People in the Landscape: A Biography of Two Villages

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Interpreting the Australian rural landscape is presently an uncommon skill. While developing an archaeological test for historical and geographical locational models, the author, a consultant archaeologist based in Canberra, discovered a string of deserted villages in the eastern Riverina. This paper summarises the historical material about two of the villages to indicate the scope of data that may be overlooked by other disciplines but rediscovered by archaeologically guided research. The villages were a forgotten element of settlement that reflected both the regional struggle for land ownership and the lines of power crucial to the outcome of that struggle. Archaeology can substantively affect colonial settlement studies.

INTRODUCTION

The villages of colonial Australia have been rather a neglected area of study among historians and archaeologists. This is particularly true of those settlements beyond the Nineteen Counties in the Intermediate and Unsettled Areas[1] whose foundation was more speculative than planned. Speculative development produced a variety of settlements, some of which survived. A number became gazetted village locations although this was no guarantee of success. Whatever their status, whether occupied or deserted, these settlements provide the historical archaeologist with opportunities to study both the growth and decline of individual settlements and to study in more nomothetic terms the factors that influenced settlement location in colonial Australia.

This paper presents two case studies of village foundation and desertion in the eastern Riverina, New South Wales. It is a synthesis of research results drawn from documentary, oral and field data. It is written in a narrative fashion rather than the discussion of research method and excavated material that is more usual in archaeological circles. The biographical style of synthesis is deliberate. The two villages, and others found, were in an historical and archaeological limbo. The purpose of the paper is therefore to display a potential sphere for archaeological exploration into colonial Australia and the development of the modern landscape, that is a step beyond convenient documentary sources and historical models and even the fascination of excavating potsherds.

The initial research was designed to test interpretative locational models such as the commonplace that pubs, villages and towns grow up beside water courses and road junctions (the creeks and crossings model). The general factors of village settlement location are to be dealt with more fully in a second paper[2] but an alternative set of five locational criteria was developed[3] and in the course of testing these criteria a number of deserted and shrunken villages were located[4] (Fig. 1). The villages had been overlooked or confused by regional historians, with fatal consequences for the creeks and crossings model that most proclaimed.[5] In terms of archival research the confusion is understandable since two neighboring villages, for example, had nine names in the space of a century, five of which names were interchangeable. The muddle is resolved by certainty that the two sites can be physically identified. The villages, as discovered, represented a quite extensive rural population engaged in a surprising variety of economic enterprise, that ranged from gold mining to wine making—the famed Rutherglen and Ovens Valley vintners in Victoria owe much to deserted Kyeamba in New South Wales.

Neither of the villages to be described was formally planned and they received scant official acknowledgement. They developed in response to local perceptions of need and opportunity. Settlements of this nature offer an insight into colonial Australia that is relatively uncluttered by historic *personae* and the machinery of government. Repopulating on paper the forgotten settlements of Hillside and Little Billabong discloses some of the cultural forces that shaped the landscape and dictated the nature and distribution of the archaeological remains. The following reconstruction demonstrates the effect had on rural settlement by the interaction of entrenched pastoral interests with the proponents of the *Crown Lands Alienation Act* of 1861 (Robertson's Free Selection Act). In essence the Act conceded the right to select from 40 to 320 acres (16 to 130ha) of Crown Land to create a freehold property. The Act created a new type of settler, the free selector, in direct competition with the long established squatters who held by leasehold (redefined by the *Crown Lands Occupation Act* of 1861) the land now liable to alienation. The competition was real and at times it was brutal. Anybody can hire bullies: Hillside and Little Billabong display a more subtle chicanery that indicates the lines of power within colonial society.

HILLSIDE

Hillside was founded at the headwater of a major creek, the Little Billabong (Fig. 2). The nucleus of the settlement remains essentially comprises two hotel sites, a cemetery, a school site and a few house sites astride the Hume Highway. One of the hotels (Fig. 2:6) was also a coaching station which, with the cemetery (Fig. 2:13), visually dominates the remains in the field. The hotel and coaching station has been a pastoral homestead since about 1890. It poses two problems to the colonial archaeologist. Firstly, to unravel the development of the hotel and its transformation into a homestead and secondly to resolve the curiosity that a property called 'Hillside' should stand on the floor of a valley.

Settlement began in 1847 with Thomas Ford. He built an hotel and claimed a leasehold of 320 acres (130ha). It was

Fig. 1: The study area.
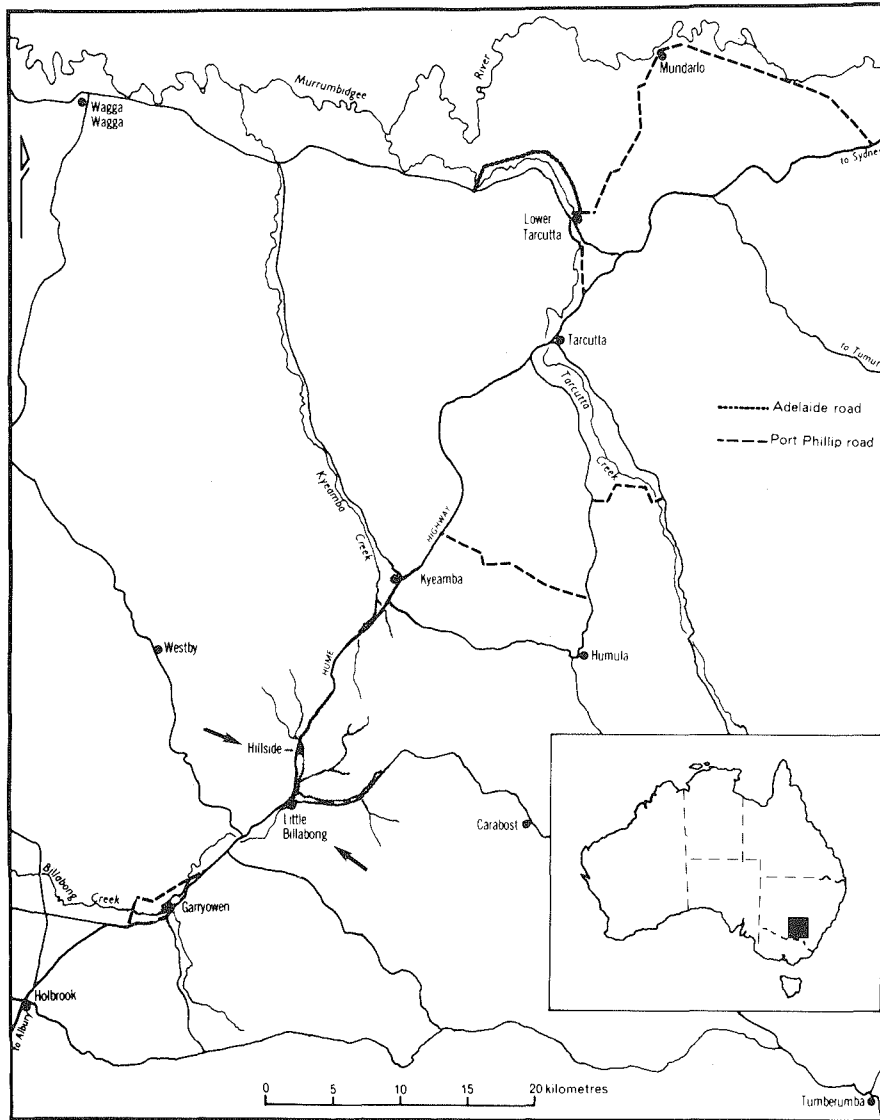
noted by Commissioner Bingham on 14 April 1847 as 'New Inn, Port Phillip Road'[6] and was recommended by Surveyor Townsend on 24 August 1848 as the centre of a public reserve:

'At Little Billabong—Ford's Inn—a reserve of one Section. There is an inn, stable on the property of Thomas Ford the claimant of the run, value about 60 pounds.'[7]

Ford called his establishment the *Woolpack Inn* (Fig. 2:5). This was the first of two hotel sites at Hillside. It was licensed to Edward Geary from 1850 to 1853. Henry Adams purchased the hotel and 50 acres (20ha) of land in 1858[8] but in 1860 he put it up for sale:

'. . . It contains twelve large rooms, the whole of which are well furnished with every requisite, also a large stone cellar, together with a six-stall stable, coach house, and harness room attached. Kitchen, storehouses, large room and pantry. The kitchen is well supplied with every utensil necessary. There is also a good kitchen garden, adjoining the hotel. The proprietor has commenced building a first-class stone store, a fourth of which is already completed, and there is sufficient stone on the ground to finish it.'[9]

The purchaser was James Keighran who called it *The Australian Arms*. At this point the fate of the building

Fig. 2: Hillside.

Legend:

——— raised path

⌐⌐ plot

x posthole

------- soil mark

++++ iron railing

🌳 eucalypt

0 2 4 6 8 10 metres

Figure labels: wire fence · Hume Highway Reservation · margin of 1980 plough · line · fence · 1873 · wire · undated fence line · 4 rail corner post
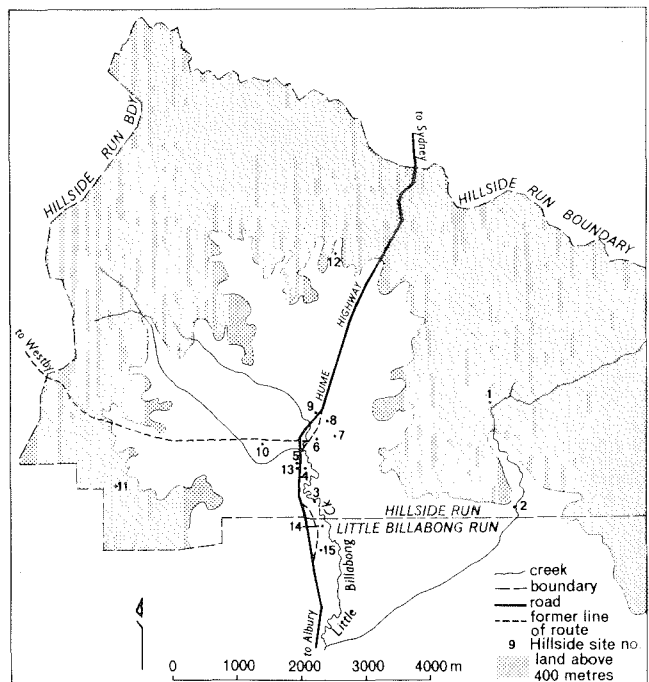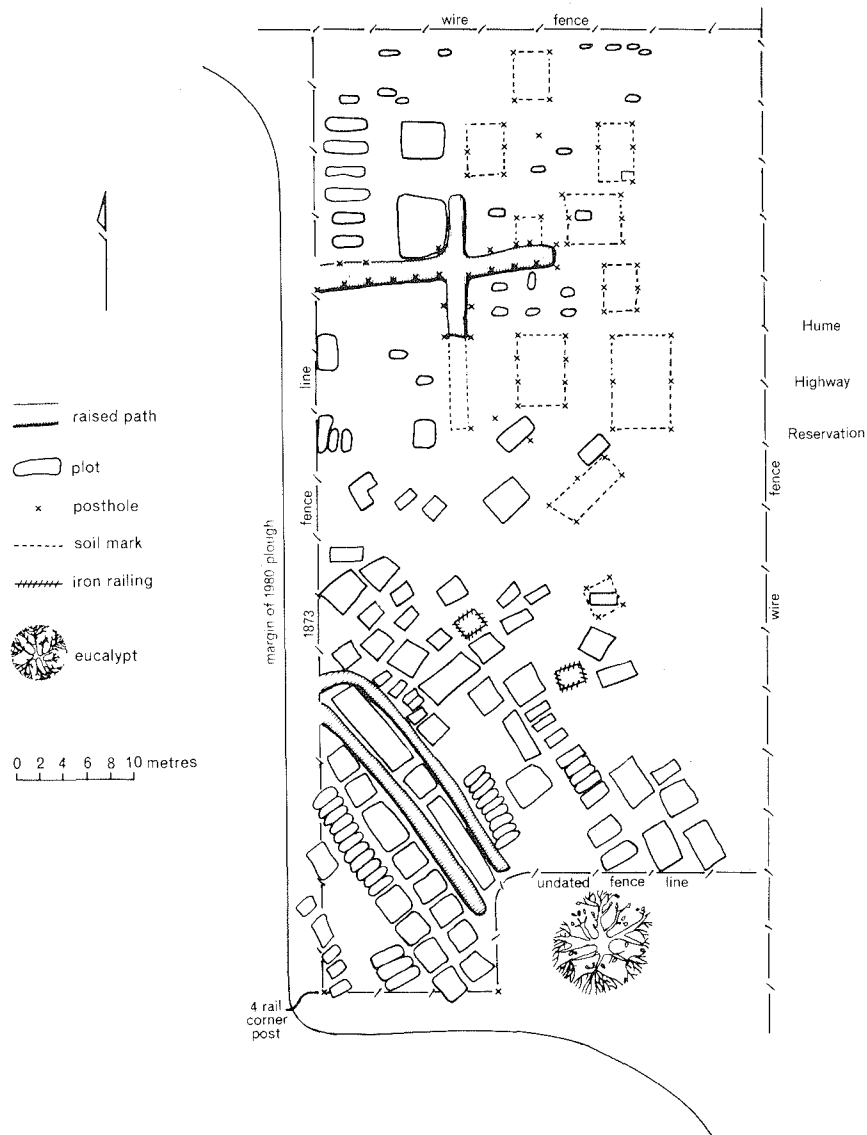
Fig. 3: The Hillside cemeteries.

becomes obscure for there are no further references to it among the Publicans' Licenses. James Keighran is next heard of in 1874 as the licensee of the *Traveller's Rest* at Dickson's Swamp (now Woomagarma) many kilometres to the south. Henry Adams, after proposing himself as a prospective storekeeper and Post Master at Tarcutta,[10] is once again resident at Hillside in 1866[11] but the last specific reference to the hotel is in 1865.[12] It is possible that Keighran remained there for a while as licensee, without a surviving record, but an 1871 survey of the neighbouring portion 18 does not mention the building which had earlier served as a datum. A small quantity of molten glass on the site suggests that the building suffered from fire. Clearly it did not long survive the loss of license.

The village cemetery deserves notice at this point in a brief digression from describing the sequence and distribution of settlement. It is visible from the Hume Highway as two small iron-railed enclosures immediately south of Henry Adams' *Woolpack Inn*. Figure 3 shows that there were two cemeteries, one at an angle to the other. This interpretation is confirmed by portion surveys from 1858 and 1871[13] which show a burial ground beside Henry Adams' garden aligned from north-west to south-east. The present alignment of north to south was imposed by the reservation of 'Lunt's Vale' cemetery in 1873.[14] It is reflected in the alignment of graves at the north end of the cemetery. Apart from these plans no records are known to have survived. Nothing was found in diocesan archives and there are only three headstones.

Although as much as a third of the earlier graveyard has been lost superficially to ploughing, there may be as many as 140 graves in 90 plots in the remaining two thirds. Unless Henry Adams' ale was a particularly virulent brew, this is an astonishing total for such a small settlement in the short time between 1847 and 1873. For comparison, there are 67 known and conjectured burials (1854 to 1922) at Lower Tarcutta 50 kilometres north, and 37 plots (1873 to 1924) in the Lunt's Vale cemetery. It suggests that Hillside was a node for a large area. This unrecorded burial ground has obvious implications for regional settlement studies and is but one of many forgotten settlement indicators that are accessible initially only to the field worker.

Large scale pastoralism, as distinct from the few acres farmed around the *Woolpack Inn*, began with Frederick Manning who established himself three kilometres east of the hotel on a slope overlooking the east branch of the Little Billabong Creek (Fig. 2:1). It is not known when Manning arrived but presumably it was after 1847 since he is not mentioned by Bingham whose records stop in April of that year. It is significant to the development of the area that Manning called his property 'Hillside'. Manning's homestead is shown in Figure 4. The figure was produced by recording surface marks, it corresponds closely to a survey drawn in 1890.[15] An earlier map from November 1870[16] shows a simpler establishment of house, garden, log fencing and a washpool for the sheep where the dam was later built. The
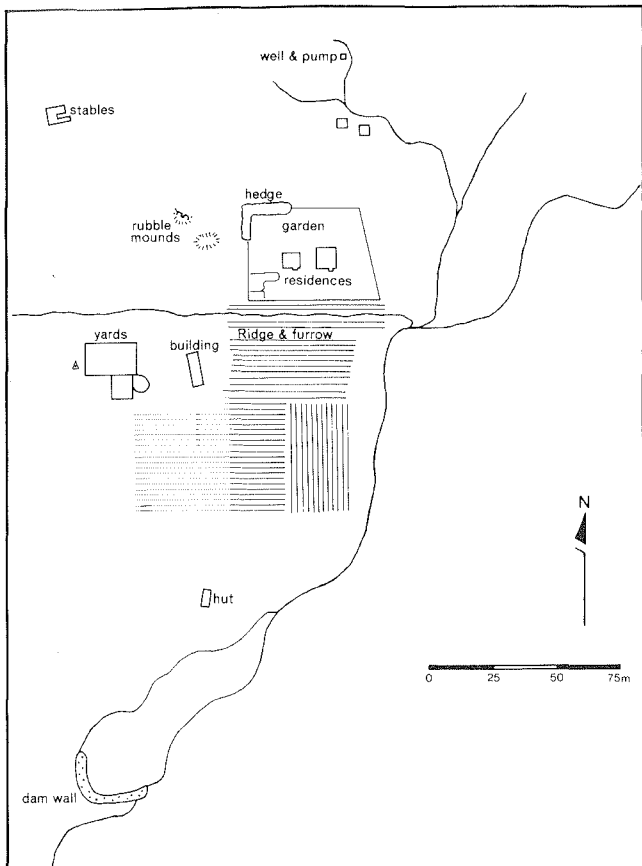
Australian Town and Country Journal politely described it as '. . . a comfortable little sheep station of about 12,000 acres'.[17]

The site is an extensive complex of structural remains, earthworks and exotic plants. The 1890 survey was extremely useful for identifying the function of the various remains. The garden noted in 1870 is visible as a series of linked soil marks and three superb poplar trees, *Populus nigra italica*. There is also an area of ridge and furrow ploughing which runs up-slope. It displays an identical erosion pattern to that illustrated by Twidale.[18] The site was apparently well preserved until the 1950s when it was stripped of usable material and bulldozed.[19]

The *Crown Lands Alienation Act* of 1861 did not become operative immediately in the study area.[20] This allowed the squatters several years in which to observe the inroads made on pastoral holdings by free selectors elsewhere. Manning had spread his homestead buildings over several hectares and he apparently held a proportionate view of his pastoral requirements. When Thomas Lunt selected 41 acres (over 16ha) opposite the *Woolpack Inn* in 1864 he precipitated a bitter struggle.

It is not known whether Manning made any overt moves against Lunt in the middle 1860s but by 1869 the dispute was open. In the intervening period Lunt had selected another portion and a second man, Fred World, had taken two more, again on the creek flats close to the *Woolpack Inn*. Manning resorted to the law in concert with his neighbours. Early in 1869 thirteen strange sheep appeared

Fig. 4:   The original Hillside homestead.

Fig. 5:   Land selection at Hillside 1866 to 1886 (for 'Australian Arms' read 'Australian Hotel').
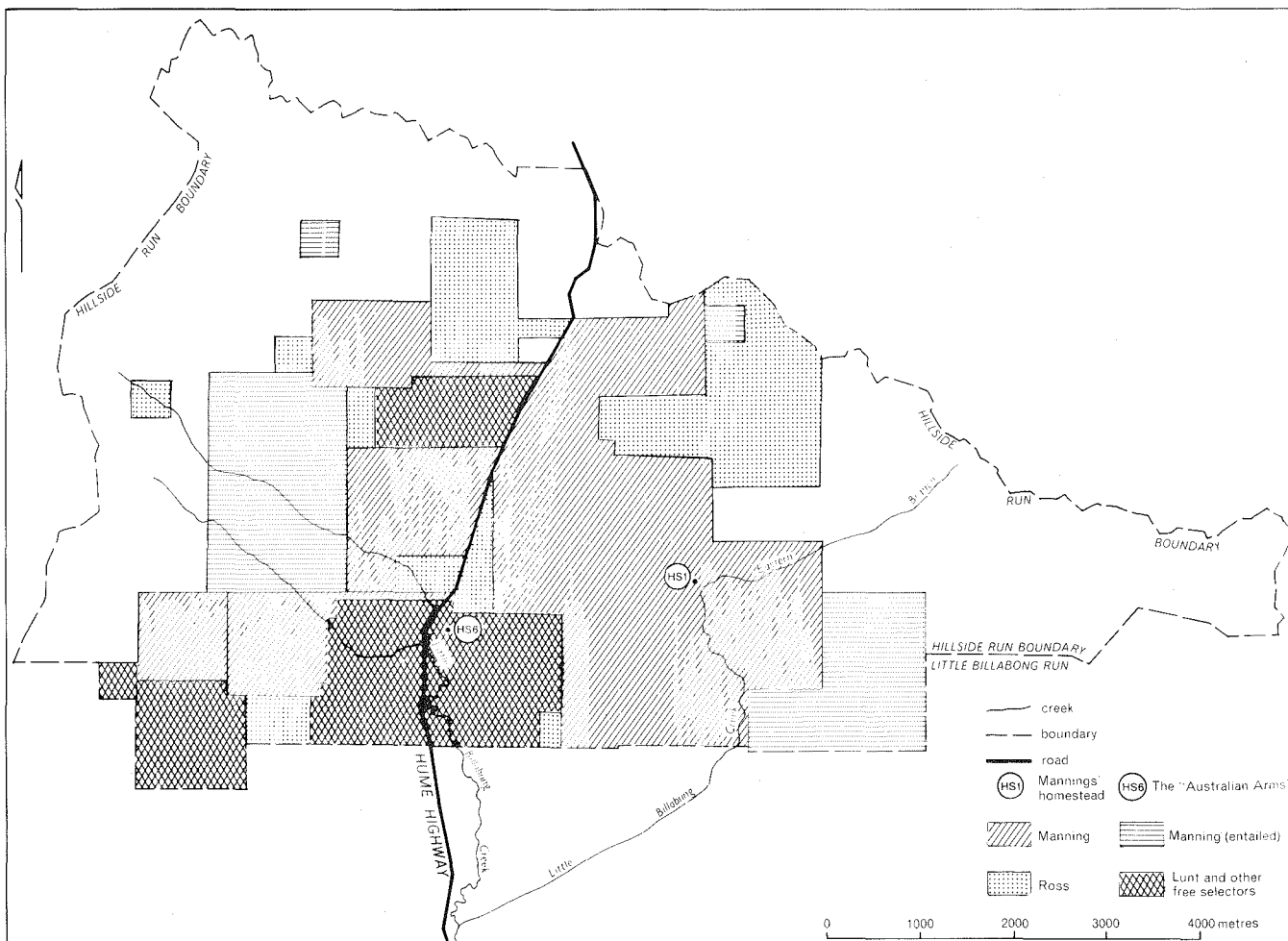
in Manning's stockyard. They were a distinctive breed from 'Humula', an adjoining station, and they carried the brands of both Humula station and Thomas Lunt, who had previously purchased some Humula sheep. James Wilson, the manager of Humula station, claimed the sheep as his own and charged Lunt with sheep stealing.

The case has two intriguing features. Firstly, the sheep were never in Lunt's possession. Secondly, only thirteen sheep were involved but no fewer than three squatters gave evidence; even Wilson's book-keeper was subpoenaed by the prosecution. The squatters were Charles Bardwell, Manning and W.H. Williams. They ran adjoining properties stretching from Oberne, near Tarcutta, south almost to Holbrook. The charge aroused considerable attention. The *Wagga Wagga Advertiser* of 10 April 1869 published a pained letter from one of the Magistrates rebutting an editorial (no longer extant) of the *Express* which had fulminated against the 'utterly senseless and unsatisfactory' conduct of the case. The *Express* was apparently curious as to why an estimated 200 pounds had been spent to arraign a selector over a matter of thirteen sheep. The case was indeed poorly conducted. The improbability was never canvassed of Lunt stealing a distinctive breed of sheep, then allowing the animals to roam into Manning's hands without even altering the simple Humula brand. The magistrates would not admit the relevance of the fact that the sheep were never claimed to be in Lunt's possession. Further, the denial by the prosecution that Humula had sold any sheep to Lunt was at best disingenuous, for Lunt had bought his Humula sheep through Henry Adams. The *Wagga Wagga Advertiser* reported the case at length on 7 April 1869 and a spirited correspondence followed, especially after Lunt was sentenced to twelve months hard labour.

There seems little doubt that the affair was arranged to demonstrate the ability of squatters, acting in unison, to deal firmly with free selectors. Carnegie goes so far as to produce hearsay evidence that W.H. Williams had bribed the selector Fred World 50 pounds to apply Lunt's brand to the sheep which were then 'found' in Manning's stockyard.[21] However, Lunt was not easily intimidated. Upon his release in 1870 he returned to Hillside and immediately selected more land. Edward Dunn also selected 50 acres (20ha) there. Fred World moved, perhaps tactfully, to a 320 acre (130ha) purchase on William's run at Little Billabong.

Figure 5 and Table 1 show the contest for land ownership which was pursued for twenty years between Lunt and Manning. Lunt concentrated his energies around his original selection until by 1873 Lunt and his family held nine adjoining portions totalling 526 acres[22] (213ha). At the same time the Church of England appropriated two Small Portions for a church and parsonage[23] and the graveyard was resurveyed and dedicated as Lunt's Vale Cemetery. 1873 is also the year when the second hotel, the *Australian Hotel* (Fig. 2:6), is first mentioned. The licensee was Thomas Lunt.

The structure deserves special mention as one of the dominant remains of Hillside. At the time of research in 1980 the building was over one hundred years old and was in the process of acquiring its fifth owner. The building has been roughly doubled in area by extensions so that the original core is almost entirely concealed. There are nine combinations of style and material in the window and door surrounds, for instance. The distribution of Flemish, Colonial 3 and Colonial 7 brick bonds in Figure 6 delineate the *Australian Hotel* within what is now Hillside homestead. The origin of the brick is unknown but there is a large clay pit (Fig. 2:3) 600m to the south. The bricks in the kitchen walls are a coarse, unevenly fired, material which suggests local manufacture. Elsewhere in the walls the bricks visible are finer, an even colour and hard. Some bear the mark of a wire clay-cutter.

Like 1869, 1873 was a watershed in the development of Hillside. Stimulated by Lunt's determination, Manning retaliated with an extraordinary string of land purchases. In

Table 1: Land allocation near Lunt's Vale, 1858 to 1883.

Parish Portion	Year	Name
1	1858	Henry Adams
2	1864	Thomas Lunt
3	1866	Thomas Lunt
8	1869	Fred. World
9	1869	Fred. World
10	1870	JOHN MANNING
11	1870	F.C. MANNING
12	1870	George W. Lunt
14	1870	Thomas Lunt
15	1870	G.H.G. MANNING
16	1871	Church of England
17	1871	Church of England
18	1870	Edward Dunn
19	1870	Edward Dunn
20	1870	Fred. World
21	1871	James Henry Lunt
22	1871	Robert Lunt
25	1873	Robert Lunt
26	1873	A.J. Lunt
27	1874	JOHN E.G. MANNING
28	1874	ALEX MANNING
29	1874	H. Tugwell
30	1874	A.G. MANNING
31	1874	F.G. MANNING
32	1874	A.W. MANNING
39	1874	Thomas Lunt
40	1874	James Henry Lunt
41	1874	F.G. MANNING
42	1875	H. Tugwell
43	1875	David Lunt
44	1875	George W. Lunt
45	1875	F.G. MANNING
46	1875	F.G. MANNING
61	1875	F.G. MANNING
63	1883	F.G. MANNING
64	1883	ROSS
65	1883	ROSS
66	1883	ROSS
67	1883	BUCHANAN & MORT
68	1883	F.G. MANNING
69	1883	ROSS
70	1883	ROSS
72	1883	A.W. MANNING
73	1883	F.G. MANNING

N.B. UPPER CASE = pastoralist or mortgagor

Source: Crown Registrar's Office, records for Parish of Little Billabong, County Goulburn

1870 he had been content to purchase three small portions scattered about his lease to secure his grazing rights, but in 1874 he adopted an aggressive policy of purchasing land beside Lunt and other free selectors to prevent their expansion, despite their right to the 'prelease' of an area three times the size of their original purchase. The legality of the manoeuvre was never tested by the local judiciary. The *Crown Lands Alienation Act* (1861 and subsequent amendments) endeavoured to prevent the manipulation of free selection by making land purchase conditional *inter alia* upon improvements to the land, residence on the land and by limiting the acreage which could be held by an agreement to purchase. Neither Lunt nor Manning appears to have used devices such as Conditional Purchase for Mineral Purposes but both made liberal use of family names to evade the acreage limits. The size of the house and garden at Figure 2:11 suggest that some of the Lunt purchases may have been
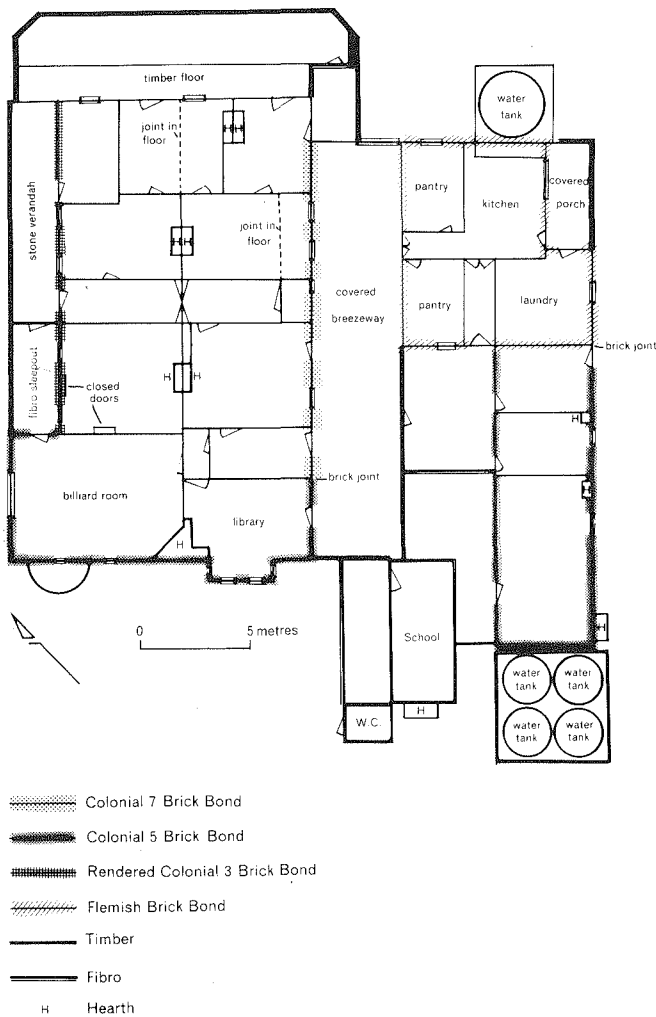
Legend:
- ▨ Colonial 7 Brick Bond
- ▬ Colonial 5 Brick Bond
- ▤ Rendered Colonial 3 Brick Bond
- ▥ Flemish Brick Bond
- ── Timber
- ══ Fibro
- H Hearth

Fig. 6: Hillside homestead, formerly the Australian Hotel.

genuinely independent farmlets (Figures 2 and 5 show that the selection is separate from other Lunt holdings) but the same cannot be said for Manning. It is hard to envisage the tiny hut at Figure 2:2 as anything more than a stockman's shelter. In fact there is still at Hillside a hut on wheels which closely resembles the notorious portable residence,[24] which could be moved between paddocks in anticipation of an inspection by the Lands Board.

Manning's new policy cost him dearly. His success in containing settlement is evident in Figure 5 but while confronting Lunt he was unable to adequately protect his back country. It can be seen that by 1875 he was beginning to use mortgagors to protect his flanks. By 1883 about one third of his titles were entailed and he was unable to resist further encroachment. In that year the Ross family purchased land on the exposed west, north and east faces of Manning's aggregate of purchases: so confining him, as he had done to Lunt, and separating him from nearly half of his run. The Ross' also purchased the few remaining acres around Lunt's Vale. Manning's position was untenable and in 1885 he sold out to Janet Ross.

Mrs. Ross was the matriarch of an extraordinarily successful pastoral family which first took up land near Holbrook in 1867. By 1890 the Ross' had leasehold or conditional purchase title to virtually the whole 45 kilometre road frontage between Holbrook and Kyeamba Gap, mostly on the west side of the road, and extending to a depth of up to 15 kilometres.[25] Lunt was now confronted by a rather different calibre of opposition.

Lunt had continued to purchase land up to 1875 but thereafter he concentrated on developing the *Australian*

Hotel as a source of income independent of pastoral interference. The 1879 closure of the *Traveller's Rest* at Kyeamba for temperance reasons must have been a noticeable benefit and may have assisted the *Australian Hotel* to become a coaching station. The consequent rise in status and business caused the hotel to be proclaimed a Postal Receiving Office in 1882.[26] Lunt advertised that his hotel:

'. . . offers a fair accommodation to anyone favouring the house, both for man and horse. Cobb & Co's Coaches start from the Hotel for Tumbarumba every Wednesday, Friday and Sunday, returning Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.'[27]

The coaching station is a remarkable group of timber buildings adjacent to the hotel. There is a blacksmith, a barn, stockyard and a combination stable and coach house. The blacksmith has been partly sheathed in corrugated iron and twice extended as a machinery shed but beneath the additions it retains its integrity as a structure. The roof was formerly bark but the walls still are vertical slab with large, unglazed, openings for ventilation. The hearth and flue are cement-mortared sandstock brick. Even the fuel store is intact and there is a deep layer of charcoal on the floor although the smithy clearly has been used as a lumber room for decades.

The barn is an unusual building. Although it is now sheathed in corrugated iron it was constructed without the use of metal. The rafters and purlins, for instance, are lashed with hide. The core of the barn is a hollow oblong 15 metres by 13 metres with a double door at each end, one of which opens onto the stockyard. The ridge-pole is about 10m from the ground. A skillion runs the length of the barn on both sides. The upper skillion plates, and the high roof plates, rest in natural tree forks. The outer skillion walls are vertical slab resting in hollowed plates. There is a chaff-cutting room immediately alongside the barn.

The stockyard is now much altered so that only a few four-rail posts remain, without any apparent linear relationship.

The stable and coach house was also built without using metal except as door hinges. It is double pile with timber slab walls, a bark ceiling and a hay loft covered by a shingle roof. The floor plan makes no allowance for sideways thrust and there is no appropriate roof truss built in, so that the building has slumped badly. However, in company with the other structures it constitutes a well preserved rural coaching station and is an outstanding example of what some are pleased to call vernacular architecture.

There were also two schools at Hillside. The schoolroom shown in Figure 6 was private to the Ross family but there is an intact public school 30m north of the *Australian Hotel* in a 250-square-metre enclosure. It was built as a vertical slab single room, with a brick chimney at the east end and a verandah on the north and south faces. There was once a pony hitching rail. The building appears to have been slightly modified in the early twentieth century and used as a residence but it is substantially untouched. Fletcher and Burnswoods[28] do not list a school at Lunt's Vale but they record one for Forest Vale. Forest Creek is a parish which lies 2.5 kilometres to the south-west. It is possible that the names have become mingled. The dates of 1874 to 1887 for 'Forest Vale' school neatly match the apogee of Lunt's Vale.

The arrival of the Ross family in 1885 sealed the future of Lunt's Vale. There is no suggestion of malice on their part. Lunt's Vale was tiny in comparison to the major properties which they were in the process of acquiring but they were assiduous in buying up mortages and in seizing on incomplete purchases which had become forfeit through a breach of condition. Throughout the late 1880s Lunt's boundaries were steadily shrinking. In 1890, after a decade of struggle with the railways in the Riverina, Cobb & Co. withdrew from the study area. The Postal Receiving Office was also withdrawn.[29] The hotel was thus deprived of two

steady sources of revenue. Carnegie suggests that Lunt's enclave lasted 'for several years' after 1885[30] but by the early 1890s he had left and Lunt's Vale died. The hotel was closed, occupied by the Ross family and called 'Hillside Station'. Manning's homestead was abandoned. By 1900 the whole of Lunt's Vale was Ross freehold or subject to Ross purchase as part of Hillside. Lunt's name occurs on modern cadastral and topographic maps as Lunt's Creek and Lunt's Sugarloaf. Neither one is in Lunt's Vale which is nowhere acknowledged. There is a vague local memory of Lunt's Paddock (Fig. 2:11). The eradication of this remarkable man has been as thorough as the prevention of settlement.

LITTLE BILLABONG

Little Billabong and Hillside are so close together when travelling by car or looking at a small scale map, that they appear to be residual elements of a single linear settlement. Such is not the case. Although Little Billabong has been socially mingled with Hillside, the settlements developed quite separately (Fig. 7).

Settlement is known to have begun in 1848, when Thomas Mitchell established the Little Billabong Run around the base of an oddly shaped hill now called Lunt's Sugarloaf.[31]

Townsend[32] noted 'Mitchell's Head Station' on the Tumbarumba road 2.6 kilometres east of its junction with the Port Phillip Road. A newspaper correspondent passed through in 1872 and remarked on a plot of vines[33] but Little Billabong Station has otherwise escaped attention. Nonetheless, until its abandonment about 1890 it was a political and economic focal point.

Unfortunately the site (Fig. 7:3) has become part of a fire-break, so that its archaeological value is somewhat reduced. It is visible 6m north of the Tumbarumba road reserve, as a scatter of granite and shale hearth stones interspersed with glass and potsherds. There are small earthworks resembling a series of ponds 32m north. The vines were not found.

Mitchell, the original owner, soon sold the run to Reuben Sherwin, who also left after a short time. In 1855 the run passed to William Henry Williams, who is the last known occupant of the homestead site. A small collection of letters relating to Williams' family and property[34] casts an informative light on the lives behind the potsherds.

Williams came from a family based in Gundaroo, near Yass, and he had family links with both Goulburn and Sydney. The family had some legal background but was predominantly engaged in unskilled rural pursuits. The move to Little Billabong was a major initiative chronically beset by financial irregularity and uncertain title. Even when Mrs. Mitchell sold the run to Reuben Sherwin she had apparently retained the Crown Lease document,[35] so that there was continuing doubt as to what Williams was purchasing.[36] Sherwin himself had departed for the Bendigo goldfield but first he stated his view of the sale:

'Mr. William Williams   Melbourne
                                    September 10
                                    1855

Sir I am willing to comply with the letter you rote to my/the number of stock on it is 8 bullocks and a dray and 7 head of cattle on the 4 mile creek branded J-W Joins/I don't now the brand of the Bullocks/there is seven acres of wheat on the station out of that you have to return 30 bushells of wheat to John Chaney/with respect to the transfer if you don't think my letter sufficient I will apply an attorney to draw it out when you pay the sum of 250£ to Mr. Evans by receiving a reseat of all dues and demands and send the receat down to my and send a draught down for the other 250£ payable on

one of the banks in Melbourne/I authorise you to take possession of the goods and chattles of Little billibung station

                     I am your
                     Reuben Sharwin'
(for 'my' read 'me'; sign / is a suggested punctuation).

The fat stock were presumably the subject of a separate agreement, leaving subsistence resources of working bullocks, dray, dairy cattle and wheat as part of the station. Sherwin later sought another 100 pounds sterling for horses. The Four Mile Creek is about 8 kilometres south of the homestead where it formed the run boundary with the next property.

Williams' first problem was not, as might have been expected, finding 500 pounds sterling (which he did not possess in his bank account) nor even wondering how much wheat would be left for the coming year after paying Sherwin's debt of thirty bushels, instead he had to wrest possession from Mrs. Sherwin. His agent's laconic advice was 'give her notice to leave the Station immediately and upon a recurrence of her violence, apply to a Magistrate.'[37] Legal difficulties beset Williams for over a year in a clear expression of both the impotent centrality of colonial government and of the pervasive influence of the larger, successful, squatters.

The pastoral licence for the Little Billabong Run had to be issued in Sydney, upon the recommendation of Crown Lands Commissioner Mr. Lockhart, who was based in Tumut. It took eleven months and two false starts to implement this basic gesture of occupancy. Meanwhile, and for some time after, Williams was vainly trying to complete the sale. Thus Pierce, a member of the land agent's staff, wrote to Williams:

'... Since you were here, the deed went down to Sydney, back again here, the Registrar objecting to the deed as it was executed in Melbourne, before an attorney there— then to Melbourne when it was found that the Attorney had left Melbourne; we then endeavoured to get Sherwin to execute it over again, this he would not do—without he got the money; and it has since been to Ballarat and Bendigo where it was made all right by Mr. Ward the Solicitor who first attested it.—It has been one of the most crooked affairs I have ever had to deal with.'[38]

It was not easy to join the ranks of the squatters and more difficulties were in store. Sherwin had agreed to accept payment over a period of time[39] but as the negotiations became protracted he apparently required a lump sum. Thomas Mate of Tarcutta, one of the major figures in the Riverina, also became involved in this. Pierce sent Williams another sardonic revelation.

'Dear Sir
At last Sherwin has got the money—I have been engaged this morning for upwards of four hours, before I could get the various parties who have been mixed up in this affair to come to a settlement—it was almost impossible to fancy the difficulties that Mate & Co's past and present Agents threw in the way of a settlement the fact being that Watson had had the use of the money and did not like to relinquish it.'

Williams never escaped the grasp of men with larger resources. He even had to cart his wheat to Albury to be ground at McLaurin's steam mill.[40] It was McLaurin who ultimately purchased the run from Williams, thereby achieving a continuous twenty-five kilometre frontage to the Great South Road north of Holbrook. The alternatives to McLaurin's mill were a water-powered mill at Oberne established by Thomas Mate's brother-in-law or the Nixons' mill at Wagga Wagga. Mate regained his hold on Little
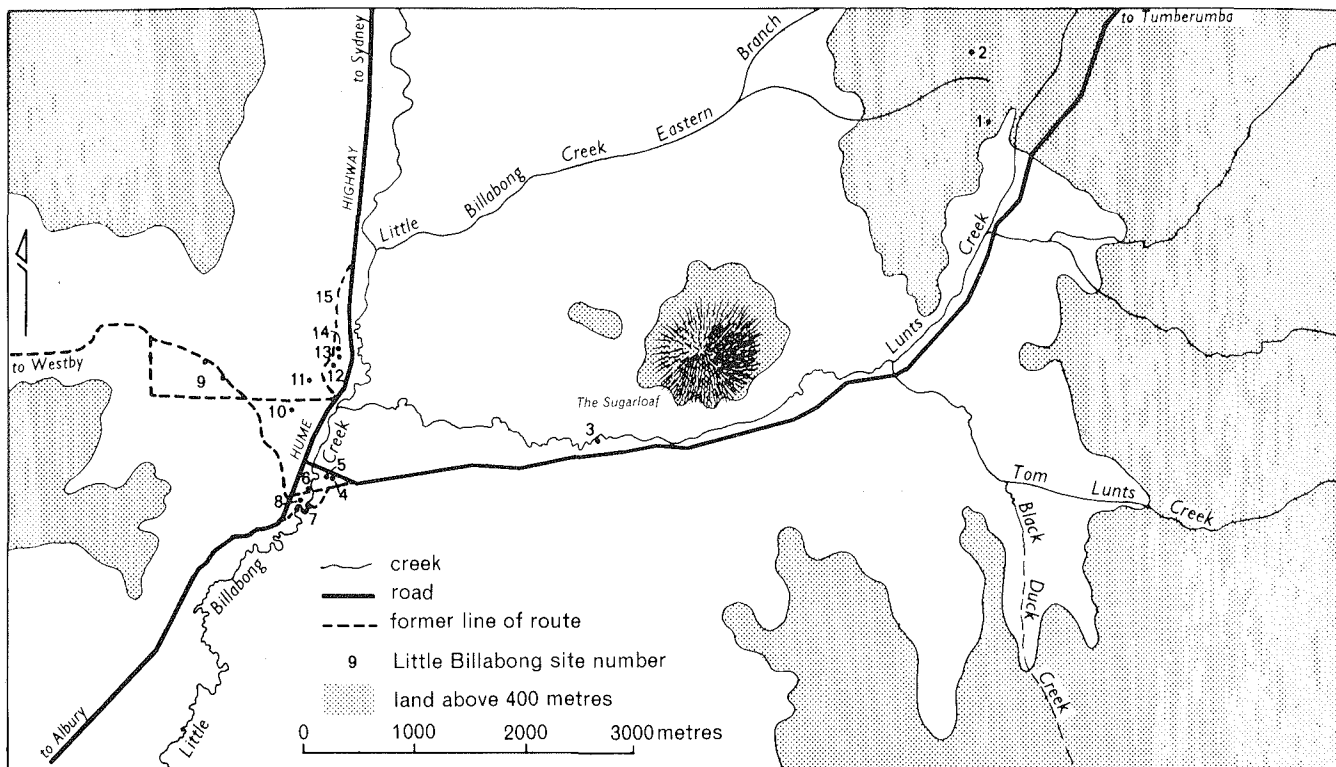
Fig. 7: Little Billabong.

Billabong run in 1861, when Williams negotiated a loan using the deeds of his father's grant on the Yass River at Gundaroo.[41]

The loan may have been used to establish an hotel. Carnegie[42] describes Williams as the publican of the *Little Billabong Hotel* but the licensee was actually his brother-in-law, William Rial.[43] Williams signed himself 'squatter' on two occasions when acting surety for a Postmaster[44] and described himself as a squatter in the Lunt sheep stealing case.

At this time the hotel was called the *Traveller's Joy.* The location could not be verified because of modern construction work but an informant identified a place on the east bank of the Little Billabong Creek close to the former Tumbarumba road (Fig. 7), saying that it had also served as a general store and post office until 1925.[45] This recollection is supported by the Post Office records, which disclose the same surnames during the 1890s and early 1900s for the Postmaster and his Assistant as occur in the Return of Publicans' Licenses 1884 to 1900. The Post Office was created in 1874. It was run first by Plunkett and then by Kirby until 1891 when Mrs. Emily Williams took it over for two months. William Henry Williams may have owned the building after the death in 1867 of his partner and brother-in-law, William Rial.

In the beginning Little Billabong was shaped to a considerable extent by family relationships. W.H. Williams' northern property boundary ran beside Lunt's Vale. Williams is said to have married Mary Dean, the sister of Lunt's wife. A child's scrawl of names across a poem in the Williams papers includes 'Mrs. Williams Esq Mary Williams'. Williams' south boundary, Four Mile Creek, is also called Dean's Creek. John Dean acted in concert with Williams to select the best portions of the Little Billabong run, for despite his relationship to Thomas Lunt, Williams never allied himself to the cause of free selection. He spent the years 1865 to 1870 instituting the purchase of land within a 3 mile (circa 5 kilometres) radius of his homestead, in the names of himself and his family. Like Manning, Williams also 'selected' small areas on the outskirts of his run.

The first independent selectors appeared between 1875 and 1880. Fred World, Crowe, Plunkett and Clark selected land at the extreme west of Williams' run, beside the Great South Road. They were the progenitors of Little Billabong as a community. To the east of Williams' homestead T.J. Hudson selected three portions. Hudson's role as a selector is intriguing, for Hudson and his brother E.W. Hudson, never completed a purchase. Furthermore, Williams seems to have made virtually no attempt to restrain them, so that by 1888 nearly one fifth of his run bore the name of Hudson on the conditional purchase documents. By comparison, Williams was careful to prevent Crowe, Plunkett *et al.* expanding their holdings from the rough, hilly, country beside the Great South Road down onto the rich creek flats closer to his homestead. Indeed the advent of free selectors inspired Williams to renew at least six land claims which he had allowed to lapse.

Geography provides a clue to the Hudsons' activities, in that there are four creeks on the western side of Williams' run. Tom Lunt's Creek and Vokin's Creek both had a portion taken up along their banks by independent selectors. Williams promptly matched the selections to prevent their expansion. The other two creeks were entirely taken up by the Hudsons. They also took up land alongside the other selectors and at the confluence of the four creeks and along the major creek thus formed, as far as the portions held by Williams himself. It seems likely that Williams had recognised the weakness of Manning's strategy at Hillside and employed dummies instead.

The pattern of settlement established by Williams never varied. Genuine free selectors remained largely confined to a small pocket astride the Great South Road, bounded to the east by the Little Billabong Creek and to the west by a low ridge which marked the beginning of Ross family country. The pocket of land, which is roughly three square kilometres in area, is bisected by the Great South Road that joins a track to Westby and the Tumbarumba road at this point.

The tiny settlement derived trade from three sources. Firstly, from traffic using the services of the hotel and the Post Office. Secondly, from the hire of labour. It was commonplace for a small holder's income to be substantially

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derived through shearing, fencing, or ploughing for a squatter. Thirdly, the Four Mile Creek Goldfield was proclaimed in 1875. The first two are directly linked to squatting interests at Little Billabong, so that there is a clearly expressed period of Williams' dominance between 1856 and 1889. The period is marked by the creation of the major homestead, the hotel and Post Office, and curiously, by the erection of a church.

The church (Fig. 7:14) was a single-nave, neo-Gothic structure of machine-fired brick on granite ashlar footings. The roof was corrugated iron. A porch opened to the east. The origin of the bricks, some of which are hand-pressed, is unknown. Albury, Tumut and Wagga Wagga had commercially operated brick kilns at this time and the first edition of the *Germanton Times and Tumbarumba Advocate* in 1884 refers to a local brick-making plant. It is also known that two and a half million bricks were forwarded to the Riverina from Lithgow,[46] although it seems more likely that these were used for building railhead hotels in the 1880s. In 1878 the church was dedicated as St. Paul's, Churchmount, Little Billabong.[47] It was presumably intended to serve both Little Billabong and Lunt's Vale to the north, where the cemetery had been recently rededicated.

No diocesan records have become available for the church but the gaunt ruin is eloquent of the failure of closer settlement. Adjacent land reserved for a parsonage was never used for that purpose. For although Wyatt remarks of the church 'its situation is awkward of access for older people and remote from any houses',[48] it was actually built alongside the former Port Phillip Road (Fig. 7:15) near the nub of settlement. It was surrounded by James Weston's 1876 free selection and it overlooks to the south the huddle of selectors' portions along the Little Billabong Creek. The location of the church, remote on a hilltop without obvious access and difficult to see from any line of route used in the last 140 years, is the key to understanding the pattern of settlement. The pattern was established not because of the supposed attraction of a creek crossing or a road junction (the 1878 creek crossing at Fig. 7:7 was a kilometre from the church) but because a nexus of property boundaries and roads had created the only land available to selectors. Little Billabong is a rare example of a *post facto* survey being unable to realign free selections into neat rectangles, although in 1922 a future Deputy Surveyor General contrived to amalgamate portions 84 and 118 into an elegant isosceles triangle.

As long as Williams controlled land, employment and commerce, the settlement prospects were slight but real. Williams' account book exists in fragments between late May and early September 1856.[49] These early entries illustrate the importance to the local rural economy of even a struggling tyro squatter. In 1856 Williams was still trying to obtain title but during the first nine days recorded, Williams spent over sixty-six pounds on services and in July 1856 he made payments to fifteen creditors. Some of them must have been local labour since only a couple received sums like eighteen or thirty pounds which are equatable to a carrier's fee.

Unfortunately the first phase of settlement at Little Billabong ends with Williams' ruin. His title to the land used as collateral for the 1861 loan and for subsequent loans was apparently disputed, along with two decades of rent from the land and other matters of inheritance. Williams' mother's first marriage had been to a scion of Clan Campbell and there is an ominous letter from Scotland discussing the best means of seeking reparation from Williams without causing a scandal.[50] The sums were not large but they were sufficient to sink Williams' endeavour to become a squatter. In 1889 James McLaurin began purchasing the run at a mortgagee sale.[51]

The second phase is one of stagnation which lasted until the early 1900s. The Ross family had successfully eliminated Lunt's Vale by about 1890 and there was no attempt at free selection either there or at Little Billabong during the 1890s. McLaurin apparently demolished Williams' homestead

almost at once and relocated the station home in a shallow, concealed, valley 2 kilometres further north. The 'new' homestead, where his son James McHardy McLaurin lived, is not currently available for research but beneath modern restoration and improvements there appears to be a late Victorian single-storey villa which would correspond to the time of McLaurin's land purchase.

At the heart of settlement, the *Little Billabong Hotel*, as it was called in 1884, remained in operation and in private hands.[52] When the hotel first opened in 1861 William Rial had indulged in a controversial experiment with horse racing, presumably on the creek flats near the hotel.[53] It is not known whether the race meetings continued into the 1880s but the hotel prospered. It was on the mail run to Tumbarumba even after Cobb & Co. withdrew their frequent passenger service in 1890.[54]

About the turn of the century, James Quinlan removed the hotel to the west bank of Little Billabong Creek (Fig. 7:8). The original building was retained as a general store. There is not a great deal left of the newer building which was burned down in the late 1950s. The site has been bulldozed and subsequently turned over by bottle-hunters. A concrete-lined well with tank stand remains, as do some exotic shrubs. A floor plan is discernible.

In its heyday the hotel stood beside the original track to Tumbarumba, close to where it crossed the Little Billabong Creek (Fig. 7:7). In 1929 the road was moved 500m north of the hotel, the creek was straightened and a substantial bridge was erected (Fig. 7:6). The hotel remained in operation however and an aerial photograph from 1944[55] clearly shows the building and the old line of route.

After the 1875 goldfield proclamation noted above, mining continued into the 1890s, so that by 1899 mining boundaries were amended to include Hillside and Little Billabong within the Tumbarumba Gold Field.[56] Local mining activity produced no major strike to influence closer settlement but it did generate local commerce. Mining may also have provided temporary employment to selectors as hired hands. The *Annual Mining Report* for 1895 refers to a party 'working on the Old Sam Claim on The Four Mile Gold Field'. Little Billabong lay midway between the alluvial gold and tin deposits at Westby and the reef gold at the Four Mile Gold Field, which was roughly twelve kilometres distant. Records are almost non-existent and, apart from isolated costeans (shallow trenches to test the mineral deposit), pasture improvement and cereal cropping have obliterated mining traces on the plain within four kilometres of the village, but the activity was evidently sufficient to contribute to the continuation of Little Billabong as a service node.

As an indication of the population in the area of Little Billabong at the start of the second phase, a provisional school was opened in 1897.[57] A school (Fig. 7:12) was built near the church in 1903 and remained there until 1918. The location is visible as a shallow terrace with a stone edging near the top of Churchmount. A series of post holes delimits the schoolyard which slopes quite steeply towards the present Hume Highway. As with the church, access was gained along the Port Phillip Road which is seen as a terrace on the hillside.

The school had a population catchment area of approximately 140 square kilometres, within a line drawn midway between Little Billabong and the nearest contemporary schools. Not all of the children within that area attended. Some of those who went to school would have been sent to Sydney or Melbourne. Alternatively there was the private schoolroom at Hillside. Except for two years of reduced status (1897 and 1912) the minimum enrolment required at Little Billabong by the 1880 *Public Instruction Act* was twenty children aged between six and fourteen years. The reduction to half-time status in 1912, and the temporary closure 1913–1917 prior to removal, indicate that the settlement of Little Billabong was a brief phenomenon rather than a continuing or self-regenerating process. The same is

evident in the archaeological record, for although the hotel license was renewed annually until after the Second World War, by 1914 the major homestead was long deserted, the school was abandoned and the church was derelict. No residential site is known to date between 1899 and 1914. Mining, also, had ceased.[58]

Little Billabong experienced a slight renaissance after the First World War, when it became a satellite of Holbrook. The small holdings provided a nucleus for dairying, which was made practicable by the beginning of motorised transport. Although the school had moved away, Little Billabong otherwise continued its community service functions. The Post Office was maintained by a small holder, Mr. J. Graham, the church was restored and rededicated as St. Thomas's[59] and in the mid 1920s a community hall was built (Fig. 7:4). A recreation reserve was gazetted nearby, 9 June 1922.

The economic basis was tenuous however. Closer settlement had been encouraged by breaking up stock reserves around Little Billabong, but in three cases which are documented on Lands Board files of the 1920s the small holder gave his principal occupation as 'labourer'. Little Billabong vanished in the shadow of the great Depression. For example, in March 1929 Charles Campbell asked that the residence condition be lifted from his lease of portion 84, since he could find 'no employment in the immediate locality'.[60] The lease was sympathetically altered to 'Grazing and Vegetable Garden', enabling Campbell's partner, Charles Woodland, to carry on. The site (Fig. 7:5) was still used in 1981 by a Holbrook family as a weekend farmlet. The church went out of use in 1929[61] and shortly afterwards it was incorporated within the Hillside Station lease.[62] The Post Office ceased about the same time[63] and the hotel passed out of local hands.[64]

This third and final phase is archaeologically dominant. Little Billabong between 1861 and 1900 was primarily a service node for a shifting population of selectors and miners, who have left only the most fragmentary earthworks and hearth-stone scatters. Crowe's hut, for example, is represented by only two pieces of glass and a half dozen granite stones scattered across 30m by ploughing. The majority of the surviving residential sites belong to the period 1900 to 1930. Such sites are distinguished by the predominance of introduced materials, especially bricks and corrugated iron, a quantitatively greater surviving population of metal and organic detritus and large quantities of brown bottle glass. These sites, for example Figure 7:11, are found only near the service node. They were in any case concentrated at that point and elsewhere agriculture has removed even the mining traces.

The interest in Little Billabong is that whereas the other settlements such as Hillside may offer clear archaeological and historical statements, Little Billabong generated interpretative problems. A ruined church demands a former congregation. Little Billabong indicates the value of archival research, for without the plans and title deeds obtained from the Crown Registrar it would not have been possible to separate the developmental phases within the archaeological record except in the most general terms. In particular, the documents enabled a distinction between an aggregation of genuine free selectors and a dispersed population of two or three selectors surrounded by the squatter's dummies.

CONCLUSION

The villages of Hillside and Little Billabong were essentially enclaves of minor enterprise and free selectors forced into nucleation by the land policies of large graziers. Service facilities were offered to a catchment area that may have varied considerably between the time of the first Hillside cemetery and the closure of the Little Billabong church, but evidently the service facilities were not self-sustaining. They were a symptom of settlement but not its cause. The

correlation between the distribution of sites, the history of settlement and the practices of the local squatters is too close to argue that the villages were primarily service nodes. Rather, the villages were the product of an intense struggle to possess land.

The effect of the Robertson Land Acts and their Victorian equivalents has been controversial since their proclamation.[65] They remain a steady source of debate among historians.[66] It was intriguing to discover in the Riverina a quantity of hitherto unsuspected archaeological evidence to co-ordinate with the documents and to direct archival research to form the core of this paper. Thus Figure 5, that summarises the struggle for Hillside, is a synthesis of title deeds, ruins, vegetation and fencelines. At the risk of disappointing the artefactually inclined, the physical remains of a full century of occupation have been described only in passing, as specific components of village reconstruction. However, discovering and figuratively repopulating these forgotten settlements discloses possible commonplaces of colonial New South Wales that have become ignored, perhaps to the detriment of our understanding.

If problems of settlement and landscape analysis are to be addressed, then the realities of life for the miners, shepherds and graziers should be sought beyond the pit-head and the woolshed. This is neither arcane local history nor stamp collecting,[67] for in the midst of problem-oriented research we are still dealing with people's lives and human motivation. Hillside village does not exist in published history but it is a lode of enquiry and information for the historical archaeologist. Simply being able to recognise similar sites should influence regional studies and there are lines of related research that archaeologists are well placed to pursue. Deserted or shrunken rural settlements are a stratum of colonial society that will repay close study.

NOTES

1. Proclaimed by 1847 Order in Council embodying the Imperial Waste Lands Occupation Act of 1846.
2. Winston-Gregson, A guide to locating settlements (in preparation).
3. —a concentration of parish portions with low numbers;
   —a concentration of portions of small area;
   —a junction of land routes;
   —a major topographical feature;
   —a major homestead.
4. Winston-Gregson 1982.
5. Buxton 1967; Carnegie 1973, 1975; Swan 1970.
6. Bingham, Itinerary.
7. Townsend to Surveyor General AONSW 2/1583.1.
8. Crown Registrar plan M73-1457.
9. *B.P.* 25/5/1861.
10. Australia Post, Historical Section, 1–75.
11. Whitworth 1866:301.
12. Crown Registrar plan G108-1475.
13. Crown Registrar plans M73-1457, G707-1475.
14. Crown Registrar plan MS1498 W92.
15. Crown Registrar plan G2868-1475.
16. Crown Registrar plan G658-1475.
17. *A.T.C.J.* 9/3/1872.
18. Twidale 1971:210, Fig. 5.
19. A. Locke, pers. comm. 18/5/80.
20. Buxton 1967:18.
21. Carnegie 1975:55.
22. Crown Registrar, records.
23. Crown Registrar plan G238-1984.
24. Buxton 1967:159.
25. Ross 1967:16, 26.
26. Australia Post, Historical Section, 5–1535.

27. *G.T.T.A.* 18/7/1884.
28. Fletcher and Burnswoods 1977.
29. Australia Post, op. cit.
30. Carnegie 1973:193 below.
31. N.S.W. *Government Gazette* 18/9/1848.
32. Townsend, op. cit.
33. *A.T.C.J.* 30/3/1872.
34. Williams, papers in private hands.
35. Grantham, W., Albury land agent, letter to Williams, 1/12/1855 (Williams).
36. Grantham to Williams, 16/1/1856 (Williams).
37. Grantham to Williams, 1/12/1855 (Williams).
38. Pierce, J.C., to Williams, 20/9/1856 (Williams).
39. Grantham to Williams, 1/12/1855 (Williams).
40. Receipt dated 19/12/1857 (Williams).
41. Williams to Mate, 23/1/1861 (Williams).
42. Carnegie 1975:54.
43. N.S.W. *Government Gazette*, return of publicans' licenses, 1861.
44. Australia Post, op. cit.
45. Macneil, J., pers. comm., 18/1/80.
46. Lithgow Regional Library, n.d.:11, 79.
47. Wyatt 1937:284.
48. Wyatt, ibid.
49. Williams, papers.
50. Campbell to Aunt Adelaide, n.d. (Williams).
51. Crown Registrar, records.
52. N.S.W. *Government Gazette*, return of publicans' licenses.
53. *B.P.* 16–28/2/1861.
54. Australia Post, Historical Section, 3–760.
55. Germanton, run 701, print 16369.
56. N.S.W. Department of Mines.
57. Fletcher and Burnswoods 1977.
58. N.S.W. Department of Mines, 1911:15, 1914:15.
59. Wyatt, op. cit.
60. Crown Lands Office file, LB 39–214.
61. Wyatt, op. cit.
62. Crown Registrar plan G4094–1475.
63. Australia Post, op. cit.
64. Crown Registrar, title deeds, Portion 60 Parish Carabost.
65. Powell 1977.
66. See Buxton 1967 for Riverina.
67. Connah 1983.

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