This chapter gives my earliest memories of Bawley Point. My parents (Les and Alma Hamon) moved to Bawley Point around Easter 1918, when I was less than a year old. I lived at Bawley during all my primary school years (1925–1930). My parents continued to live there after 1930, although I saw less of the place, being a boarder at St Patrick’s College, Goulburn, 1931–1935, and then a student at Sydney University, 1936–1940. My father, who was born and reared in Milton, worked initially in the sawmill, and we lived in one of the houses that had been built on the mill lease site, presumably when the mill first started in 1891. Our house was nearest the mill.

After the mill burnt down in April 1922, most of the mill hands moved away from Bawley Point. We stayed on, with my father initially stacking and tallying timber cut at the Flat Rock mill and brought to Bawley Point for shipment. The roads in the district have been discussed in Chapter 6. The road to Termeil was an unmade track, which gave a lot of trouble, especially to visitors. Since it was often easier to make a detour around an obstacle (fallen tree, boggy patch) rather than fix the obstacle itself, the tracks became tortuous and ill-defined. Local knowledge was almost essential. When guests from Sydney first started coming, it was one of my jobs to meet them, usually at Termeil, and guide them in. Often I would ride to Termeil on my pony, then ride back in front of the car, giving directions with signs and shouts. At other times I walked up and had the rare thrill of a car ride, even if only standing on the running board!

We had no car or even a sulky of our own, so getting anywhere was a major problem. I can remember only one car in the Bawley Point–Kioloa district at the time I started school. This was owned by Mr Walker at Kioloa. I think it
was a Standard. We did not own even a horse in the early years of the decade. My father often walked to Termeil, for example, to pick up medicine sent out from Milton on the mail car.

By modern standards we were very isolated, but we were better off in some respects. Grocery orders were delivered to the door once a week (Friday) from Blackburn’s in Milton, and bread and meat twice a week. These deliveries continued on to Kioloa, and even to the farm on Durras Mountain in earlier years. Blackburn’s delivery was by a wagon drawn by two horses, and driven by Mr Edwin (‘Winnie’) King. I have been told recently that a third horse was harnessed in front of the usual two for the pull up onto Durras Mountain. Bread and meat came by motor van (Afflick, butcher in Milton), but may have come by horse-drawn vehicle in the earlier years. If the bread and meat could not be brought right to the door, due to the lake being too deep, it was left in a tin shed on the Termeil side of the lake. I often collected it from the tin shed on my way home from school at Termeil.

Michael Anthony, originally from India, had a store in Ulladulla, and made a weekly trip to Bawley Point and Kioloa. He operated as a hawker, carrying goods with him from which customers could choose on the spot. Michael came initially by horse and cart, and stayed overnight in a shack near our home. Later he had a T-model Ford. He could not read or write, so he had to remember each person’s credit purchases, and sometimes got my father to write them down for him. With today’s emporia in mind, it is interesting to reflect on what a small selection of goods could be hawked around by horse and cart. I remember clearly his stock of fishing gear — it was all in a single tin, about 25 x 20 x 10 centimetres.

Pushbikes were rare; I suppose the wretched state of most tracks made bike riding as difficult as travel by car. My grandparents owned a horse and sulky from around 1925; this made us more mobile.

Our home was a simple four-roomed cottage, weatherboard on the outside and lined with pine. It had a corrugated iron roof on which heavy rain drummed a merry tune. Perhaps the cottage was a little more than four-roomed: we had the post office, which was housed in a small room at the western end of the verandah. The post office served also as my bedroom, at least for some years. There was also a small room, the ‘wash house’, off the back verandah. This was really a toolshed and store for feed for the cow and poultry.
The main rooms were all small, probably not more than 3 x 3 metres. I noticed the smallness particularly when I revisited the house in later years, not long before it was abandoned. Of course the rooms did not seem small to a child’s eyes at the time. The building was similar in size and general layout to the cottages in The Avenue on the Edith and Joy London Foundation property at Kioloa.

There was no bathroom. Baths were taken in a galvanised iron tub on the kitchen floor, using water heated on the wood-burning cooking stove in a four-gallon kerosene tin. The stove had a fire-box on the left, oven on the right, and several removable circular plates on top. It boasted a few ‘dampers’ to control the draught. Mother worked wonders with this stove, but gave dad and me a ‘time of it’ if we didn’t keep up a good supply of the various grades of firewood. Dad cut and split the heavier wood, while it was my job to collect sticks and bark for kindling, and to split lighter wood such as old palings for the next grade.

The kitchen had no built-in cupboards. There was a free-standing cupboard or safe which had a single shallow drawer near the top. Many of my childhood treasures were found in the ‘kitchen drawer’. There were open shelves, covered with strips cut from newspapers. The down-hanging edges of these strips were scalloped and serrated. There were two small tables and a bench, covered with
either oilcloth or pieces of linoleum. Water was drawn from a tap to the right of
the stove, connected to tanks outside. There was no sink. Washing up was done
in a dish, and the water thrown out onto the back lawn, or sometimes saved for
the garden.

Life was very simple and amusements were few. In the evenings we often played
cards. Five hundred was the favourite game, but euchre was also played. Billy Orr,
who owned Murramarang, often visited to make up a four. We acquired a table
model gramophone in the early ’20s and had a lot of pleasure from it. I think
it was bought for us in Sydney by one of the ship’s captains, probably Captain
Andrews.

We had little excitement and few crises. My father had a serious illness soon
after we settled at Bawley, and had to be taken to Sydney. This must have been
traumatic for Mother, but I was too young to remember it.

We had a near tragedy involving a shotgun when I was only about two or three
years old. The gun had been left loaded, standing upright in a corner of the post
office. The loading was deliberate: hawks or crows had been raiding the fowl
yard and Mother was supposed to give them a blast or two if they came while
Dad was at work. I was so young that it was assumed I could not even lift the
gun, let alone do any damage with it. I did not lift it, but did manage with some
effort to cock one barrel (it was a double-barrelled 12-gauge gun with hammers),
and of course had no difficulty in pulling the trigger to see what might happen.
Since the gun was standing upright the only damage was to the top of the linen
press, and probably the roof. It took Mother and Father a long time to get over
the thought of what might have happened. And it was a long time before I fired
a shotgun again!

Much of our spare time was spent out of doors. The lake (Willinga, and sometimes
Meroo) provided swimming and prawning. The most effective prawning was at
night, using lights. We had a carbide cycle lamp which was fairly effective but
temperamental. Hand or dip nets were used. During the day we got moderate
catches of prawns by a method that seems to have died out. The prawns were
raked out of the sand with a garden rake. Each disturbed prawn was followed
till it settled and dug into the sand again when it was caught either by hand
or with a dip net. A slow job but we kids had plenty of time. We explored the
lake on rafts made of ships’ hatch covers that had washed up on the beaches.
These were too ungainly to row, but could be coaxed along with a pair of poles.
I made one canoe out of a sheet of corrugated roofing iron. It was very unstable
and leaked badly, but provided its share of fun.
Rabbit shooting with .22 rifles was my main sport. Rabbits were very plentiful; myxomatosis was still many years away. The rabbits were sometimes eaten but more often used to feed the cats. The skins were dried on wire frames and sold.

The beach provided much entertainment. We trundled hoops on the firm, wet sand at low tide, built the usual sandcastles, and had bonfires in the evenings. ‘Bungers’ were available free, in the form of the float bladders on seaweed. Surfing was not encouraged, at least not in the absence of the grown-ups. The first surfboards appeared around this time, brought I think by the Nicholsons. They were small flat rectangular boards, about 0.5 x 0.3 metres, which were held under the forearms. I had few playmates in the earlier years of the decade. There must have been many children in the families of other mill workers, but I do not remember them as the families moved away soon after the mill fire in April 1922. Frank Carriage was living near the Cullens for part of the time, and I got around (and fought!) with his son Willie, who went briefly to Murramarang School. The Carriages moved away, but Frank returned later with two younger children, Frankie and Charlie. Frank was a professional fisherman, and had an open boat with a small ‘Chapman Pup’ inboard motor. The boat was kept at the old mill site and launched by using the crane. That boat introduced me to the despair of seasickness. As well as boat fishing, mainly for snapper, Frank also netted Willinga and Meroo lakes, and I think also Murramarang lagoon, using a gill net.
The Hapgood family lived at Bawley Point. Olive was about my age, and we walked to Murramarang School together. Her sister Essie was younger, and I think the family moved away before Essie started school.

The only playmates who were around for the whole decade were Reg and Innes Collins — two kilometres away on Guy’s Willinga property. We were together at Murramarang School for several years. The Collins family had come in 1919 to manage the property, and stayed till 1931. Several crops were grown on the property. I remember potatoes, maize (which was always called ‘corn’), oats, artichokes (for cattle feed) and of course the watermelons that nearly did for me, and will be mentioned again later. They had a chaff cutter powered by a kerosene engine; some of the chaff was used to feed the horse teams working at Flat Rock. All the outside work such as ploughing was done with horses. Small dams were made using horse-drawn scoops. Some cattle were run, and sometimes the Collinses did their own killing. Guy owned property on Durras Mountain at the time, and ran cattle there, but I do not think anyone lived on the mountain after the Beadman family left around 1920.

Lacking our own family transport, we did not often get away from home. Picnics involved carrying the necessities in sugar bags or hampers. Nuggan was a favourite place for picnics. Grandad Reynolds had built a substantial picnic table there under a large lilly-pilly tree.
We did not visit locally or entertain as far as I remember. We visited my grandparents on father’s side in Milton (Wason Street) and sometimes visited friends in the Milton district. I recall particularly visiting George Claydon and Maude Cashman on a farm at Little Forest.

At home we had only kerosene lamps, with wicks but no mantles, in the earlier years. Later, especially after the guest house business started, we acquired an ‘Aladdin’ lamp (still kerosene and wick, but with a conical mantle), and a couple of petrol lamps that used mantles and had to be pumped. It was one of my jobs to keep these lamps filled, light them and replace mantles when necessary.

Washing the clothing and bed linen was done in the backyard, in the open. The wash load was boiled in a copper set in its own brick fireplace. After the boiling, the clothes were lifted from the copper with a ‘pot stick’ (about one metre length of broom handle) and transferred to tubs where most items were rubbed against a ‘washing board’ (square of wood with corrugated surface, about 30 x 30 centimetres, mounted in a frame so it would stand in a tub). So washing day meant hard work, and small boys found it convenient to be somewhere else if possible.

We kept a cow and fowls, and grew most of our own vegetables. Fresh fruit was scarce, except for locally grown peaches, nectarines, apricots, common lemons and apples. There was a small market garden at Kioloa about two kilometres inland from Merry Beach, run by a Chinese man (Chin Slin). He brought his produce round by horse and cart.

We did not have even an electric torch in the earlier years, and no radio until the late 1930s when I made a battery set for my parents. I recall one of our guests from Sydney bringing an early model radio, and the disappointment when it did not work.

Cats have been a part of my life as long as I can remember. The first I remember clearly was a fine tabby named Mit, who was born at our place when I was about three years old, and shared my earlier years. Mit was the most ticklish cat I have known, and I exploited this weakness with fiendish glee, using a pair of leather gardening gloves to even things up a bit. I was not cruel to him, but did not give him much peace. Mother was always at me to wash my hands after mauling the cat.

I had a dog for some years, but in retrospect I could have benefitted from some training in dog psychology. A dog’s life was certainly a dog’s life in those days, especially in the country. But he was a great companion when rabbiting and fishing, though he found the latter boring.
A recent visit to the local barber reminded me that things were simpler and cheaper in the ’20s. You did one another’s hair, or else. Grandfather had a pair of hand clippers, which he kept well oiled; these were a boon compared to scissors. But there would be complaints from the customer if you did not keep squeezing those handles fast enough.

My mother was postmistress through the 1920s. The telephone was on a party line. Each exchange was identified by a particular ringing pattern. Ours was ‘a long and a short’. Ringing was done by turning a handle — one turn for a ‘short’ and several turns for a ‘long’. The party line connected a number of small exchanges, each of which might have a number of local subscribers. We had two subscribers: the Collins family on Guy’s property one mile south, and Billy Orr at Murramarang. This small exchange system must have been installed around the middle of the decade; earlier we had only the simple wall-mounted phone. Other exchanges on our party line were Milton, Ulladulla, Termeil, Kioloa, East Lynne, Benandarah, and perhaps Morton and Flat Rock.

The phone line from Termeil to Bawley was a single unstranded galvanised iron wire strung through porcelain insulators which were tied to trees using the same kind of wire. We were provided with a pair of pliers, a wire strainer and some spare wire, and were expected to go out and fix the line after storms. Outages were frequent. A technician came occasionally to do an overall check and change batteries (four large 1.5 volt dry cells at each exchange). The replaced batteries usually had some life in them, and provided power for my earliest electrical experiments. One technician, Mr Dean, was very helpful in explaining the electrical mysteries to me. I learnt recently that he was killed in an on-duty accident at Wandandian.

A trunk call through to Sydney was difficult and time-consuming. I often had this job when guests were in the house. There were frequent allegations of phone operators listening in to conversations on the party line. One had only to lift the receiver from the hook. In fact, it was necessary to listen in this way before ringing, to make sure the line was free. There must have been a strong temptation to listen for longer than necessary.

The mail was taken to Termeil on horseback on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays by the mailman, Walter Scott, who lived at Kioloa. The mail, even if only a few letters, was carried in a large canvas mail bag tied with string and sealed with sealing wax. A figure of the Crown was imprinted into the hot wax using a seal supplied for the purpose. No chances taken with the mail!
The guest house business at Bawley just happened without any planning. There are two versions of how it started. Mother's version was that she spoke to Dr Blaxland, an eye specialist in Macquarie Street, about the beauty of the place, and the fishing. He decided it would be a good place for a holiday and
invited himself down, making little of Mother’s protestations about lack of space. He came, enjoyed himself, then spread the news among friends, after which there was no turning back. The other version was told to me recently by Dave McCathie. He claims the guest house business started when Frank Sargent and party were camping at Bawley and were flooded out. They asked Mother to take them in. Probably both versions are true. The start would have been around 1925. I don’t remember how many guests were accommodated at one time in the original small cottage, or what ingenuity was used to fit them in. I have a vague memory of many camp stretchers in different parts of the house. But space limitations quickly forced a decision to add extra rooms and a bathroom at the eastern end of the house. These additions were made by my father with help from Frank Carriage, and probably also grandfather Reynolds. The extended cottage served as guest house until the present guest house in Johnston Street was opened around 1932.

Mother, besides being the cook, was also the business manager. I often wonder how she managed with no electricity, no refrigerator, not even an ice chest in the earlier days, and only a pathetically small stove for cooking. The stove was supplemented by a single burner Primus stove, and a small kerosene stove with two parallel wicks. Mother was very attached to this wick stove, but few others could get it to cook or stop it smoking. Mother was an excellent cook, especially of fish. This was most often covered in egg and breadcrumbs and deep fried in oil, but large snapper might be stuffed and baked. Snapper soup was a specialty.

Figure 37: Bawley Point c. 1927, after the mill fire.

The feed shed (left), crane and chimney stack, and some mill buildings (including the blacksmith’s shop) survived the fire. The first guest house, with the additional rooms on the left for the guests, and its extensive garden area, is above the corner of the beach. The dark line running left from the house towards the mill buildings is the tramline.

Source: Bruce Hamon.
Most guests enjoyed themselves and many came back year after year, becoming friends of the family. Ralph Johnston (a descendant of Major George Johnston, who had deposed Governor Bligh in 1808) must have come first around 1925. I remember him teaching me to dance on the front verandah, providing rubber bands for a catapult and joining enthusiastically in shooting and fishing trips. He settled at Bawley when he retired, and was one of the most loved identities in the district.

The guest house business must have influenced me in many ways. I had extra chores. Washing up was one I didn’t like — who does? Mother was strict and had definite ideas that I didn’t always go along with — such as washing and drying the bottoms of plates as well as the more obvious tops. Another chore was to take a bucket of milk each morning across the beach to Grandad’s where I helped with separating the cream, using a small bench-mounted hand-turned separator. This short trip with the milk was at the time when guests and campers were enjoying their morning swim, so I felt especially annoyed that I could not join in.

I met many people and had my narrow horizons stretched in the process. I recall in particular Mr G. Haskins, at that time a senior engineer with the Sydney Water Board, explaining to me the difference between a professional engineer and a mechanic.

Here are the names of some of the early guests: Dave McCathie (McCathie’s Ltd, Pitt St) and Mrs McCathie. They came in 1929, not long after their marriage, and eventually settled in the cottage at the north end of the beach. Several members of the Winn family (Winn’s Ltd, Oxford St and Newcastle) (Mr Gordon Winn gave me a lift back to Sydney in his open-model Rolls Royce the day war was declared in 1939). Sir John Madsen, Professor of Electrical Engineering at Sydney University, and the best beach fisherman I ever knew. Mr H. H. Massie, remembered especially for his ability to tangle the heavy cord lines used when fishing for snapper from the rocks. F. H. Ernest Walker, architect. The Gardner ‘boys’, insurance brokers. C. H. Bell, dentist (and ventriloquist). Mr and Mrs F. V. Nicholson and their sons John and Frank, who stayed with my grandmother regularly twice a year for many years. Mr Nicholls, solicitor. C. W. Peck, author of *Australian Legends*, who enthralled us with stories as we sat near the kitchen stove on winter evenings. D. Brockhoff (Brockhoff’s Flour, Glebe Road, Sydney). Jack Palmer (F. J. Palmer and Son, Sydney). Sid Ellis (son of a founder of the timber firm A. & E. Ellis) and family. Dr Spark, who liked fishing for sharks from the old gantry. Dr Blaxland, eye specialist, who probably started the whole business. E. Gallop (chairman of the Housing Commission). The anthropologists from Sydney (and Melbourne?); I am not sure of their names, but I seem to recall McCarthy, Towle and Thorpe. Doris Stenhouse and Marge Talbot (teachers, who came initially by bicycle in the late 1930s, became family friends, and later built
THEY CAME TO MURRAMARANG

a holiday cottage north of the guest house). Sir John McKelvey, surgeon. Dr H. Daly, anaesthetist. Dr Anderson-Stuart, radiologist. (These two were keen snapper fishermen, and both had cottages at Bawley later.) Captain Cooper R. N., who spoke severely to one of our cats: ‘If you look at me like that, you’ll get a thick ear!’ The cat was not amused. Mr McFadyen, known to the girls as ‘Mr Baby-Blue-Eyes’. Dr Ritchie. Mr Reg. Roberts.

In running the guest house, Mother had help from some of the local girls: Phyllis, Grace and Eileen Kellond, and Belle Walker helped at various times, and enjoyed it. As Belle put it: ‘I loved helping my friend Mrs Hamon … I loved it there, I had my own pony and I loved the fishing and I loved the land and I loved the place. For years I did that.’

Camping became popular during the 1920s. The favoured area at Bawley Point was among the trees on Willinga headland, but people camped anywhere that took their fancy. Water had to be obtained from local households, though some campers set up spear pumps in the sands near Willinga or Meroo lakes. There was no control or council supervision, nor any rubbish collection or toilet facilities. For the latter, you dug a suitable hole and put up a crude screen, usually of hessian, around it.

Most camps were one-family affairs, but Dr D. Bowman, a Paddington GP, did things on a much larger scale. Several families of relatives and friends were involved. Each family had its own tent, but there was a large dining marquee, and a separate cooking tent. Children under eight years were not allowed, as Dr Bowman felt they would be too young to look after themselves. I remember climbing on the branch of a fallen log to get a good view of the erection of their big tents on Willinga. Mrs Bowman, perhaps disconcerted by my stickybeaking but more likely through kindness, came over to ask me if I would like a sweet. The use of the word ‘sweet’ in this context was quite new, but I was quick to learn. To me, sweets were simply lollies.

The Bowmans were keen beach fisherfolk, using the traditional beach worms for bait. In each generation, the girls were encouraged to learn the tricky art of worming using the fingers only. Janet Arnold (née Bowman) recalled being offered ten shillings for her first worm, but the pay thereafter dropped to a mere shilling per worm.
Figure 38: Rodney Ellis and Charles Parsons with jewfish, Bawley Point, 1934. Rodney was the grandson of the owner of the Bawley Point sawmill.
Source: Bruce Hamon.
When Willinga became more crowded, the Bowmans moved their camp to Pretty Beach (then called Island Beach), which they must have had almost to themselves for years. Frank Evans supplied them with water in 200 litre drums, and their heavy camping gear was stored between trips at London’s place. Later, the Bowmans returned to Bawley Point, building a cottage in Lorikeet Close, which is still enjoyed by their descendants.

I should be able to write a separate book about local fishing! My father was a keen fisherman, and I have been returning to Bawley mainly for the fishing ever since I lived there. Gut lines first became available in the early ’20s. My earliest memories are of cord lines for both beach and rock fishing. The cord lines were rigged with a sinker on the end and one or two hooks on dropper loops above the sinker. The lines favoured for rock fishing were of Irish linen and described as ‘36-cord’. They were very strong; it was only just possible to break a snagged 36-cord line.

Rock fishing was for snapper, and to a lesser extent for groper. The beaches were fished for bream and whiting. Blackfish (luderick) or tailor were not fished for at all, and I don’t think we even suspected the existence of black drummer. Octopus, usually called starfish, was the preferred snapper bait, as it stayed on the hook well, but fish bait was used occasionally. The north-east corner of Bawley and the rather ill-defined gutter due east of the Trig Station were the favoured spots on Bawley Point, but if there was too much sea at those places my father fished the ‘Basin’, or even from the rocks about 100 metres east of the wharf. The cord lines were flaked out on rock or beach before throwing out. If this was not done carefully the line would tangle. Rods were used by visitors to the area, but were slow to catch on with the locals. Most of my early fishing was from the beaches, using gut lines wound on a bottle. The line could be thrown directly off the end of the bottle, but in playing a fish it was usual to drop the bottle on the sand and let the recovered line fall.

Was the fishing much better then? Here I must be cautious since in this field especially memory plays tricks, and of course no records were kept. For what it’s worth, my feeling is that things haven’t changed much! Snapper and groper are probably scarcer, and perhaps whiting, but I have certainly had some catches of other species recently that were as good as any, and conversely can remember many fishless sorties in the ’20s. Perhaps I’ve become more skilled with advancing years.

I started school at age seven, at Murramarang. This would have been August 1924, so my first full school year was 1925. I walked the two miles each way, barefooted like the rest. The school had only around 15 students, in six different classes, all in one room and of course with only one teacher. The teachers during
my four years there were Mr A. B. Hayes and Mr Brown. Mr Hayes kept in touch with at least one student from those times (Mrs Isabel Vider, née Walker) until his death. I visited him in Sydney in around 1974.

I have only a hazy idea now of the actual schoolwork. Laborious attempts at copying those too beautifully formed copperplate letters in the writing exercise books; ‘sums’, of course; copying maps; pressing flowers into nature study books. There was little manual work — some attempt at gardening, and folding of squares of brightly coloured paper. We were introduced to chip carving, and I still have a small practice piece from those days, which Mother kept and used for years as a teapot stand. Plasticine was used for modelling. We had slates in the first year or two. Ink in inkwells, stoppered with glass marbles. Those wretched scratchy steel pen nibs, that seemed better designed for the tips of darts than for writing. And singing — aided in some mysterious way by a tuning fork. We were very bashful about singing. I seem to recall that if the teacher didn’t continue to lead us, our efforts quickly trailed away to nothing, like a gramophone running down. The school did put on a play called ‘Soot and the Fairies’. I was a very unwilling Baron Bootlace, or some such. The play must have taken some organising, as we were an apathetic bunch.

A school inspector (Mr West) came once a year from the Department of Education. Very wrongly, the inspector was portrayed to us as a bogey man, to such effect that on one occasion of an inspector’s visit we all scampered off to a nearby patch of she-oaks to hide. I don’t recall how we were coaxed back. Another once-a-year event was the gift to every school pupil in the district of a bag of boiled lollies on Empire Day! They were provided and distributed by Blackburns, storekeepers in Milton.

‘Rounders’ was the most popular game at school. I doubt if I ever saw cricket or football played before going to college in Goulburn. Jacks and marbles were also played, and some ring games such as drop-the-handkerchief.

I suppose these early school days were happy enough. Certainly neither teacher was a tyrant, and there was little in the way of punishment. But we did not like going to school. I suspect this was at least partly an attitude passed on by our parents, whose school years were probably harsher. We used any excuse to stay away from school. The most frequent excuse was rain: either we would get wet and cold (wet weather gear was not so easy to come by) or we might be swept away in flooded creeks. On very wet days, only the teacher would put in an appearance.
Playing truant or ‘wagging it’ was much talked of, but I’m not sure how many absences from school were a result of truanting. In my case, I had to try it, but once was enough. Olive Hapgood and I decided to raid a patch of watermelons that were growing among maize on Guy’s property. We tested a number of melons in the approved way, by cutting out a small triangular piece with a pen-knife. A nice melon was eventually selected, and we ate it and our lunch at the south end of Gannet Beach, then sheepishly made our way home at what we guessed was the right hour.

Soon after I got home there was a phone call from a very agitated Mr Collins (manager of Guy’s). He was not so worried about the number of melons we had ruined by our thoughtless testing. But some of the melons we had cut into had been poisoned to deter the rabbits! This was indeed too much, and the sorry truth had to come out. I was made to apologise — a very severe punishment for me. I figured that I was not cut out for a life of crime. Olive, now Mrs Olive Baxter and living at Termeil, remembers the incident, and told me recently she got into trouble that day for being home too early.

Murramarang School closed at the end of 1928, as there were too few pupils. My last two years of primary schooling were at Termeil (1929–30). I rode to school each day on a darling shaggy-coated, cunning little pony named Titch. I suffered many falls from Titch, but came to no real harm, after all, it was not far to the ground. Mr William Peacock was the teacher for these two years. He was a kindly person, and older than either of my former teachers. He saw to it that I applied for a bursary, and promised me a camera if I succeeded. I had that camera for many years.

One return trip from Termeil School caused my parents much anxiety, as I did not get home till about 9 p.m. I was bringing father’s suitcase from Termeil, balanced on the pommel of the saddle. This made anything but a walking pace difficult. It had rained heavily all day, so I found the usual crossing of the lake much too deep to tackle. I continued on the north side of the lake to the tramline bridge, but it was under water. I went on then to the mouth of the lake, only to find that the lake had opened to the sea and was much too dangerous to cross. So I rode, still at walking pace, halfway back to Termeil and then took the track around the head of the lake to Murramarang, and thence to Bawley. Of course I enjoyed the adventure; it did not occur to me that anyone might think I had been drowned or swept out to sea!

Opportunities for getting into mischief were rather limited. I remember trying ‘tailor-made’ cigarettes (father smoked a pipe, or ‘rolled his own’), but even these were hard to get. We also smoked candle-bark, pushing smaller pieces into larger ones to get something large enough to stay alight. When electric torches appeared, I found I could catch rabbits at night by running them down while
dazzling them in the torch beam. This was harmless enough, but Mrs Hapgood was worried by the flitting lights. Belle Walker and I decided we would give her a bit more to worry about, so prepared some coloured lights whose effect was reinforced by strange yells and howls from both of us while we raced madly over Bawley Point behind her house. Mrs Hapgood came out with a hurricane lantern in one hand — and a rather business-like stock-whip in the other! My senior partner rose to the occasion, admired the stock-whip, ‘borrowed’ it and cracked it a few times, explaining the while that we were indeed only chasing rabbits. Peace was restored.

Except for campers and guest house clients, very few people came to Bawley Point. One group that made a special impression on me were marine surveyors, who visited Bawley in June 1923 and carried out a water depth survey within about one kilometre of the mill site. This was a great event in such a small and quiet community. Recently, I found a copy of the survey results in the State Archives. Mr H. H. Kelly, the surveyor in charge, was one of the Kelly family who mined shellgrit and made lime at Burrill.¹

The visit of the marine surveyors would have been my first introduction to marine science, and my only contact with it for many years. Little did I think at the time that I would become a marine scientist, or a scientist of any kind, for that matter.

The survey party set up a crude tide-indicating device attached to the wharf. This had to be read at regular intervals, probably hourly, and the results logged. One of the local lads was given the job. I remember being very curious about this activity. In later years, I have enjoyed working with sets of hourly tide heights, and would have reanalysed these old observations if I had been able to find them.

Another outstanding visitor, almost literally from another world, was Andrew Cunningham, who ‘dropped in’ by plane, landing his two-seater Gypsy Moth on Juwin Head (‘Logpaddock’) several times, around 1925. He and his mechanic (Mr Waller?) stayed with us. His plane would have been the first I had ever been close to, and perhaps the first I had seen.

On one visit, he took my father to Sydney and back, while the mechanic stayed at Bawley. Mother and I, and others, were present when they took off. I am sure neither Mother nor I realised that they very nearly didn’t make it. They took off towards the east, but were a bit south of the intended track near the crest of the headland. Banking the plane to correct this caused the left wing-tip to touch the ground, leaving a visible furrow several metres long, and some

¹ McAndrew, A. Beautiful Burrill, A. McAndrew, Sydney, 1993, p. 83.
grass on the wing-tip! But father enjoyed the flight, the only one he ever made. They detoured via the spectacular scenery in the upper Clyde valley, west of the Pigeon House.

Andrew had other landing spots near Milton.² I do not remember why he chose to land in such a remote spot as Bawley. Perhaps it was the fish? He had a property near Queanbeyan, and was well known in that district for his unorthodox flying. I was sad to learn recently that he was badly injured in a car accident, and took his own life while still in hospital, using a pistol smuggled in by a friend.

The Depression did not worry us very much, or perhaps I was shielded from such troubles. Father was out of work, so the only income was from the paying guests, and the post office, the latter being the only income for months during the winter. I was at school in Goulburn for the worst years. I might not have been able to continue there without the money from the bursary.

My grandmother Mary Reynolds, née Brodie, was born and reared a few kilometres south-west of Milton, but lived most of her life in Sydney, where she married Henry Reynolds. They came to Bawley to live around 1922, after Grandad retired from the Sydney Harbour Trust.

While in Sydney, Gran wrote four novels (The Heart of the Bush, The Selector Girl, The Black Silk Stocking and Dawn Asper) and had several short stories and nature articles published in the Sydney Mail. I have been told she also wrote If England Knew, which was published as a serial in the Ulladulla and Milton Times. She wrote under the name of Broda Reynolds. Gran kept writing till she was over 90, as is shown by a poem to celebrate her 93rd year. She did not write other poetry, as far as I know:

GRATITUDE
I thank you dear people for this party most rare
Given me in my ninety-third year.
And I know you’ll repeat it this day twelve months
If only it happens I’m here.
There are other fond gestures in memory’s chest
Piled high on a shelf near the door.
And this I shall place on top of the rest
With a hope there’ll be one or two more.
For if I could turn backward the swift hand of time
And live my life over again

I’d begin where I’m leaving off, here among friends
And begin where the narrow track ends.
I’d rake in a lot that I’d wasted in play
Ambition, endeavour and strife,
And blend them with love, for the good of mankind
For it helps in the riddle of life.
I’d pay in a thought or an act every day,
Remembering humanity’s need
Then wait for the blossoms and fruit ‘twould produce,
For it’s strangely like planting a seed.
Or might it not be that I’d make a worse hash
Of the chance given me in this span,
Squandering and wasting the gold dust of time
As only reckless youth can.
It’s hard to define at this age-worn hour
Looking back down the dim darkening way,
But why worry o’er space or the years as they count
Life’s only a night and a day.
Yet there are just a few words I’d like you to recall
For I say them with fervour and faith,
And you’ll hear them again in the sighing of the wind,
There’s a life after this for us all.
So away over there on those astral plains
Where the soul is our self-hood alone
I’ll be waiting, my friends, mid the sunbeam that blends
With a halo no earthchild has known.
So comrades most true, I’ll leave it to you
To remember this day at its fall.
When I murmured good night while the heavens are bright,
And God bless you my friends one and all.
Although she was a great reader, I do not remember many books in her home at Bawley Point. One might have expected extensive, crammed bookshelves. Perhaps her generosity to friends, even to mere acquaintances, took toll of the stock over the years. This generosity extended to her pets, and she told the tale many times of giving a beautiful piece of fillet steak to the cat, and opening a tin of sardines for herself.

She was a great talker, and was happy in any company as long as she ‘held the floor’. Visitors were fascinated, and quickly fell under her spell. She was fond of thumping your arm almost continuously, for emphasis. In later years, she found it hard to continue to dominate the discussion, but would still follow visitors out to the gate, loath to admit tiredness or let them go. But even at the gate, after almost shooshing the visitors off, she might single one out and say: ‘But not you. I want to talk to you!’

From her parents, Gran had acquired many ‘Irishisms’. I can still recall a few. The spellings are mine, and the meanings, well, who knows?: flahulickness; fininst; gosthoon; pig-dog (as an adjective, usually reserved for the weather: ‘a pig-dog day’).

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In the Reynolds’ first cottage at Bawley, cooking was on a small wood-burning stove. I am fairly sure there was never a recipe book, or a measure other than the very convenient ‘handful’. And there would always be an extra handful for the pot. She made jam, especially shaddock, melon and lemon, and blackberry. I recall delicious fried scones, pancakes with lemon juice and sugar, and dumplings. In later years, in what became Johnston’s cottage, she used a camp oven to good effect.

Gran took in guests when the guest house business started. I am not sure if this was her own initiative, or a question at least initially of taking an overflow from Mother’s place. Some of Gran’s guests came back year after year. I recall in particular the Nicholson family from Rose Bay, who came twice a year (Christmas and May) for many years, making the trip in a hire car which then returned to Sydney, returning to Bawley at the end of the holiday to take them home. There was much camping on Willinga Point in those days, and Gran achieved some control over the camping by refusing more than an emergency supply of scarce tank water to those she did not like the look of. They were advised to go on to Kioloa.

Figure 40: Moving two rooms of one of the mill cottages at Bawley Point to a site near the north end of Bawley Point Beach. These rooms became the centre of the cottage lived in by Broda and Henry Reynolds, and presently owned by Pat Johnson. Henry Reynolds (left) and Charlie Clark (bullock driver), c. 1925.

Source: Bruce Hamon.
Gran was brought up a Catholic, but at least in later years enjoyed discussions with members of other denominations. She was not above telling a good story about her own minor transgressions. One Good Friday she had a beautiful piece of fillet steak in the meat safe, but felt she should not eat it. But later she admitted to my wife Anne: ‘I craved for that fillet steak all day, and in the end I ate it, so as not to lose the respect of my husband.’

To the dismay of some members of the family, she arranged to be buried in the C of E part of the cemetery (to be near her husband), with a Congregational minister officiating (because she liked the fellow), but after a short service in the Roman Catholic church in Milton. That was Gran, indeed.

My grandfather, or ‘Dadkins’ as my grandmother often called him, was a character in his own right, though always outshone in company by my grandmother. Grandad was a doer, a practical belt-and-braces man who liked nothing more than to potter about in his workshop or garden. He was impatient with those who talked too much. I recall an evening by the fire when a friend and I, and perhaps Gran, discussed religion at some length while Grandad dozed. We were discussing Jesus when Grandad stirred and interjected with two telling words: ‘Stump orator!’ We gave up after that.

Grandad had an ‘Indian’ motorcycle. It was not for riding, but for cutting wood. It was jacked up, and bolted to a tree in the yard. A very Heath Robinson rig, involving parts of a sewing machine and a three-bladed homemade fan, was coupled to the rear wheel hub to keep the engine cool. He planned to drive a circular saw via a belt running from the tyreless back wheel. We spent endless hours on this, but seldom got the engine to fire at all, and certainly never got within a cooee of cutting wood. Just as well, as I think the exhaust system was missing. But I learned a lot about petrol engines, specially the mysteries of timing.

His workshop housed a treadle-powered woodturning lathe which he had made while in Sydney. This did not get much use. There was also a home-made and hand-powered vertical drill, which was very effective though rather slow. Grandad was very careful with his tools — after all, the nearest hardware shop was a long way away. He especially treasured the smallest (1/16 inch) twist drill.

Gran and Dadkins kept a cow, and a horse and sulky. They had a garden, which served also as a bank. Doris Stenhouse once offered to dig a few potatoes, but Grandad kept an eye on her, and gave instructions: ‘No Doris! Not there! Dig over here!’ I wonder if there is still some buried treasure under the present lawns. He kept bees at one stage; I recall him swathed in some kind of netting and collecting a swarm of bees from a low limb down towards the lake. He was a great DIY practitioner and inventor; even to inventing the proverbial new mouse trap. I recall at least two designs that were made, but I do not think
they caught anything. Most country people had to ‘make do’, and Grandad made this almost a religion. He would spend days mending a cheap tin-opener. Some of this rubbed off on me, or was inherited: I often find myself ‘doing a Grandad Reynolds job’ on some worthless item.

Ralph Johnston stayed with my grandparents after he retired, and looked after them in their old age. When they died (Dadkins in July 1951 and Gran in June 1962) he bought the property, and lived there for the rest of his life, leaving it to his nephew Pat Johnston. Ralph had many pets over the years: wallabies, possums, at least one penguin, cats and dogs. He lavished great care and affection on them, and later in life built a small church in the grounds of the cottage as a memorial to them. This is now a local landmark, and is enshrined in the special language of surfies, who refer to Willinga Point as ‘Churchill’s’. (They also call it ‘Sharky’s’.) Before building the church, Ralph had used the local water-worn pebbles, some carried back from as far south as Snake Bay, and pieces of abalone shell, as decorative materials. They were fashioned into architraves in the house, and flower beds in the garden. After a stay in Royal North Shore Hospital, he made dozens of flower vases out of concrete decorated with pebbles and shells; these were given to the hospital. Each Christmas, Ralph bought boxes of ‘California’ chocolates for most of the residents; I believe these gifts were delivered by wheelbarrow.

Figure 41: Ralph Johnston’s memorial to his pets, Johnston Street, Bawley Point.

Source: Margaret Hamon, courtesy of the Johnston family.
Most families had shotguns and rifles, and potted the local wildlife when they could. ‘Roos, wallabies, rabbits and duck were the main targets. The ‘roos and wallabies were shot for their skins, and were seldom eaten, except for soup made from their tails. The ducks were harder to get, so I have few memories of eating them. ‘Gill birds’ (red wattle birds) were sometimes shot for a meal, but were not good targets, at least for the poorly maintained pea-rifles used against them.

There was not much interest in the wildlife as such; perhaps there would have been more if there had been books to consult. Koalas should have been in the area, but I did not see any, and do not remember others talking about them. Reg and Innes Collins said they had seen one or two, and Peter Scheele saw one back of Kioloa. He told me there are still some koalas near Benandra. Belle Vider said she saw only one while she lived at Kioloa. It was large, and on the ground, and after some more questioning Belle agreed that yes, it could have been a wombat!

I can think of only a few changes in bird life, but we did no proper birdwatching in the 1920s. The pallid cuckoo, and some honeyeaters, particularly the white-naped, have become less common. The koel, wood ducks, white egrets, and very recently the channel-billed cuckoo, are more common. Galahs, now quite common, did not appear until about 30 years ago. Cattle egrets appeared even more recently.

There was a deposit of peat a few hundred metres west of the lagoon at Murramarang. This started to burn, probably as a result of ‘burning off’, sometime in the 1920s, while I was going to school at Murramarang. The burning continued for some months, until put out by heavy rain. The ‘fire’ was really a very slow smouldering, and resulted in gradual death of the grass around the burning area, which I recall as a hole that was eventually a few metres in diameter. Bill Cullen recalled seeing similar burning in the swamp behind Cormorant Beach. About 20 years ago, I mentioned this to a geographer, who was very interested. He had used carbon dating of such deposits in studies of the history of NSW coastal lagoons and lakes. He did not know of the Murramarang deposit.

My grandmother had heard tales about the bodies of Aborigines ‘buried’ in caves on Durras Mountain, and I remember two attempts we made to find them. At the time, these tales probably came from the Beadman family,4 who had farmed on the mountain for many years and had only recently left, but there is an earlier reference. In 1870, a travelling reporter of Town and Country Journal mentioned it: ‘I had heard of a cave, somewhere in the neighbourhood

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of Murrumerang, which had never been explored. It was said to be haunted, and to have entrances both east and west, to be full of stalactites, bats, fossils and other living creatures.’ It was said to be ‘six miles on our way [south from Murramarang], and 100 yards off it’.5 He did not find it. This description, at least for the west entrance, fits a small cave on the west side of Durras Mountain, a few hundred metres north of the end of the fire trail that goes up to the mountain from the west.6

In our first attempt to find the cave on the east of the mountain, my parents, grandparents and I camped on Durras, in the then recently deserted farmhouse. Getting there was fun: we used a dray or spring cart, drawn by a decrepit splay-footed lop-lipped nag. The route was the old coastal road that climbed the mountain from the north-east. The last rocky pinch near the top was too much for the nag, so we had to carry our food and gear the rest of the way. My father did the searching, but found nothing. Later there was a shorter expedition, this time accompanied by Mr C. W. Peck (author of two volumes of Australian Legends), but again with no success. My grandmother thought the caves might have been found and some contents removed by Varney Parkes, son of Sir Henry Parkes, who was living at Conjola around this time.7

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5 Town and Country Journal, 26 November 1870.

6 In the 1980s, an Aboriginal elder from the Illawarra area, Mr Dick Henry, told Sue Feary about a huge cave on Durras Mountain that contained Aboriginal skeletal remains wrapped in paperbark and placed on ledges (Feary, S. personal communication) (A.G. and S.F.).

7 McAndrew, A. Congenial Conjola, A. McAndrew, 1991, pp. 31–5.
This text is taken from They Came to Murrarang: A History of Murrarang, Kioloa and Bawley Point, by Bruce Hamon, edited by Alastair Greig and Sue Feary, published 2015 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.