

CHAPTER 3

The Mansions

This is how the "Illustrated News" dated 15th September, 1866 spoke of Rushcutters Bay on Page No. 37 (Reference M.L. Reel FM4.4301):-

"The arm of our beautiful harbour known as Rushcutters Bay is familiar to all residing within the vicinity of Sydney. It is situated immediately to the eastward of Woolloomooloo Bay, from which it is separated by Potts' Point, the most fashionable suburb of Sydney. Darling Point, the eastern shore of the Bay is almost as aristocratic and is chiefly occupied by very fine mansions, two of which contain galleries of art unequalled in Australia. The heights around the Bay are also studded with fine villas, most of them commanding a view of the placid water of Port Jackson."

The first building in the area in which we are concerned was James Underwood's three-storey brick and stone building with a flat roof, which was built in 1804 a little below and slightly to the west of where "Juniper Hall" stands today and at the time it was said to be more elaborate than the Governor's residence. James Underwood's address after streets were made was Paddington Street.

When James Underwood, Robert Cooper and Francis Forbes were given a 100-acre land grant for the purpose of building a Gin Distillery, James Underwood chose the area stretching along South Head Road (now Oxford Street) roughly from Glenmore Road to Point Piper Road (now Jersey Road) and his partners agreed.

They apparently came to an agreement that each should have three acres assigned to each for the purpose of building a home, the three acres being leased to each one by the other two. Robert Cooper chose his three acres first and this choice was agreed to by the other two and Robert Cooper built the original section of "Juniper Hall" on his three acres in 1822-1823 enclosing them by a stone wall.

In 1822 Francis Forbes had been considerably overworked in his duties as Chief Justice and his health suffered accordingly, so he requested extended leave to return to England to recuperate. He left in 1822, but returned to Australia in 1824. He again went to England in 1836 and received his knighthood in 1837, but he retired three months later and died in 1841.

Before leaving for England Francis Forbes sold all his rights in the one-third share of the 100 acres, including the three acres on which he was supposed to build a house and also his one-third share in the distillery to James Underwood. James Underwood bought it at public auction for £1,700 "of lawful money of Great Britain" the bill of sale read.

Subsequently Underwood and Cooper quarrelled about the building of the distillery and so they decided to dissolve the partnership, seeking the services of a firm of solicitors to adjudicate. It was decided James Underwood should pay Robert Cooper £1640/10/- for his share of the land, apart from the land on which "Juniper Hall" was built and surrounded by a stone wall, as well as his share of the distillery. You will read all about this in a following chapter about the famous court case which followed and was not settled for 12 years! James Underwood then built a fine house with a lovely garden for himself near the distillery.

Until 1824 there were only two roads in the vicinity of Rushcutters Bay - South Head Road and New South Head Road - both of which led from the city to the lighthouse at South Head. Of course they were not sealed roads as we have now, but just wide dirt tracks and water carts constantly patrolled the streets to lay the dust in the Summer and in rainy weather the men on the carts tried to cope with the mud and slush.

In 1824 James Underwood opened the distillery with a flourish. Six bay horses dragged a wagon with a huge cask on it from Frog's Hollow to his property near the top of the hill and he presented a sample of the gin he had brewed to the Governor.

From then on the bullock drays dragging loads of casks up the hill to the hotels along South Head Road and probably right into the town took the easiest way for them to go and very soon this became a marked route and it was named Glenmore Road and little attempt was made to alter the twists and turns it made from New South Head Road to South Head Road.

The name "Glenmore" (Reference h) was chosen by Messrs. Cooper, Forbes and Underwood because the district resembled the Vale of Glenmore in the Counties of Moray and Inverness on the Spey near Abernethy, Scotland.

During 1822-1823 Robert Cooper had "Juniper Hall" built and perhaps whilst the building was being constructed, Cooper claimed he was entitled to another three acres to the west of "Juniper Hall". This claim was denied by Underwood, but at that time neither one could prove his claim. You will hear more about this in Chapter 5.

Between 1823 and 1869 many mansions were built either above or below Glenmore Road, although Glenmore Road was not actually made until 1880.

Those built above Glenmore Road were:-

James Underwood's home built 1804.

"Juniper Hall" built by Robert Cooper 1822-23.

"Flinton" probably built by Sir Roger Therry in 1834, but sold to a Mr. Woodhouse, who rented it to William Dean who was the first auctioneer in the area and it is interesting to note the Estate Agency business in Oxford Street was operated under the name of Reginald Dean until 1988.

"Engehurst" built by Frederick Hely, but not completed until 1835, three years after Mr. Hely's death.

"Bradley Hall" built by Thomas Broughton in 1845.

"Duxford" built for John Gurner in 1843.

"Elfred House" built in 1843 as W.T. Cape's Academy.

"Olive Bank Villa" built in 1869 for John Elly Begg Snr.

Those built below Glenmore Road were:-

James Underwood's second home near the distillery.

"Lohort" built by the Ridleys.

"Deepdene House" built by W.G. McCarthy, later owned by Dr. Bottrell.

"Glen Ayr" built by Mr. Justice Matthew Henry Stephen in 1860.

"The Terraces" built for Judge Kinchela in the 1840s but later sold to Barton Bradley.

Although there were only a dozen houses with their families and servants living in them, the Postal Authorities established a Rushcutters Bay Post Office (Reference j) in New South Head Road on the opposite side from where the present Rushcutters Bay Post Office is and much further east. It operated between 1863-1870.

When Olive Bank Villa was built in 1869, there were only about 50 house-holders in Paddington (i.e. outside the parish area) but by 1885 there were thousands. That was the year the new Paddington Post Office was opened. The Town Hall was built in 1891 and at that time Paddington was classified as the most prosperous suburb in Sydney.

The Ridleys who lived in "Lohort" leased the lower part of their property and it was used as market gardens. In fact, these gardens supplied all the vegetables to all the people in the Colony in the early days of the settlement. Later the land right up to the distillery was leased by Chinese market gardeners, until Council, acting on a petition by many living in the area who said the area was unhealthy, closed it down.

Only section of four of the houses are standing today - "Juniper Hall" which was restored to its former appearance as a Bicentennial Celebration Project, "Olive Bank Villa" in Heeley Street, which is now used as a Day Nursery and part of The Terraces now the Scottish Hospital and, as previously mentioned, one wall of "Engehurst" is part of a block of units in Ormond Street,

The approximate sites of these mansions are shown at the beginning of this book on the map showing the land grants.

A map dated 1878 in the Lands Department shows the low and high tide mark readings in Rushcutters Bay for several different years. The map shows William Street coming to the top of the hill at Kings Cross, William Street East leading down the hill to Rushcutters Bay, then a single arch stone bridge called "Bentley's Bridge" (which replaced a timber trestle bridge) joining William Street East and New South Head Road. All tide marks came near the bridge on the water side and the horizontal lines were broken there indicating that the water flowed under the bridge and into the area which is shown on the map as the Valley of Lacroza. Also, as previously mentioned, a large area south of New South Head Road was shown as marshy swamps. Another map, part of which is shown opposite [*Map of 1878 showing high water marks and Valley of Lacrozia*] shows the valley being in the area between New South Head Road and Glenmore Road. From the map and the name itself, it would be reasonable to assume that the foot of Glen Street would be the lowest level of the valley. To substantiate this - in the 1920s there was a gully at the bottom of Glen Street and in it was a two-storey wooden house, of which only the top storey with a balcony and the roof were visible from the street. It was necessary to run down a very steep slope to enter the house from Glen Street, but one could easily approach it through the wilderness at the foot of the Scottish Hospital grounds as there was no fence between the house and the hospital grounds at that time.

It was said by residents who had lived in the district for many years that a boat builder had lived in the two-storey house and he used to construct his boats on his land and when they were finished, launch them in the water not far from the boundary of his property.

On two occasions during the late 1920s, the writer witnessed officers of the Fire Brigade rescuing an elderly couple from the balcony on the first floor of the house, when the culvert at the bottom of Glen Street could not cope with the water rushing down the street after excessive rain and the gully, in which the house

was built was full of water, as was the ground floor of the house. The house was empty for a long period after that and when the Cahill Expressway was being constructed (1953-1958) rocks blasted from the Circular Quay area were used to completely fill the gully at the foot of Glen Street and bury what was then left of the house.

Then Stephen Street between Glen and Cooper Streets was made and a fence erected along the side of the Scottish Hospital. Much later, when the Housing Commission flats and other flats were built in that part of Stephen Street, a pathway with steps was constructed between Cooper and Stephen Street. It is interesting at this point to say a portion of the gully can still be seen in Stephen Street, behind the houses facing Brown Street near Dillon Street, the place where the recently-constructed children's playground is situated.

It must be remembered the land of Rushcutters Bay Park, the Weigall Sports Ground and the White City grounds all had to be filled in before it could be used, because it was mainly marshy swamps and no doubt this was partly the reason why the Eastern Suburbs Railway had to be built above ground in that area, as there would be no rock foundation as there is in other parts of Sydney.

The map of 1878 was issued in association with the resumption of an area of 6½ acres of land to be used for the forming of Rushcutters Bay Park.

From the middle of the 1850s a lot of land which had been reserved as Common Land or Pasture Land was released for sale and auctioned. No doubt the owners of the properties in the Rushcutters Bay area realized they would soon be surrounded by hundreds of houses and they would no longer be living in idyllic seclusion and most of them must have decided to go further afield. John Gurner was not one of them - he stayed in his home "Duxford" until he died, as did his three unmarried daughters. The last one died in 1885 and the remainder of the Gurner property was sold in 1886. Thomas Broughton bought "Duxford" for £3,100.

The Council was unable to cope with making all the new roads which were necessary through the subdivision of the large estates, so in 1876 the Council ruled that the property owners of large estates were responsible for making the necessary roads or streets before selling the building blocks, which no doubt explains why so many streets in the area have the names of the early owners.

John Elly Begg Snr. and Jnr. and Thomas Broughton (Reference k) were men who did not receive land grants from the Crown, but they became substantial owners of land in the area in which we are interested, so we shall now hear something about them. Senior first rented the gin distillery plant in 1862 from James Underwood, who at the time was the sole owner of the property and later Mr. Begg purchased it. He then moved the family tannery business from Stanley Street to the site carrying on the business there as John Elly Begg & Son until 1890.

He sold some of the Distillery land and made a roadway to the tannery and extended Cascade Street. In 1879 John Begg Snr. apparently built three small houses on the tannery property for his workers as the names of six tanners are listed as living in them, two in each, in Sands 1880 directory. These houses are still standing in Hampden Street, which was originally called "Tannery Road (off Glenmore Road)" in Sands Directories of 1882 and 1883, then for a few years it is shown as Ebenezer Street, but in 1905 it was called Hampden Street, no doubt in honour of Viscount Hampden who was Governor of N.S.W. 1895-1899. (Incidentally, Ebenezer was the nickname of John Begg Senior's youngest son Norman). In 1891 the business appears in the Directory as "G.B. Vickery's Glenmore Tannery".

John Begg Jnr. bought "Juniper Hall" from Robert Cooper about 1871 and later he bought William Timothy Cape's "Elfred" estate, which enabled him to have a road made from South Head Road (Oxford Street) to Glenmore Road and he called it Begg Street. After his death the name was changed to Ormond Street (you will recall having read that Judge Kinchela changed the name of "Juniper Hall" to

Ormonde Hall when he bought the house from Robert Cooper, as it had been the Marquess of Ormonde who had assisted him in getting the appointment as Attorney-General in N.S.W.). Now the only thing to remind us of the Beggs is an unpretentious lane running behind the houses in Ormond Street on the western side and the Royal Hospital grounds.

Thomas Broughton (References 1 and m) was another who had not been granted any land, but he bought lots 21 and 22 which had been granted to William Lithgow, the Attorney General. Thomas Broughton had a long and interesting life, as was reported in two newspapers at the time of the death on 12th December, 1901.

He was born on 20th August, 1810 at Windsor and was quite young when he was orphaned and went to the city. He was originally apprenticed to a tailor and eventually owned a very successful tailoring business. He married in 1837 and had six sons and four daughters. In 1842 he was elected to the City Council. Four years later he became Mayor of Sydney, a position he held for one year only but he was an alderman for about 12 years.

He was one of the first members of the Legislative Assembly under the Electoral Reform Act of 1858 and he was offered a portfolio on several occasions, but he always declined saying he was too busy. In 1845 he built "Bradley Hall" on his eight acre property and he lived there until 1889, by which time he had bought about eight acres of the Gurner estate. He then moved to Glebe and "Bradley Hall" was demolished. In 1898 all his property was divided into building sites and auctioned. This was the last of the large estates to be sub-divided and sold.

In addition to his property in Sydney, he owned two large estates in the country "Muttama" and "Gundagai" which totalled 60,000 acres and a large estate on the North Shore - the Artarmon Estate of 300 acres in the heart of Willoughby.

Apart from being a very successful business man, it is obvious he was also a very public spirited person, so it is not surprising

that he was very influential in having a church established in
Glenmore Road.