The significance of *They Came to Murraramarang*

*They Came to Murraramarang* was first published in 1994, providing the New South Wales South Coast villages of Bawley Point, Kioloa and the surrounding area with an authoritative history from colonial settlement through to the contemporary era. High demand for the book led to subsequent reprints in 1997 and 2001. Ongoing requests for reprints attest to its popularity, with readers ranging from residents within the district and holiday makers discovering the beauty of the area, to academics interested in the history of this once isolated part of the South Coast.

In considering another reprint, two decades after its initial release, the author Bruce Hamon was aware that the region has experienced considerable development since the early 1990s and it is appropriate to consider these changes. Bruce was also aware of research conducted into particular historical episodes associated with the region since the original publication, which augments his account presented in *They Came to Murraramarang*. Furthermore, he felt that the original text provided only a brief glimpse into the rich story of the Indigenous custodians of the country, even though the book presented a fascinating account of early colonial frontier conflict. In incorporating these changes and discoveries, Bruce sought my assistance, along with that of Dr Sue Feary, an archaeologist with extensive knowledge of Indigenous history and environmental policy in the region. Bruce passed away in August 2014 before the book went to print.
The most difficult dilemma in considering how to incorporate these changes into a new edition was that the book itself has become part of the history of Murramarang. The book remains the only comprehensive account of the region. This was partly due to the diligent archival efforts of the author. More importantly, Bruce was able to write the history from a unique position of authority because his family were early settlers in the region and he himself grew up within the small settlement of Bawley Point between 1918 and 1930. Under circumstances where archival records and archaeological evidence are sparse, the testimonies of local people become even more significant. Bruce not only had access to such testimonies, but was also part of the community’s history, having lived through its transformation from the timber age to the present.

Given the unique position of the author, no book can surpass *They Came to Murramarang* as a historical record of the area. This new edition has remained mindful of Bruce’s legacy, and Sue and I have ensured that readers have full access to his own words.

### The life of the author

Bruce provided rich insight into his early life in Chapter 7, ‘Bawley Point in the 1920s’, and these reminiscences remain the most vivid we possess of life in the region towards the end of the timber-milling era. His connections with the region, however, can be traced back to his great-grandparents on both sides, who settled in Milton in the 1850s. When Bruce’s parents, Les and Alma, were expecting Bruce’s arrival — he was born on 11 August 1917 — his mother was sent to Sydney, where they both remained during Bruce’s first year. The family then moved to Bawley Point, where his father was a mill hand at Guy’s timber mill.

After the mill burned down in April 1922, Bruce’s father was retained in the capacity of a load tally clerk at Bawley Point, as a timber mill still operated at Flat Rock near Monkey Mountain Road north of Termeil. The population of Bawley Point by then had been reduced to around a dozen households.

At the age of seven, Bruce was enrolled at Murramarang School, before its closure forced Bruce’s mother — who was determined that Bruce advance his education as far as possible — to transfer him to Termeil School when he was 11 years old.

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1 In writing this section, I drew extensively on two interviews conducted with Bruce Hamon and Margaret Hamon at Bruce’s home in Bawley Point in July and August 2012. I also consulted a memoir Bruce wrote detailing his professional career, entitled *My Working Life*. Additional support was also provided by Nicholas Steinmetz and Bruce’s work colleagues at CSIRO, including Stuart Godfrey, George Cresswell, John Church, Alan Pearce, George Veronis, and Ian Jones.
INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW EDITION

He traversed the 10-kilometre daily journey on his pony, Titch. Even though this westerly journey became familiar, he rarely ever ventured five kilometres south to the village of Kioloa. Today they are considered twin villages. Given the isolation of Bawley Point during this time, Bruce spent much of his childhood exploring the coastal and marine environment. He vividly recalled his interest in the visit of a team of marine surveyors to Bawley Point.

At the age of 13, Bruce received a bursary to attend St Patrick’s College in Goulburn where he boarded for four years. During his time there, his mother began operating the Bawley Point Guest House. His parents had already been taking in guests ever since his mother visited a Sydney optometrist, Dr Blaxland, who subsequently visited Bawley Point, and then informed others of this tranquil spot and the convivial local hospitality. Word of mouth was the only advertising the Hamon’s business required. Bruce’s parents purchased land and his father, with the help of Frank Carriage (described by Bruce as a ‘fisherman, builder, jack-of-all-trades’), built the more commodious guest house. The house still stands on Johnston Street in Bawley Point, an extension of Murramarang Road, heading north towards Willinga Lake, although it closed as a guest house in 2001. The guest house had its own orchard, vegetable gardens and chicken house, while a tennis court and motel-style units were later added.

During his schooling in Goulburn, Bruce would return to Bawley Point during school holidays. Most of the visitors at the guest house came from Sydney. One keen fisherman, the head of electrical engineering at University of Sydney, Professor John Madsen (knighted in 1954), encouraged Bruce to consider engineering at university. The young Bruce thought engineers drove steam trains.

Bruce was accepted into Sydney University and studied electrical engineering for four years, followed by an additional year of mathematics and physics. In 1941, his technical skills were in high demand as a result of the war and he began his career-long association with the CSIRO by choosing to join the National Standards Laboratory. He soon became adept at designing precision resistors that improved the accuracy of measurements. Throughout his career, Bruce published some 70 papers in various journals such as The Journal of Scientific Instruments. His renown became international, and one Canadian company continues to advertise ‘Hamon Type Resistance Transfer Standards’.
Figure 1: Bruce Hamon aged 15, with Bobby the cat.
Source: Margaret Hamon.
Bruce also participated in various wartime projects, including one associated with improving the range accuracy of coastal defence guns. This included an assignment to Britain between June 1943 and February 1944. On his first international flight, to San Francisco, his seating allocation consisted of mailbags. On his return to Sydney, he was involved in projects de-gaussing ships, limiting their risk to magnetic mines.

After the war, Bruce continued his work on precision instruments, venturing into the design of oceanographic electronic devices. He also led a research team calibrating instruments for measuring salinity, temperature and depth. These professional duties drew him back to his childhood fascination with coastal and marine environments. Eventually, this path led him to join the CSIRO's Division of Fisheries at Cronulla, in February 1957, and he spent the following year on a UNESCO Fellowship in Marine Science at Britain's National Institute of Oceanography, in the company of his wife, Anne, and daughter, Margaret. On his return to Australia, Bruce became interested in currents, tides and waves, and he was credited with ‘discovering’ the ‘continental shelf wave’ (although, modestly, Bruce observes that they are mentioned in *The Royal Society Philosophical Transactions* of June 1665). Much of his scientific work at the CSIRO during the 1960s and 1970s was devoted to oceanographic observations of the eastern coast of Australia, the same coast he had fished from at isolated Bawley Point.

Figure 2: Bruce on a bushwalk, with a White-eared Honeyeater removing his hair for nesting material.
Source: Margaret Hamon.
He retired from the CSIRO in August 1979 and became an Honorary Associate at the Marine Studies Centre at Sydney University, the university where his initial training commenced. He remained an active researcher, specialising in time-series data for tides and sea levels. He stated that: ‘I have enjoyed my working life. I enjoyed the freedom to choose projects.’ Testimonies from those who Bruce worked with or supervised confirm that he commanded enormous respect by allowing his team latitude in pursuing their interests and balancing work with non-work life. Through this approach, Bruce built a work culture characterised by trust, loyalty and mutual respect. He has been acclaimed as the father of physical oceanography in Australia.

His retirement allowed him to pursue his other interests, including fishing, bird-watching, astronomy and woodwork. He put his woodworking skills to good use making many wooden items for Technical Aids for the Disabled. Having lived at Caringbah since 1957, Bruce moved back to Bawley Point in June 2005. Surrounded by family members and friends, Bruce was able to remain living independently at Bawley Point until March 2013, when he moved to IRT Crown Gardens at Batemans Bay. He passed away peacefully on 24 August 2014.
Writing *They Came to Murraramang*\(^2\)

While Bruce enjoyed the freedom to choose research projects throughout his life, one can only wonder why he chose to turn from his expertise in precision measurement towards the local history of an isolated region where only rudimentary records existed. *They Came To Murraramang* is one of the most challenging projects Bruce chose in his research career. Yet readers of the history quickly come to admire the way in which the author used a wide range of research material — from census data to electoral rolls, from early settler journals to newspaper reports, and from interviews to personal recollection — to present a compelling narrative of how a set of small isolated communities battled to connect themselves with a wider world that itself had created — and continually transformed — the small communities. This narrative of isolation and connection ran through Bruce’s quest to understand his community.

The road out of Bawley Point was always of particular interest to Bruce, literally and metaphorically. He remembered as a child the stonework at Willinga Lake that marked the Old South Coast Road, built some time before 1837. He used to trace the visible remnants of this road south from Bawley Point, up Durras Mountain and down to Pebbly Beach. His mother, as noted below, painted an image of the stonework at the side of the road in the early 1920s.

He wrote letters to the Royal Australian Historical Society in January 1964 and the Illawarra Historical Society in March 1964 requesting information about when the old coast road was in use and whether it ever carried a coach service. However, neither society could furnish the necessary details. In 1982, after reading George Antill’s book, *Settlement in the South: A record of the discovery, exploration and settlement of the Shoalhaven River Basin 1803–1982*, he wrote to the author asking for further information on the road as well as more information on the schools in the Murramarang district. Antill’s detailed response only confirmed to Bruce how limited and sketchy the record of the region was. Antill himself camped at Bawley Point with his family around 1930 and recalled the Hamons.

Now retired, Bruce began spending more time exercising his own historical memory and those of others. He wrote notes for his daughter Margaret on his grandmother, Broda Reynolds, who also lived at Bawley Point in the 1920s. In 1983, he also took notes from a conversation about the history of the region with Neil Evans, whose family history in the region went back to the 1850s. Bruce also sought traces of information about Bawley Point and Kioloa before his birth through researching editions of the *Nowra Leader* from 1913 and 1914.

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\(^2\) In writing this section, I am grateful to Bruce Hamon for providing me with a folio containing his correspondence associated with researching and writing *They Came to Murraramang*. 
In 1985, Bruce sent an unpublished memoir of life at Bawley Point to Jim Gibbney, who had become the ‘official’ historian of the Edith and Joy London Foundation when the property was handed over to The Australian National University in 1975. Gibbney, one of Canberra’s most renowned historians, resigned from the role in 1977, but responded to Bruce’s memoir by complimenting him on ‘a readable and useful piece of work, indeed I consider it one of the best things of its type that I have seen in a long professional career’.

Bruce was interested in Gibbney’s confession that he had begun to research a history of the area but was eventually forced to abandon the project. He informed Bruce that transcribed interviews existed with locals such as Reg and Innes Collins, Ernie Donovan, Belle Vider and Bill Cullen. Bruce also discovered that Owen Dent, who had taken possession of these materials, was not in a position to continue writing the history. More importantly, Bruce offered his assistance to Lorna Froude and Dorothy Watts, who had also begun writing a history of the district.

At this time, the early 1990s, Bruce was still living in Caringbah, Sutherland shire, and used this opportunity to trawl through the State Library in earnest. Between December 1991 and March 1992, Bruce wrote a series of long letters to Dorothy providing a wealth of information that he had obtained from his research into the Milton and Ulladulla Times around the turn of the twentieth century. These letters reveal the value of Bruce’s training in precision instruments combined with the mind of a critical historian, always questioning contradiction and searching for explanations of events out of limited material. In a March 1992 letter to Dorothy, he finally summoned the courage to state: ‘I should have enough material now to start writing!’ His initial interest in the Old South Coast Road had taken him on a much longer journey than he could have anticipated.

Shortly after this, Bruce spoke with Dr Brian Lees, an ANU geographer involved with the Edith and Joy London Foundation, about the possibility of writing the history. In July 1992, he wrote more firmly to Lees, confirming that he was interested in continuing the project — with help from Lorna and Dorothy — and Lees granted him permission to use Gibbney’s transcripts. He also outlined the structure of the proposed book, which bore an uncanny resemblance to the final product, and anticipated that the project would take a year.

This proved to be a frenetic year in which Bruce attacked his project with the same stamina and critical questioning that he had devoted to his CSIRO work. Letters were sent around the country with a wide range of requests for documentary assistance and clarification, prefaced with the explanation that he was ‘about to start a short history’. He wrote to the CSIRO about rabbits on Brush Island, to a range of different historical societies asking for details about electoral rolls, to record offices about assigned convicts, to academics
about wages and conditions, to the National Museum of Australia on particular Indigenous identities, and to experts on shipwrecks. He even found time to warn ANU about the early spread of Bitou Bush at Kioloa.

In the midst of his research, Bruce also rediscovered the watercolour that his mother painted of the stonework on the Old South Coast Road at Willinga Lake. This was found at King House, in rooms used by the Milton-Ulladulla Historical Society. Bruce wrote to the society, seeking permission to use it on the cover of the forthcoming book.

ANU had expressed interest in the book in January 1992, and in August 1993 the ANU Centre for Resources and Environmental Studies agreed to underwrite the costs of publishing it. With the precision that had characterised his professional life, Bruce delivered the manuscript on time, and its publication ensured that it became part of the history of the region.

Figure 4: Bruce Hamon at Minnamurra, c. 1995.
Source: Margaret Hamon.
Changes in this edition

This new edition of *They Came to Murramarang* includes some significant new features while respecting the integrity of the first edition. Readers therefore have access to Bruce’s original history in addition to new material that places the original text in perspective.

Any changes Bruce requested have been added to his original endnotes within each chapter, which have been converted to footnotes for this edition. Bruce wanted to retain the artwork that adorned the cover of the original edition, the watercolour of North Beach at Bawley Point painted by his mother Alma around 1920. However, in this edition, the detail gives more prominence to the stonework marking the edge of the road (or dray track) from Murramarang to Milton, built in the 1830s. The text has also been supplemented in this edition with additional photographs held by Margaret Hamon and the Edith and Joy London Foundation.

Apart from these changes, the original text is presented here, contextualised with this introduction. This is followed by a new chapter written by Dr Sue Feary on the Indigenous history of the region. In acknowledgement of their deep and ongoing association with the land, Bruce recognised the need for an introductory chapter describing the history of the original custodians of the Murramarang country. Dr Feary has also inserted explanatory footnotes to Bruce’s text, providing readers with further details of the Indigenous regional heritage. In presenting more information about ‘the other side of the frontier’, Bruce hoped that this second edition would play a modest role in the process of reconciliation. These editorial footnotes at the bottom of the relevant page are distinguished from Bruce’s own notes by being marked: ‘(A.G. and S.F.)’.

At the end of the original text, an epilogue written by Alastair Greig and Sue Feary supplements Bruce’s history by describing social, economic and environmental developments in the district during the two decades since the original publication of *They Came to Murramarang*. 