

THE WELLS GEOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY

The unscrambling of history is built on books like the Wells Dictionary, published in 1848 and printed in Sydney. This was 3 years before gold was found at Ophir, near Orange, which changed the pessimistic outlook when New South Wales was losing many prospectors to the gold strike in California. Circumstances changed so much that the population in New South Wales tripled in 10 years.

The preface to the Dictionary states "The want of information which prevails in England respecting this colony, has long been a subject of observation and Complaint." The language is rather quaint by modern standards but very much conveys relevant information as far as it was known at that time.

The entry relating to Barrenjoey gives us some of the flavour of the time. "Barrenjoey is a point of land, situated in the parish of Warrabeen, in the hundred of Packerham, and County of Cumberland, NSW ; It is a rocky peninsula, bounded by the sea on the E and Pittwater on the W..... This remarkable spot is inhabited by one or two old fisherman, who supply the settlers of the Hawkesbury as far as the river admits of navigation. They also ferry travellers across Broken Bay to Brisbane Water. Coasting vessels often put in here for safety as well as steamers weatherbound from the northward. "

In summary every geographical point from Abbeygreen to Zero are included although on present day inspection many of those place names have disappeared.

The Dictionary was what many hopeful immigrants had in their hands in their first days in the new colony and gives an invaluable insight into how the colony described itself on the eve of the gold rush. We hope they treated the spelling as approximate and were not confused by the use of the term hundred as it disappeared shortly after only to survive in the present day in South Australia.