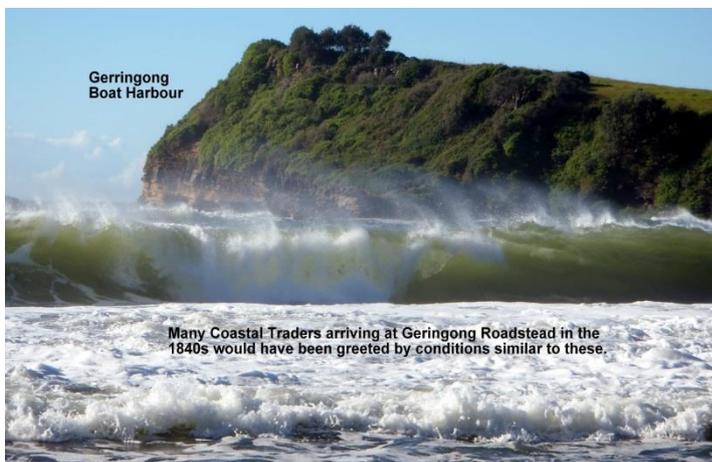
Michael Hindmarsh, using convict labour, was rapidly developing 'Alne Bank' into a cattle (500 head)¹⁷ and horse breeding facility as well as growing tobacco and transporting cedar from Broughton and Foxground.

Shortly after the majority of the local cedar was extracted from the area, various farmers turned their hand to cultivating the land for agricultural purposes.

They cut down the hardwood timber which was utilised for fencing or placed aside to be sent to Sydney for the building of houses, sheds and the construction of wagons and carts.

Any remaining brush was then cleared and stump-grubbed for the growing of cash crops such as wheat, potatoes, onions, maize, barley and tobacco, or else for the grazing of dairy cows and horses. With the introduction of dairying, pigs soon become a thriving part of the industry. Another small developing industry was the *'harvesting of honey from the nearby forest which now swarmed with English bees'*¹⁸

As the quality of their produce improved and the quantity increased, the farmers sought to have the



excess transported to Sydney for sale at the markets. The only practical way to achieve this was by boat. Unlike shipping cedar however, perishable agricultural produce demanded a regular shipping service, otherwise all the farmers hard work would be to no avail.

On 3rd October 1840, the Sydney Herald reported:

'The importance and extent of the

coasting trade of the Colony, until recently, was scarcely known by any except those concerned in it... the vessels to Broulee, Gerringong and other places on the coast, take down supplies for the stations in those neighbourhoods, but at present there is little for them to bring back.'

The first documented coastal vessel to leave Sydney for the 'Gerringong Roadstead'¹⁹ ['Roadstead' - name given to the calling stops for the early coastal vessels] was the 14t Sloop '**Industry**', under the command of Benjamin Young²⁰. This vessel arrived at Gerringong on the 25th October, 1840 to pick up a shipment of cedar.

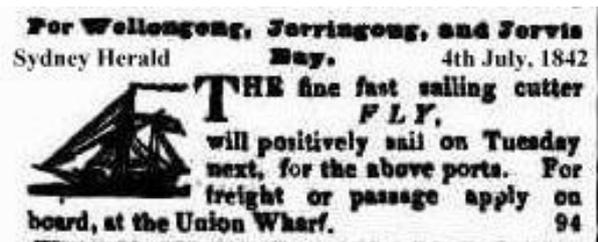
For the next six months, the '**Industry**' paid a monthly call, bringing down sundries or 'in ballast' [ballast: any rocks or off-cuts of Sydney sandstone which in those days could readily be found scattered around the Sydney wharves. Upon the vessel's arrival at Gerringong roadstead, this rubbish would be dumped overboard into the small harbour.] The '**Industry**' would then return to Sydney with its cargo of local cedar, hardwood and potatoes.

By March 1841, produce had increased to such an extent that Young was obliged to transfer to a much larger vessel, the 30t. Cutter '**Thomas & Mary**'²¹, which he operated on a monthly basis till the end of August 1841.

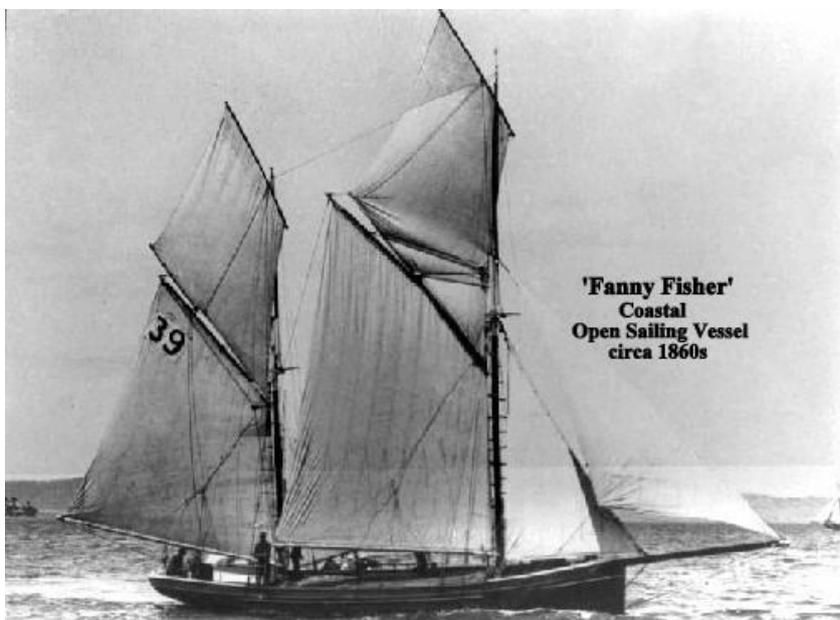
Compared to the smaller boats employed in the cedar trade, the coastal traders were larger, somewhat safer, and faster. Being heavier - up to 30 tons – they were required to be moored at a buoy some 400 feet out in the deeper channel of the small cove.

All the sailing vessels servicing Gerringong at

the time were solely wind powered – no inboard motors under the baseboards!



As they were required to be manoeuvred around the small inlet through rolling surf and fickle winds, the mooring procedure on many occasions was extremely hazardous, requiring great alertness and skill on behalf of the vessel's Master. [On many occasions, conditions proved to be so treacherous on arrival, that Masters, for the safety of their ship and crew, simply refused to enter the roadstead.]



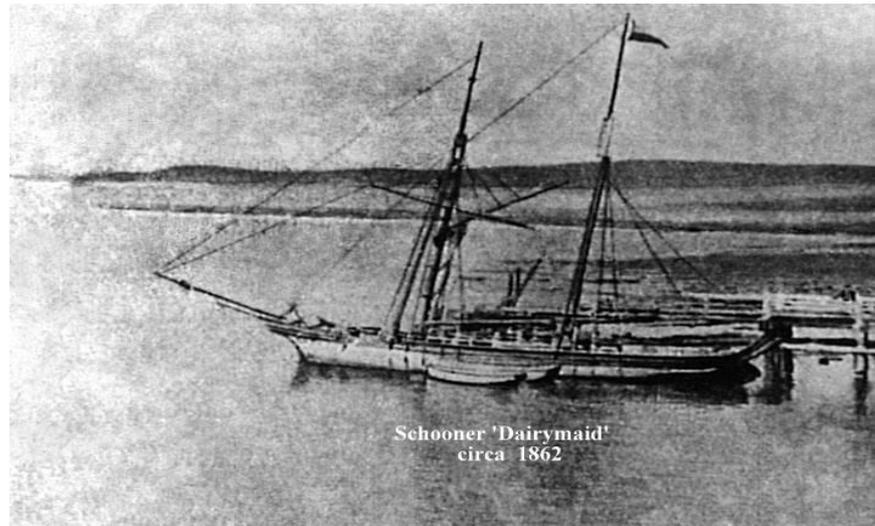
Once the ship was safely anchored and warped,²² the lumpers then hoisted the produce onto their shoulders and ploughed their way through the surging waves to the waiting vessel.²³

If the tides were too high, the produce was rowed out in a whaleboat and hoisted up over the side. Both these methods of loading and

unloading were dangerous and time consuming.

Besides the **Industry** and **Thomas & Mary**, other ships using the 'Jerringong roadstead' to pick up either timber or produce throughout the 1840s were: [**Dolphin 17t** – Master James Nicholson – 34 times, **Betsy 14t** – 2 times, **Fanny 23t** – 1, **Roubulla 18t** – 1, **Fly 10t** – 2, **Trial 30t** – 1, **Acme 18t** – 4 times, **Friendship 18t** – 3 times, **Alligator 19t** – 1, **Bee 12t** -2 times, **Flying Fox 14t** – 6 times, **Ruth 12t** – 1, **Alexander 10t** – 5 times, **Mermaid 10t** – 2 times, **Pedlar 18t** – 3 times, **Lady of the Lake 23t** – 1 and **Brothers** – 1.]²⁴

The majority of the Sydney Harbour shipping records, along with newspaper notices relating to the Coastal Commerce of the 1840s, list all cargo being transported up to Sydney aboard these small vessels simply as potatoes, sundries, timber, maize etc.



However, on the few

occasions where shipments were specifically identified, the combined total of cargo carried from Jerringong was: **570 bushels maize, 120 bushels wheat, 48 bushels corn, 390 bushels barley, 231 tons & 300 bags potatoes, 1 ton honey, 10cwt bacon, 12 kegs butter, 1,000 staves, 33,000ft cedar and 22,300ft timber.**²⁵ [bushel - dry measure for 8 gallons].

[Note: After the locality was officially named and Gazetted as **Geringong** on 1 June 1829,²⁶ up to 12 different spellings were used by various newspapers and Government Notices.

When a Post Office was finally Gazetted for Gerringong on 1 April 1857,²⁷ **Gerringong** - as franked by the Gerringong P.O. hand stamp - became the official spelling.

Relevant spellings have been used throughout the article.

1. *Register of Grants of Land No.22, p.83*
2. *NSW Government Gazette, September 4, 1833. No.32 p..345*
3. *Register of Grants of Land No.59, p.217*
4. *NSW Government Gazette July 29, 1840. No. 52 p.706*
5. *Lindsay, Benjamin A Story of Early Land Settlement in Illawarra, Nowra Library*
6. *Sydney Herald, 28 January, 1833*
7. *Hindmarsh, Michael of Alne Bank Letter, 10 Sept 1833 p.33*
8. *Sydney Herald, 27 October, 1834*
9. *NSW Government Gazette November 18, 1840 No. 127 p.1224*
10. *Sydney Morning Herald, 6 December, 1849*
11. *Householder's Returns, NSW Census of 1841*
12. *Illawarra Mercury, 13 April, 1857 Freer's Farm*
13. *Lands Title Office No.632, Book 6*
14. *Lands Titles Office, Deeds Packet No. 25037 p.23, No. 356, Book L*
15. *Confirmation of correct location site by Ken Miller 2013*

16. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 December, 1849
17. *Hindmarsh, Michael of Alne Bank Letter 2 Decr., 1838 p.37*
18. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 December, 1849
19. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 July, 1863
20. *Sydney Herald*, 24 October, 1840
21. *Sydney Herald*, 16 March, 1841
22. *Item 2 The 'Swallow' in Web Article on Shipwrecks in the Gerringong-Black Head area*
23. *Shortis, John A Vision Splendid, Gerringong & District A History, 2011*
24. *Coastal Commerce, Coasters IN - OUT, All Newspapers 1840 – 1850*
25. *Coastal Commerce, Coasters IN - OUT, All Newspapers 1840 – 1850*
26. *Sydney Gazette & Advertiser 4 June, 1829*
27. *Government Gazette 31 March, 1857*

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