

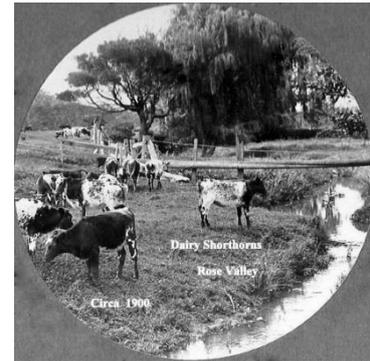
Gerringong Boat Harbour – 1860s

From the late 1850s, a gradual change took place throughout Gerringong's farming community. With the vagaries of the weather playing a major part, many of the 'cash crops' which the early farmers had so relied on were no longer sustainable in this coastal locality.

Wheat was destroyed by rust; plagues of lady-birds attacked the flowering buds of the potato¹ and various crops were continually being devoured by large infestations of caterpillars and aphids.²

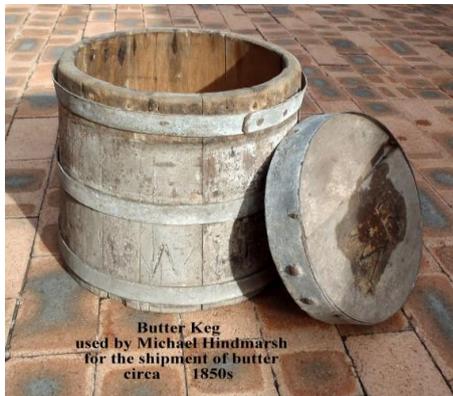
Thus with great fortitude and foresight, the early pioneers such as the Millers, Hindmarshs and Mackie Greys set about laying the foundations of the dairying industry for which Gerringong today is so renowned.

Cattle [Durhams, Shorthorns, Longhorns and Red Lincolns],³ horses, pigs, poultry and such related products as butter, cheese, bacon, eggs and hides were now the main commodities being shipped to the Sydney market.



Mainly to ensure they receive the best price for their hard labour, the farmers initially accompanied their own produce on the "sloops" to Sydney, where they were able to sell it for the best price on the day, at the relevant company's wharf on arrival.

By doing this, they felt that by talking directly to their customers, they were able to get a better feel as to what produce was in high demand and thus adjust their growing patterns accordingly.



Before returning home they would always purchase any provisions they needed.

Later, as the number of producers increased, this way of doing things proved to be too time consuming, especially the amount of time spent on the ship. It therefore became more convenient to appoint a Shipping Agent who, at both ends, carried out all transactions on the farmers' behalf.⁴

In 1859 Thomas Hale, a Sydney ship owner, advertised that his steamer the "RAPID" would sail twice weekly out of Kiama for Sydney and actively compete for freight against the Illawarra Steam Navigation Company but at a cheaper rate.⁵

Immediately the I.S.N.C. dropped its freight charges to undercut Hale's.

For many small producers, this new competitive service was well received and after encouraging patronage from Gerringong's tenant farmers, Hale called *'a meeting at Lang's Inn [Gerringong] on 14 May 1860, to devise measures for obtaining Steam Communication to Gerringong in connection with the proposed 'New Steam Packet Company.'*⁶

Shortly after this meeting and after only ten months in operation, Hale decided to cease all further operations without fully explaining his reasons. This decision dealt a severe blow to his many small clients, who now found themselves 'out on a limb'.

With the competition now out of the way, the I.S.N.C. immediately increased its rates, and then to add insult to injury, it antagonised the “Rapid’s” former customers, by charging them an extra 30% for all freight, in retribution for their disloyalty.⁷

You now had the ridiculous situation whereby two farmers living side-by-side, were charged different rates to freight the same size kegs of butter, on the same day by the same carrier.⁷

After the meeting of 8 December, 1859, which discussed Alexander Berry’s proposal for a harbour at Blackhead, a party of local residents and Councillors from the Gerringong Ward [Kiama Council] rode their horses down to Shoalhaven on a private visit to consult with Berry on the comparative qualities of the two harbours [Boat Harbour vs. Blackhead].

‘In the course of the interview, Mr. Berry remembered that the late Captain Oxley, R.N., who was Surveyor – General before Sir J. Mitchell, had spoken to him in favourable terms of Blackhead’s capabilities of being made a harbor. This opinion, from such a high authority, united the Council [Kiama], and they soon came to terms.’

A document was drawn up and handed to Alderman Miller, whereby A. Berry *‘agreed to give a road and the ground for the store, wharf, &c., and also bear half the expense of mooring chains, besides assisting generally through the whole work’* on the proviso *‘that he should have a public opinion from the townspeople [Gerringong] before proceeding any further .’*⁸

A second public meeting was then held on 22 December 1859, to discuss Alexander Berry’s proposal for Blackhead.

*‘Unfortunately... the meeting was very much divided... There was a great deal said pro and con, [Most Gerringong residents vehemently opposed the Blackhead site as it was on Berry’s private land and they leaned strongly towards the Government site of Boat Harbour] but the only definite conclusion arrived at was that Mr David Berry, who was present, would communicate with his brother (Alexander) in Sydney the request of the meeting, “that he would ask the Government to send a surveyor to report on both harbors; and the people of Gerringong would decide for the one most favourably spoken of.’*⁹

On 7 January 1860, it was reported *‘that Mr. Moriarty, Government surveyor, is engaged in inspecting the rival harbors of Gerringong and Blackhead; so our agitation has not gone for nothing.’*¹⁰

Following this report, mention was then made on 17 March 1860 that *‘Alderman Robinson has received a letter from Government concerning the harbor survey... but it was not made public.’*¹¹ This left many in the community believing that the findings in the Report were not favourable for the majority.

About this time, the good folk of Gerringong, as happens in many small and remote towns, felt they were being badly treated by bureaucracy.

On the one hand, the residents felt that when they came to Gerringong, which was a Government Town, they had already paid a high price for the land and therefore they shouldn’t now have to go ‘cap-in-hand’ for funding when necessary improvements, such as the laying of mooring chains or the construction of a jetty were needed.¹²

On the other hand, being a Ward of the Kiama Municipal Council since 1857, they always felt that being tucked away behind 'the Kiama bends' they were being severely overlooked, especially '*by the enormous expenses of the Kiama Ward having swallowed up part of our income and so leaving no funds for even the most necessary works*'.¹³

As a result, '*A Public Meeting of Ratepayers...will be held at Lang's Gerringong Arms...on 27th September 1861, for the purpose of petitioning the Government to Separate the Gerringong Ward from Kiama and Jamberoo Wards; also, for a Mooring Chain for Gerringong Harbor*'.¹⁴

There was great jubilation throughout the district therefore, when on 23 April 1863 Treasury called for '*Tenders... for laying down Moorings at Jerringong*'.¹⁵

This was soon followed on 26 June 1863 when:

'GOVERNMENT MOORINGS have been laid in **Geringong Roadstead**, in between four and five fathoms of water, consisting of two anchors of 20cwt. each, and 120 fathoms of 1.5 inch chain with two bridles, each of 12 fathom of .5 inch chain, attached to the main mooring; the position of each bridle being indicated by a large Nun-Buoy with .5 inch buoy-chain. Masters of vessels are distinctly to understand that the buoys are not intended to hang by, but are merely for the purpose of picking up the bridles, which should be got on board by passing a bight of the .5 inch buoy-chain through the vessels hawse pipe, and by heaving it in by the windlass. Masters of vessels are particularly cautioned that immediately on the appearance of bad weather from S.S.E., veering easterly, they should slip and proceed to sea; as during bad weather from seaward, a heavy sea sets in on Geringong...

T.W.SMART.¹⁶

The installation of the mooring chain brought with it many advantages.

Besides providing safer anchorage for the larger steamers, the masters of the small coastal sailing ships could now enjoy greater security when entering the roadstead as they were able to use the chain as a 'braking' system. As the vessels slowly drifted into the harbour, kedges were dragged from their bow and stern. Once these small anchors hooked the chain, the crew played out the warps to safely bring the boat to a halt before dropping the main anchors.¹⁷

The bridles on the mooring chain were then raised and the ship was able to be securely moored to the main chain and warped to the harbor's fixed warping eyelets or points.

However, due to the numerous violent storms experienced along the entire south coast during the early to mid 1860s, only a few brave and experienced masters were game enough to bring their vessels into such a treacherous place.

The Kiama Independent of 22 September 1864 reported that:

'The licensed surveyor, Mr. Taylor has been actively employed ...making a trigonometrical survey of the harbour, taking the depths and soundings of the inner basin.'

In February 1866, the Engineer-in-Chief for Harbours, Mr Moriarty, inspected Boat Harbour and reported '*that if the jetty were made, vessels could not be brought to it*'.¹⁸

A delegation of prominent Gerringong citizens politely pointed out to the Colonial Secretary that Mr. Moriarty had actually arrived at Gerringong by steamer and '*embarked at the place where it was said steamers could not safely approach...They were therefore disinclined to give up their project*'¹⁹

In 1867, James Wilson purchased and renamed George & Ann Fuller's former "Gerringong Post Office Stores" on the corner of Fern & Jupiter Sts. as the "Boat Harbour Store". This store rapidly became the focal point in the town.

IMPORTANT NOTICE.
Kiama Independent 19th November, 1868
Boat Harbour Store,
1868 GERRINGONG. 1868
JAMES WILSON, JUNIOR,
IN returning thanks for the liberal patronage bestowed upon him since commencing
Business as
GENERAL STOREKEEPER, &C.,
Would embrace the present opportunity to announce to his numerous friends and
customers that he
**HAS JUST RETURNED FROM THE METROPOLIS WITH A CAREFULLY
SELECTED STOCK OF
GENERAL GOODS,**
Which he has determined upon offering at those recently-erected and centrally-situated
premises, the
BOAT HARBOUR STORE,
At prices which will be found strictly in accordance with the times.
The STOCK, which is extensive and choice, consists of
**DRAPERY, GROCERY, IRONMONGERY,
HABERDASHERY, &c., &c.,**
Too numerous to particularise, all of which will be offered at the
Lowest possible Prices.
J. W. would respectfully solicit a call from the ladies, whom, he flatters himself, he is
in a position to furnish with
GOODS, FANCY AND PLAIN,
Equal, if not superior, to any other house in the district,
AND AT PRICES DEFYING COMPETITION.
**ALL KINDS OF COLONIAL PRODUCE TAKEN IN EXCHANGE, FOR WHICH
THE BEST PERCENTAGE
WILL BE ALLOWED.**
As J. W.'s motto is
Small Profits and Quick Returns,
He is determined to dispose of his goods
FOR CASH ONLY.

June 1868 saw the commencement of a direct weekly service – Gerringong Boat Harbour to Sydney - by the 20 ton sailing ship AGENORIA belonging to and under the command of Captain Alexander Buchanan.²⁰ This service proved to be so popular that on many occasions two other vessels, the WILLIAM & ANNE plus the ketch "MISSIE" had to be brought in to help move the volume of produce.²¹

*'At one time, the export trade of Gerringong by Captain Buchanan's crafts was over £10,000 in value per month from Gerringong and its vicinity.'*²²

From June 1868 – December 1869, the AGENORIA made 48 pick-ups and during that period transported the following massive amount of butter and other cargo to Sydney: **4,605 kegs of butter, 1,026 pigs, 123 calves, 148 cases of eggs, 243 sides of bacon, 90 coops of poultry and 154 bundles of hides and skins.**²³

1. *Kiama Examiner*, 5 November, 1859
2. *Kiama Examiner*, 12 May, 1860 – 27 June, 1860
3. McCaffrey, Frank *First Century of Dairying in N.S.W.* p 52-53
4. McCaffrey, Frank *First Century of Dairying in N.S.W.*, p. 36
5. *Kiama Examiner*, 27 August, 1859
6. *Kiama Examiner*, 30 April 1860
7. *The Examiner*, 22 August, 1860
8. *Kiama Examiner*, 10 December, 1859
9. *Kiama Examiner*, 24 December, 1859
10. *The Examiner*, 7 January, 1860
11. *Kiama Examiner*, 17 March, 1860
12. *Kiama Examiner*, 29 January 1861
13. *The Examiner*, 24 September, 1861
14. *The Examiner*, 24 September, 1861
15. *Empire* 29 April, 1863
16. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 July, 1863
17. Andrews Graeme, *South Coast Steamers – Maritime History Publications* p.5
18. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 February, 1866
19. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 February, 1866
20. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 June, 1868
21. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 September, 1868
22. *The Kiama Independent, and Shoalhaven Advertiser*, 5 August, 1897 [The Late Mr. Alex. Buchanan, Master Mariner.]
23. *Sydney Morning Herald, Empire & Kiama Independent Coastal Shipping* June 1868 - December 1869

PHOTOS: **Rose Valley** - Ken Noble Collection

Butter Keg- Illawarra Historical Society

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