

Maitland and District Historical Society Inc.

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Peter F Smith
Historian and Author

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*The Aims of the Society are to
Discover, Record, Preserve, Advise on and Teach the History of Maitland and the
District*

Maitland and District Historical Society Inc.

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Location: 3 Cathedral Street Maitland (opposite Bishop's House)

Lecture meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month from 5:30-7.00pm as a forum for lectures, talks and presentations.

Committee meetings are held on the third Tuesday of even months from 5:30-7.00pm.

General meetings are held on the third Tuesday of odd months from 5:30-7.00pm.
Members are invited to attend all monthly meetings.

Meetings are held at the Society's rooms, 3 Cathedral Street Maitland.

Membership fees : \$25 (single) and \$35 (double / family)

The rooms are open between 11 and 3 on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

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Editor's Notes: This Bulletin has an early Maitland theme. Jim Waddell has written an extensive article on Stockade Hill. The first part is in this edition. The second part of his history will appear in the November Bulletin. In July this year historian Peter F Smith returned to Maitland and hosted several functions which dealt with Maitland's early years. We have included an illustrated article about those functions. We conclude with a piece on the English artist John Skinner Prout, who painted in the Maitland area in the 1840s. This article appeared in the *Maitland Mercury* in 2023.

STOCKADE HILL – PART I: Pre-eminence of Church and School in the planned township

By Jim Waddell (2024)

Stockade Hill in East Maitland has a significant place in the early history of the Hunter region. It was once the site of two important facilities, of which the first was a brick School House built in 1829 and used as a church. The second was a convict stockade and soldiers' barracks of timber construction used to confine the iron gang, and later as an immigration depot.

The original streets of East Maitland south-east of Melbourne Street had been planned and laid out in 1829 to be the official Town of Maitland, but consisted largely of virgin bush. It was intended to be the administrative capital for the Hunter; and there was already an official government residence, police barracks and lock-up on the western side of the hill overlooking Wallis Creek.

The Surveyor General, Major Mitchell, reported on 23 May 1829 that the spot selected for the township was "on some gently sloping hills situated in the angle formed by the road to Newcastle and that to the Store ship at the head of the Navigation". He explained that the road to Newcastle crossed the principal ridge at right angles, "and thus establishes the direction of the Streets." "Parallel to the Newcastle Road, and nearly equidistant, on each side of it, two Hills, connected and level with the cross ridge, extend towards Wallis' Plains." Of those two hills, that on the south-west eventually became Stockade Hill, while that to the north-east eventually became the location of the gaol. Of the future Stockade Hill, Mitchell wrote:

The spot selected for the Church, is the brow of a fine eminence overlooking the approach from Wallis' Plains. The slope is gentle and regular though the Height is considerable ... I would recommend that the whole of this Hill should be reserved for the recreation of the Inhabitants, with the exception of an acre and a half for the Church and Burial Grounds; that a broad Belt of Trees should be left when the Timber is cut, as a Promenade on each side of an approach from the low ground, and the whole reserved

as a Park, to which the buildings on the opposite side of Newcastle Street, would present a front.ⁱ

The church site was thus intended to be the centrepiece of the town plan. Mitchell further explained that "King Street is laid down so that the Church on the hill may be exactly in prolongation of its centre".ⁱⁱ As a burial ground was ultimately laid out some distance away adjoining the glebe, the church site was reduced to one square acre.

It was also described as the site for a Church and School. On 12 March 1829 Mitchell had instructed his local representative, Assistant Surveyor G.B. White, to point out to the assistant Surveyor of Roads the situation for the Church and School. It had been selected by Archdeacon Scott, who headed the Church of England in NSW. Its boundary was to be wholly surrounded by a street, from which the timber was to be cleared as a priority.ⁱⁱⁱ

Scott's pragmatic intention was to erect a School House which could also be used as a church. As Archdeacon and King's Visitor of schools, he was directly responsible for the administration both of the Church and of public education in the colony. At Scott's behest, the Church and School Corporation called tenders in March 1829 for the erection of a brick school house at Wallis' Plains or Hunter's River, which was built on the site selected on what would later become Stockade Hill, East Maitland. The plan and specification, now in the NSW State Archives, show a structure 41 feet x 20 feet on stone foundations, with a smaller room projecting from one side, and a bellcote at the apex of a gable at one end of a shingled roof.^{iv}

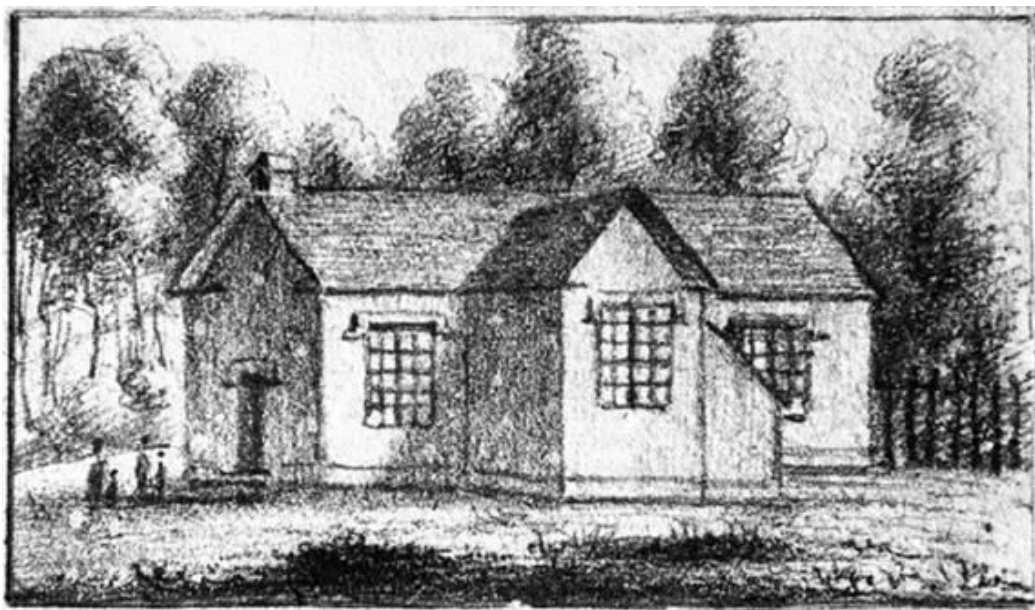
When completed in December 1829, the School House was said to be "the very best upon the Hunter, & would do credit to Sydney."^v It was immediately used as a primary school under the superintendence of the Church, with the schoolmaster residing in an adjoining slab dwelling; and it continued to be used as a school until 1868. The curriculum was later governed by the Denominational School Board, and later still by the Council of Education. The school had first been established on 1 October 1827, and previously occupied a former inn on the low-lying ground.^{vi}

The School House was also used as a church for public worship on Sundays, the services being held sometimes by a clergyman visiting from Newcastle, but more often by a local settler appointed for the purpose. On his vice-regal visit to Maitland in April 1833 Governor Bourke attended divine service in the School House, when the Rev. C.P.N. Wilton preached.^{vii} The Rev. Samuel Marsden officiated in it in September 1833.^{viii} Here also, on 10 November 1836, the sacrament of Confirmation was first administered in East Maitland by the newly-consecrated Bishop Broughton.^{ix} From 1834 services were conducted by the resident clergyman at Maitland the Rev. G.K. Rusden, who officiated at the School House until the first St Peter's Church was completed further down the hill in 1840.

Between 1829 and 1833 it must have become obvious that the School House would not be an adequate substitute for a church in the longer term. The purpose of Bourke's visit to Maitland in 1833 was to inspect and plan the township with Major Mitchell, and it is likely that the site for the later St Peter's Church was selected on that occasion. The site in Newcastle Road between William Street and Banks Street was favoured as the site for a church by the Government in 1834, was measured and marked off for that purpose in 1835, and was approved by Bourke in 1836.^x

The prominence of the earlier Church and School site on the hill had been accentuated in 1829 by juxtaposing it at 45 degrees to the parallelogram of the Maitland town plan, separating a public square (Cook's Square) on its southern boundary from the park on the northern side. The concept of Cook's Square never eventuated except on paper, but the park situated to its north eventually became Cook's Square Park. This was evidently a corruption of the name used for both areas collectively, which was 'Cook's Square and Park'.^{xi} By 1952 it had become 'Cook's Square Park' in official records,^{xii} and the area originally intended for the square had been subdivided.

Governor Bourke in 1833 had ordered that the native trees in the Park of Maitland (the later Stockade Hill) were never to be cut down or destroyed.^{xiii} Despite the later use of the park as the location for a convict stockade and soldiers' barracks, it is interesting to note that as late as 1861 children traversing Stockade Hill between the School House, on its "finely elevated spot in the reserve", and the old St Peter's Church, walked there by a route "winding through the bush".^{xiv}

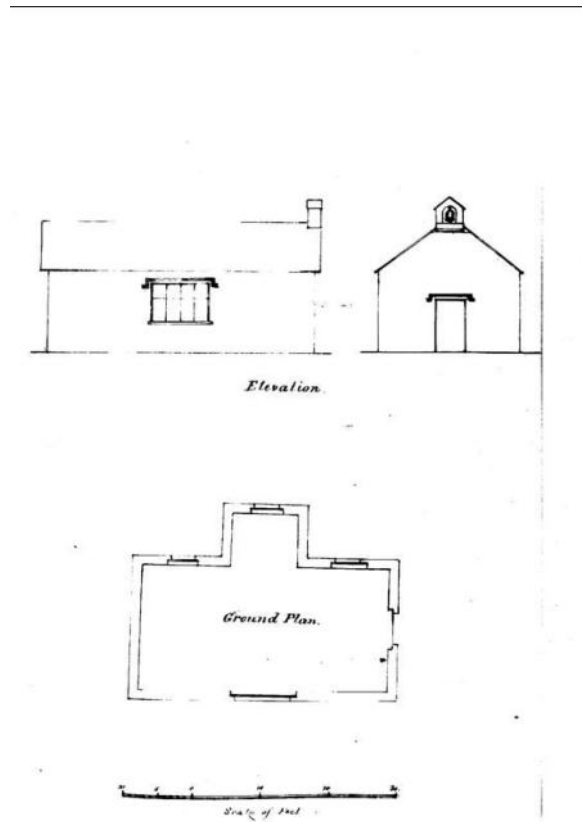


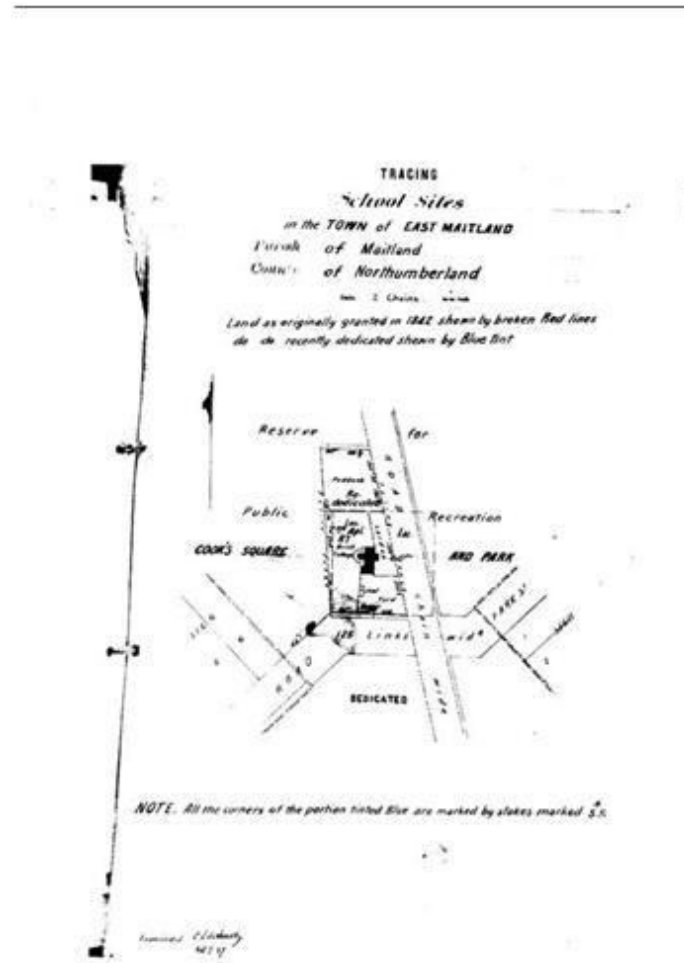
Schoolhouse in East Maitland 1838

But its location eventually proved deleterious to the conduct of a Church of England denominational school. In 1864 Bishop Tyrrell described the School

House at East Maitland as “very old & dilapidated, & situated out of the Town on a high clayey hill” so that parents were deterred from sending their children to it.^{xv} By this time it was competing with other primary schools, including a National School, which had sprung up in the more central, lower-lying parts of the township. Enrolments in the Church of England denominational school on Stockade Hill had declined from 116 children in 1857 to 40 in 1866,^{xvi} which the rector of St Peter’s Church attributed to “the wretched state of the approaches to the School”,^{xvii} and to its unfavourable position and the opposition of other schools in more favoured situations.^{xviii} In 1868, therefore, the school was re-located to a new and larger school room built in a more central position at the bottom of the hill, adjacent to the old St Peter’s Church.^{xix} This was the brick building now known as St Peter’s parish hall, in Banks Street.

Still owned by the Church but no longer used as a school after 1868, the old School House on Stockade Hill was converted into a private residence called “the Cedars” and was let to tenants. It contained six rooms, kitchen, servants’ room, stable, coach-house, loft, laundry, and two large underground tanks. It commanded an uninterrupted view of the surrounding country.^{xx} In 1887 to accommodate a new line of road across Stockade Hill between Brisbane Street and William Street, the original site of one square acre was resumed by government and re-dedicated in an elongated configuration of equivalent area (at the corner of Brisbane Street and Park Street).^{xxi}





Prior to the First World War, the Cedars was said to be haunted by "a woman in white". Still let to tenants as late as 1923, it was reported in 1924 to be in ruinous condition and was demolished in 1928-29 and the materials sold. The land was subdivided in 1950 into seven blocks on which modern cottages were built (numbered 23 to 31 Brisbane Street, and 39 and 41 Park Street).^{xxii}

A once-popular belief that executions were conducted on Stockade Hill is probably myth. The supposed recollection of an old man, Frederick Crew, of having seen a gallows on Stockade Hill in 1830 when he was young is of doubtful reliability:

I arrived in Newcastle late in November, 1830, when there was a rough track, called a road, between Newcastle and Maitland, and came in a dray to Maitland from Newcastle on November 30, 1830. As I came over the hill from One Mile Creek, two things struck me. I saw on my left, on Stockade Hill, a gallows, and on my right hand side, the unfinished walls of the Roman Catholic Chapel which was not roofed over.^{xxiii}

But the historian W. Allan Wood doubted that story, noting that the name of Stockade Hill had made it the subject of fable and romance.

I know the story of the R.C. Chapel and the gallows standing on opposite sides of the gully at Maitland in 1830. That story collapses when it is found that no chapel stood there before 1834.^{xxiv}

The story of Frederick Crew was associated with a dubious claim that five men had been hanged at Stockade Hill on the morning of the day on which he claimed to have passed by,^{xxv} but the historical record tells a different story. In 1830 the Supreme Court ordered that a Circuit Court be held at the Public School-house in the Town of Maitland, Wallis' Plains, commencing on 15 April 1830, for the trial of crimes and misdemeanours.^{xxvi} Mr Justice Dowling presided, and 27 prisoners were tried by jury, four of them being tried twice in separate trials. Of nine men against whom sentence of death was passed, five were ordered for execution on such day as the Governor should appoint.^{xxvii} Charles Boydell passing through Maitland on 29 April 1830 "saw the preparations for the execution of seven unfortunate wretches found guilty at the late assizes, a large drop was being erected in the forest just opposite the New Inn (Muir's)".^{xxviii} This was near the cross-roads of Melbourne Street and Newcastle Road.

The executions took place on 30 April 1830. W. Allan Wood refuted another story:

According to tradition, Father Therry was enabled to attend the condemned men of the Catholic faith before their execution "on Stockade Hill". That spot was too secluded for such a spectacle. The men were hanged at the cross roads.^{xxix}

The burial of three of the condemned men was conducted by John Wood,^{xxx} a settler appointed as catechist in the absence of a priest of the Church of England. As for the others, Father Therry had been privately informed in Sydney that the criminals under sentence at Maitland were to be executed on 30 April 1830, and requested that the Governor should order him the use of a good horse or any mode of conveyance by land or water to enable him to be there.^{xxxi}

W. Allan Wood conjectured that "[p]ossibly a contrast between the R.C. Chapel and gallows on the opposite hill stimulated the imagination of a traveller, not earlier than the Spring of 1834, but virgin bush between, which stood untouched in 1838, would have hidden the view."^{xxxii} He doubted

that men swung from gallows where little children attended school on week days in a building which until 1839 [sic] was a place of worship on Sundays. There was no reason for exhibition in the gum forest of such a gruesome spectacle, as there was at the cross-roads.^{xxxiii}

In later times, Stockade Hill was undoubtedly the scene of convict floggings, as evidenced by the employment of a scourger at the stockade. Executions certainly took place in later years in the gaol at the opposite end of William Street.

ⁱ Report on the Town of Maitland by Major Thomas Mitchell, 23 May 1829, NSW State Archives and Records Office NRS-906-1-[4/2519] – 4/2519.9 Townships – sites, etc., Maitland 1828-33.

ⁱⁱ Report on the Town of Maitland by Major Thomas Mitchell, 23 May 1829, NSW State Archives and Records Office NRS-906-1-[4/2519] – 4/2519.9 Townships – sites, etc., Maitland 1828-33.

ⁱⁱⁱ Quoted in James Waddell, *A History of St. Peter's Church, East Maitland N.S.W.*, published by the author in 1996, p.15.

^{iv} James Waddell, *A History of St. Peter's Church, East Maitland N.S.W.*, published by the author in 1996, pp.16-17.

^v James Waddell, *A History of St. Peter's Church, East Maitland N.S.W.*, published by the author in 1996, p.16.

^{vi} James Waddell, *A History of St. Peter's Church, East Maitland N.S.W.*, published by the author in 1996, pp.5-6.

^{vii} *The Sydney Monitor*, 27 April 1833, p.2 ("The Governor at Maitland").

^{viii} East Maitland parish marriage register, in Anglican Diocese of Newcastle archives, University of Newcastle Library.

^{ix} James Waddell, *A History of St. Peter's Church, East Maitland N.S.W.*, published by the author in 1996, p.19.

^x James Waddell, *A History of St. Peter's Church, East Maitland N.S.W.*, published by the author in 1996, pp.44-46.

^{xi} Government Gazette No.461, 25 June 1892, p.5155 (proclamation).

^{xii} Government Gazette No.124, 13 June 1952, p.2054 (notice).

^{xiii} W. Allan Wood, *Dawn in the Valley*, Wentworth Books, Sydney, 1972, p.298.

^{xiv} *Maitland Mercury*, 7 November 1861, p.3 ("St. Peter's, East Maitland").

^{xv} Letter of 20 June 1864 from the Rt. Rev. William Tyrrell to C.E. Robinson, Esq., secretary of the Denominational School Board, in NSW State Archives [1/319], Denominational School Board, letters received 1863-64.

^{xvi} Figure for 1857 from Further Appendix to the report of the Denominational School Board for 1857, in NSW State Archives [1/316], Denominational School Board, miscellaneous letters received 1859; and figure for 1866 from Inspector's report of a visit on 23 January 1867 to the Church of England School at East Maitland in response to an application for it to be certified under section 28 of the Public Schools Act, in NSW State Archives, NRS-2621, Council of Education, miscellaneous letters received 1867-75, 1/746, SR reel 1790.

^{xvii} Letter of 13 August 1867 from the Rev. Lovick Tyrrell to the Secretary of the Council of Education, in NSW State Archives, NRS-2621, Council of Education, miscellaneous letters received 1867-75, 1/746, SR reel 1790.

^{xviii} *Maitland Mercury*, 9 March 1867, p.4 ("East Maitland Parochial Association").

^{xix} Letter of 4 June 1867 from the Rt. Rev. William Tyrrell to the Secretary of the Council of Education, in NSW State Archives, NRS-2621, Council of Education, miscellaneous letters received 1867-75, 1/746, SR reel 1790.

^{xx} *Maitland Mercury*, 19 October 1878, p.8 (advertisement).

^{xxi} Government Gazette No.196, 2 April 1887, p.2379 (proclamation).

^{xxii} James Waddell, *A History of St. Peter's Church, East Maitland N.S.W.*, published by the author in 1996, p.21.

^{xxiii} Harold Campbell, *The Diocese of Maitland 1866-1966*, Catholic Diocese of Maitland, 1966, p.24.

^{xxiv} Letter (undated) 1969 from W. Allan Wood, Muswellbrook, to Mrs W.C. (Judith) Hawke, East Maitland.

^{xxv} Harold Campbell, *The Diocese of Maitland 1866-1966*, Catholic Diocese of Maitland, 1966, p.24.

^{xxvi} *Sydney Gazette*, 27 March 1830, p.1 (proclamation).

^{xxvii} *Sydney Gazette*, 6 May 1830, p.3 ("Maitland Circuit Court").

^{xxviii} Journal of Charles Boyde (1830-35), entry for 29 April 1830 (State Library of New South Wales).

^{xxix} Notes and observations on executions at Maitland, provided to Mrs W.C. (Judith) Hawke, East Maitland, under cover of a letter from W. Allan Wood, Muswellbrook, 8 April 1969.

^{xxx} East Maitland parish burial register, in Anglican Diocese of Newcastle archives, University of Newcastle Library.

^{xxxi} Letter of 27 April 1830 from Therry to the Colonial Secretary, in Eris M. O'Brien, *Life and Letters of Archpriest John Joseph Therry*, Angus & Robertson Ltd., Sydney, 1922, pp.320-21.

^{xxxii} Letter (undated) 1969 from W. Allan Wood, Muswellbrook, to Mrs W.C. (Judith) Hawke, East Maitland.

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Peter F Smith's visit to Maitland

By Chas Keys

In July we were visited by Peter F Smith, now a resident of Indiana in the USA but Maitland born and raised. Years ago he "caught the Maitland bug", as the late Harry Boyle put it to his face, and he began a decades-long search into Maitland's roots. He combed the records of land titles, constructing bit by bit the history of those who owned pieces of land in Maitland and how they used them. Thus he built a method in which the ground on which the place grew was made central to the story of its development.

His new book has recently been published. This is Book One ('Maitland's Rise: the Hill, the High Road and the River Flats') of 'The Footprints of Maitland's Old Hands Trilogy'. Books Two and Three are slated for release later this year and in 2025.

Book One is monumental, a work of great scholarship. It covers, more or less on a property-by-property basis for the older areas, East Maitland and that part of central Maitland west to Patrick Maloney's convict holding which straddled High St and spawned the original Central Business District between about today's Smith St and Hunter St. It traces the ownership and usage of many of the plots of land in the subject area, on the way gently correcting errors and mistakes in Maitland's history as recorded by previous writers. Book Two will deal similarly with the rest of the CBD and Book Three the parts of Maitland further west along with the estates of the surrounding rural area.

Smith's work has been painstaking, occupying decades and creating a history of more detail than we have ever had of early Maitland. His book will be a valuable source of reference for people interested in Maitland's history, especially its many amateur historians examining individuals and their properties in times past. It is available or can be ordered from McDonald's bookstore in High St.

While in Maitland, Smith conducted two walks along High St from the Maitland Regional Athletics Centre to about Elgin St. Among others he pointed out the sites of York Place (Sun St), where Drs William Peagum Coleman and David Sloan practised in a tiny private hospital in the 1830s, and the deep well just off Bulwer St which provided water for many in Maitland's early days. On the same day he also gave a talk ('A closer look at Maitland's past: fresh insights, new content, unseen images and early maps') to an appreciative audience of 140 people at the East Maitland Bowling Club. This talk provided many new insights into Maitland's rich history.

Smith has signalled with his book, walks and talk that he has become one of Maitland's leading historians alongside WA Wood, Cynthia Hunter, Harry Boyle, Les Fredman, Brian Walsh and Cameron Archer. He joins an august company.

(Editor: The following two photographs are of the walk. The subsequent two photographs are of the talk at East Maitland Bowling Club.)







A Brush with Fame: John Skinner Prout, painter

By Lisa Thomas

Just over 180 years ago John Skinner Prout, an English artist who attained an international reputation, came to the Lochinvar area and painted Harper's Hill.

Thirty-five year old John Skinner Prout arrived in New South Wales with his wife and children in December 1840. In England he had achieved recognition as an art teacher, water-colourist, and landscape painter. He also came from an eminent artistic family. His uncle Samuel Prout was "Painter in Water-Colours in Ordinary" to King George IV and later to Queen Victoria.

John Skinner Prout made his home in Sydney between December 1840 and January 1844, after which he moved to Tasmania.

Prout was particularly attracted by the Australian landscape. During the time he was living in Sydney he made several extended sketching tours to the regions around the city.

In 1841 Prout made a sketching tour north to the Lower Hunter. He painted several scenes around Newcastle and Port Stephens. Prout also travelled through the Maitland area, arriving in the Lochinvar district. It was here he produced a painting titled "Harper's Hill, Hunter River". Harper's Hill is a steep rise just to the west of Lochinvar.

John Skinner Prout's presence in Lochinvar was undoubtedly due to his friendship with the amateur artist John Rae, who knew the area well and very likely accompanied him on that trip.

Scotsman John Rae had arrived in New South Wales in 1839 to be the Australian secretary and accountant for the Aberdeen-based North British Australasian Loan and Investment Company. In 1840 the Company bought the central Lochinvar estate of Leslie Duguid's 1822 land grant.

The 1840 purchase included Duguid's Lochinvar House, which became the *de facto* headquarters for the Company. Lochinvar House sits below Harper's Hill, and it is probable that Prout stayed at Lochinvar House.

When Prout arrived in the Colony it was beginning to slip into an economic depression, but he needed to promote and sell his art works. Prout had brought a lithographic machine with him from England, which enabled him to reproduce his paintings for sale as lithographs. In 1842, with John Rae as his collaborator, he produced a multi-part set of lithographed views of Sydney and its surroundings titled "Sydney Illustrated".

The *Sydney Morning Herald* wrote (26 July 1847):

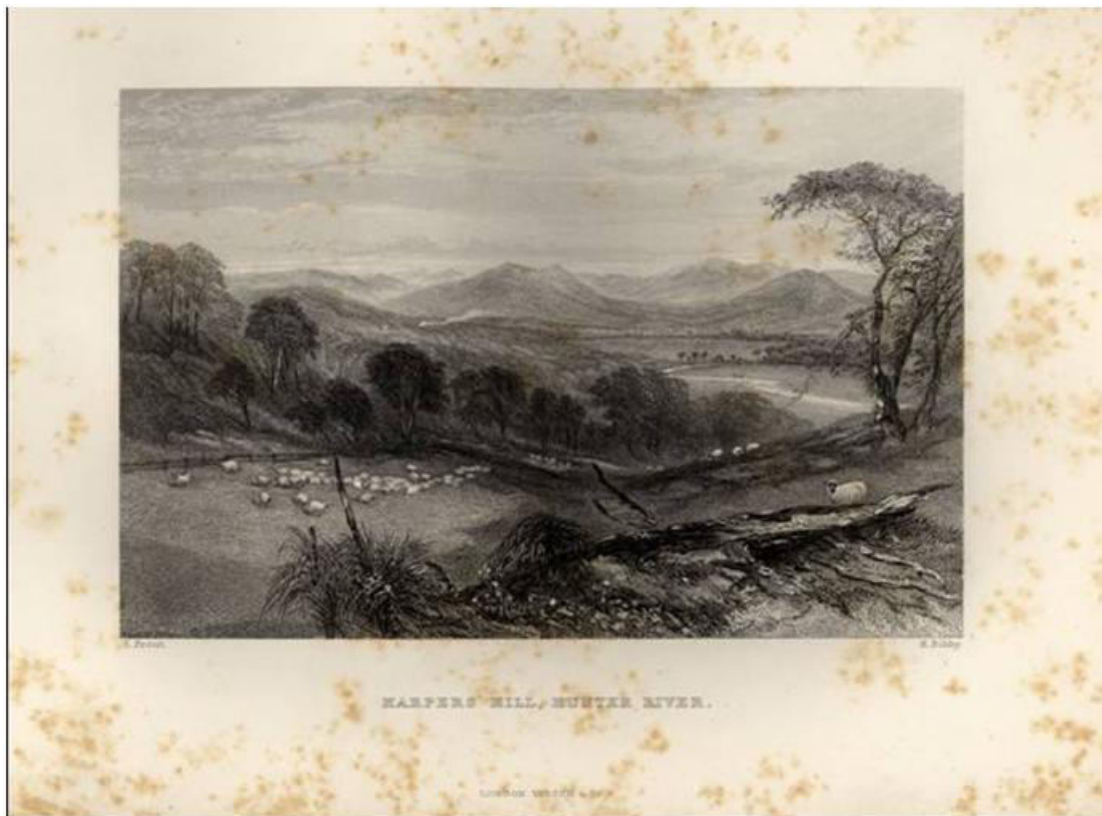
Of Prout's abilities as a landscape painter in water colours we have repeatedly spoken with admiration, and we think that his works...bear us out in the assertion that he is the best landscape artist who has appeared among us...On the whole he is an artist that does honour to the colony.

In 1848 Prout moved back to England, where exhibitions of his Australian scenes were hugely popular, particularly after the discovery of gold in Australia in the 1850s.

In England in 1874, engravings were made of several of Prout's Australian paintings, including that of Harper's Hill, one copy of which is now held by the University of Newcastle.

Prout continued to paint until his death in 1876.

John Skinner Prout was one of the most important artists to have worked in Colonial Australia. He is represented in museums and galleries throughout Australia and the UK, including the British Museum. The National Library of Australia holds over 100 of his works.



“Harper’s Hill, Hunter River” 1874 engraving by H. Bibby, based on the original 1841 work by John Skinner Prout. Courtesy of Special Collections, the University of Newcastle.