CHAPTER 9

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

A very important event in the area in recent years was undoubtedly Joy London’s gift of 860 acres at Kioloa to The Australian National University. The deeds of this land, the ‘Home Block’ (block E on Map 1), were handed over on 1 March 1975, and the property then became known as the Edith and Joy London Foundation. This generous gift was Joy’s way of honouring her mother, and particularly her mother’s wish that the property be preserved as nearly as possible in its present state instead of following the usual path of subdivision. The property had been the home of the Moore and London family since 1929 — about half the time since it was granted to Carr in 1842. The family had worked hard there; it was happy work, and they had loved the place.

The property had been left to Joy after her mother’s death in November 1958. Joy’s grandparents Edward and Kate Moore had died in 1933 and 1942 respectively, so only Joy and her aunt and uncle were left to run the property. With no close relatives, it was time to think hard about the eventual fate of the property. It was originally offered in turn to some charities, but they declined. This might seem strange: the main difficulty they saw was that of guaranteeing to maintain the character of the property ‘in perpetuity’. Then Joy, who had become friendly with Pat Walker, wife of Professor Don Walker of ANU, asked Pat casually if ANU might be interested? They were indeed.

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1 This chapter was the last in the first edition of the book. When the present tense is used in this chapter, it refers to circumstances in 1993. This helps to retain some of the speculative nature of the chapter. An updated reflection on Murramarang at the time of the publication of this second edition is presented in the following epilogue to this book (A.G. and S.F.).

A property of this size and diversity provides many opportunities for university staff and students to carry out carefully planned field projects that might run for long periods — decades, or even centuries. It also satisfies many shorter-term requirements, such as giving students first-hand experience of gathering data under field conditions.

The foundation property is run by a management committee. Joy London is a member of this committee, and in this way continues an active interest in the foundation. She continues to live in the main homestead at the top of The Avenue. With the help of the late Neil Evans, she ran the farming side for the foundation in its early years.

Another important event has been the gazetting of Murramarang National Park in May 1973. This park extends from Pretty Beach to Batemans Bay, and includes some areas that were previously privately owned, such as the land on Durras Mountain. The National Parks and Wildlife Service also administers the Murramarang Aboriginal Area, which includes the extensive midden referred to earlier. Setting up the park was the culmination of many years of investigation and planning by NPWS staff and by private groups, including the National Parks Association.

For the rest of the area, the period since World War II has been one of continued growth, and improvement in facilities. The number of houses rose slowly at first, to only 72 in 1964, but then increased more rapidly to 220 in 1977 and an estimated 650 in 1993. About one third is permanently occupied, so there are enough residents to support local shops and tradespeople.

The concrete bridge over Willinga Lake was opened in April 1969, and the road from Kioloa through Bawley Point to the Princes Highway was sealed within the next decade. For the first time, residents and visitors could rely on access in any weather, except the rare occasions when the lake was high enough to flood the bridge approaches. Electric power lines were put through a few years earlier, around 1966, and the navigation light on Brush Island was installed in 1967. A school bus service from Kioloa and Bawley Point to Ulladulla started around 1971. In 1993 this service catered for nearly 100 pupils. The Education Department is considering a re-introduction of the local school scheme, and is looking for a suitable site.

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The earliest substantial development in the area was at Bawley Point, where around 50 quarter-acre (0.1 ha) blocks were surveyed from Crown Land south of the guest house in the 1940s. This was followed by Alan Guy’s subdivision of part of the Willinga property around 1962, which had been left to him and his brother Jack by their grandfather Francis Harrington Guy. Their father, Francis Augustus Guy (1891–1927), had died before their grandfather. This was the area on Juwin headland, and behind Gannet Beach. I was present when these blocks were auctioned, and can remember the mutterings of gloom when only one block was sold. The further subdivision of the eastern part of ‘Willinga’, on the headland at the south end of Gannet Beach, and on the west of Murramarang Road, was carried out in stages and over a period of years.
Other early subdivisions were at Kioloa, opposite the camping area, at Merry Beach and on Bawley Point. Subdivisions on the west side of Murramarang Road have generally been later, and the block sizes larger. The first part of the Voyager Crescent subdivision was around 1973, and the large size of the blocks here and elsewhere was due to terrain and poor absorptive capacity of the soil. A historically important subdivision was made in 1981, when the home block for Murramarang House was reduced to 10 acres. It was bought at that time by Mrs le Febvre (now Mrs Truter), who plans to live in the old house in a few years’ time.

Figure 54: Entrance to the Edith and Joy London Foundation, The Australian National University, Kioloa, before the renovation of the cottages on The Avenue.
Source: Margaret Hamon.

The small shop on Bawley Point was started by Bruce Brown in 1972. The Bawley Point shopping complex north of Murramarang House opened in the late 1980s. It now contains a supermarket, butcher, bread shop, newsagency, estate agent, liquor store, fast food shop, hardware shop, gallery, hairdresser and doctor’s surgery.

Camping areas and caravan parks have gradually replaced the uncontrolled bush camping of earlier years. Council put up ‘No Camping’ signs, reserved some areas for day picnickers only, and provided toilet facilities. The Kioloa camping area and caravan park was the earliest; it was started by Jack Kemp
after World War II. The shop opposite the park entrance also dates from this period. Some people felt they were not treated well by Jack, accusing him of praying for rain then charging for pulling them out of bogs with his blitz buggy.

John and Jean Brierley started the caravan park behind the south end of Racecourse Beach in the mid-1960s, on 146 acres of land. This block is the part of block D (see Map 1) east of the Bawley Point–Kioloa road. It had not been developed previously, so they began with virgin bush. The work was hard; they had four children between the ages of two and eight when they started. There was a drought in the early years, so water supply was a serious problem, solved only by refurbishing a well in the north end of their property. The water was excellent, and they were able to truck some of the water to local residents. Their van park was called ‘Camp Nundera’, but the name was changed recently to ‘Racecourse Beach Tourist Caravan Park’.

Brian Wallace began the caravan park at Pretty Beach around 1960, and Stan Bogle started another one at Merry Beach some years later. This was initially north of the creek, but was later extended south of the creek by Brian Wallace. After Murrarang National Park was gazetted, the NPWS wanted to close the van park at Pretty Beach, but was persuaded to change its mind.

Dune stabilisation was carried out by the Soil Conservation Service during the past 20 years. The main areas treated were Racecourse Beach, Gannet Beach, the midden area on Wilford’s Point, and Bawley Point Beach. They may have been overzealous in this work. The character of the midden area has been completely changed, and users of the picnic area at Bawley Point cannot see much of the beach. 4

Bush fires have always been a problem in this area. In the earlier years, it was up to individuals to fight the fires with anything that came to hand, as there was no special equipment, nor any organisation or training. Wet sacks or green boughs were used to beat the flames out; back-burning was also used.

4 The stabilisation work on the headland was done by NPWS, to protect the midden from further erosion. The vegetation now protects this very important site (A.G. and S.F.).
Volunteer fire brigades were started first at Kioloa then at Bawley Point, and many who lived locally and knew the area well gave much of their spare time over the years. Windsor Evans was Captain at Kioloa 1939–68, and Neil Evans gave excellent service there later, for the very long period of 43 years. Bill Fuller, who was running the guest house at Bawley Point, started the fire service there. Charlie Antill was Fire Captain at Bawley Point for many years. The proper buildings for storage of equipment are very recent.

Through luck in earlier years, and the efforts of the brigades later, there has been little damage to property from bush fires. I do not recall any family’s house being destroyed by bush fire since 1920, but three houses and some farm buildings were burnt at Termeil in the 1890s. One of the worst fires was in 1939, when the area from Termeil to the coast was burnt out. My grandmother described the scene after this fire: ‘You could chase a mouse from Termeil to Bawley Point and not lose it once!’ And I recall a massive stranding of insects along the beaches; they had been blown out to sea by the hot westerlies that accompanied a fire, and washed ashore by a north-easter a day or so later, some still alive. The destruction of Kioloa mill around 1928 was due to a bush fire.

Permanent residents in the area are mainly either retirees, or engaged in service industries: teachers, builders, plumbers, electricians, painters, tilers, upholsterers, shopkeepers. The guest house provides some seasonal employment. The Edith and Joy London Foundation employs a manager, who runs the cleared part of
the foundation as a farm, maintains foundation buildings and attends to the needs of visitors to the foundation. The only industry exploiting local materials is the removal of sand from the back of the north end of Racecourse Beach. This started around 1970, when John and Jean Brierley had the land. Initially, it was planned to treat the sand, which is finer than average, and use it for moulds for casting metals, but this plan was abandoned. It is now used for general building purposes. In Jean Brierley’s view, this activity is redressing an imbalance due to overgrazing in earlier years, which led to the dunes becoming mobile and covering previously useful land, including a small lagoon (Abraham’s Lagoon). I recall the backs of the dunes being much nearer the shore, and certainly active (moving inland), in the 1920s.

Shortly after World War II there had been a flurry of excitement about mining the local beaches for rutile, and some claims were staked, much to the worry of the few local residents. This mining did not go ahead; apparently iron in the sand made processing too expensive.

Timber-getting, once the main local industry, has practically ceased. Don Baxter still operates a sawmill at Monkey Mountain, Termeil. Another mill back of Murramarang (block H on Map 1), started some decades ago by Charlie Mison, operated until around 1985. Brian Wallace was still cutting pit props about a year ago.
The year 1991 saw the opening of the Kioloa–Bawley Point Community Centre. This was financed partly by City of Shoalhaven, and partly by funds raised by the local Sports and Recreation Club, of which Wendy Montgomery was President and Bronwyn Clarke Secretary.

In the 1950s and earlier there was no provision for garbage collection. People either buried their garbage, dumped it in the sea, or took it out of the area. The nearest tip was at Ulladulla. Around 1965 council opened a local tip opposite the Racecourse Beach camping area. Around 1990 this was upgraded to a ‘Refuse Transfer Station’: you can dump your rubbish there in designated bins, which are whisked away out of the area at regular intervals, so reducing the smells and vermin associated with the earlier open trench system. Collection of recyclable items was also provided for. A system for weekly collection of household garbage from individual homes was also started around the same time.

Council has never provided a night soil collection service. In early years pit toilets were used, or cans which were emptied into the sea. I’ve been told part of one headland at Kioloa, used for this purpose, was known locally as ‘Dunnican Point’. At present all residences and camping areas use septic tank systems. Council provides a pump-out service where there is not sufficient natural soil cover for absorption trenches, for example on Bawley Point itself. This service is not free. Generally, this system is working well, though some warnings of health risks and possible long-term damage to wetlands have appeared, for example in the 1980 dissertation by Williams.5

Residents and visitors rely on tank water for the most part, though some use is made of groundwater accessed by spear pumps. Kioloa camping area uses roof water for drinking, and dam water for showers, laundry and toilets. The guest house has frequent deliveries of water by road tanker during the summer season. There are no plans for a reticulated water supply, or for a sewerage system. The majority of residents feel these amenities would be too expensive.

I have enjoyed writing this book. It has brought back and refreshed many memories; old friendships have been renewed and new ones made. In the immediate future, Kioloa and Bawley Point will continue to cater mainly for tourists and retirees. The two villages have attracted people who like the peace

5 Williams, G. An Environmental Study of the Coastal Strip from Bawley Point to Pretty Beach, Bachelor of Architecture Dissertation, NSW Institute of Technology, 1980, p. 154.
and beauty of natural areas. There is always a threat that too much ‘people pressure’ on natural areas will destroy the very qualities which attracted people to the areas. Only continued vigilance will keep that threat in check.