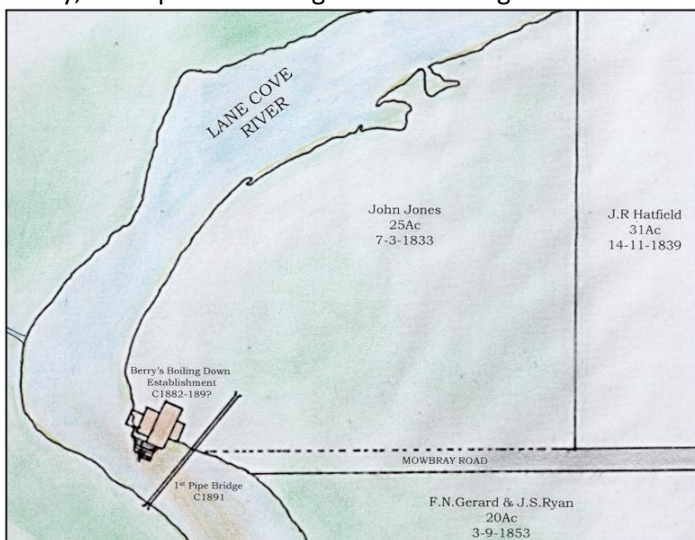


The Factory at Duck Corner – Part 1

The factory at Duck Corner is all too familiar to LCRKers - having tickled a number of our senses (sight, sound, smell at a minimum) on many a time trial and no doubt spurring many of us on to moments of PB-ness. Whilst current operations are no doubt stringent from an environmental perspective, just a few decades ago this was not the case. If we look further back - more than a century and a quarter we find things were a different kettle of fish altogether.

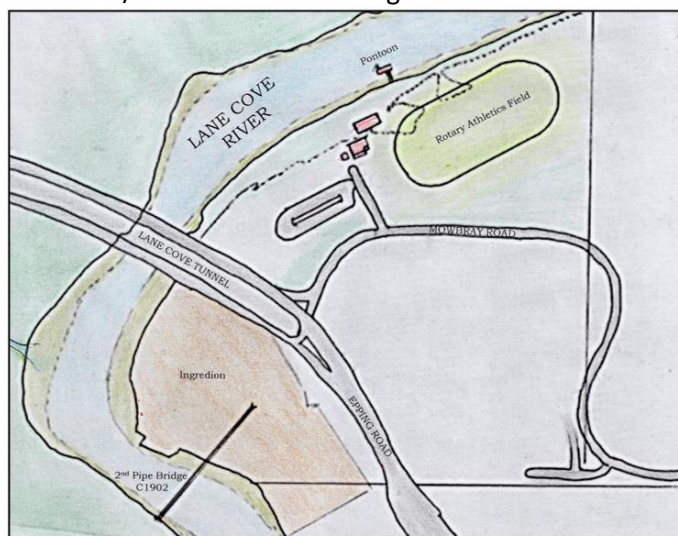
The history of the factory is going to be covered over two articles. The first will deal with the less salubrious workings at the site up to around 1890. The second part (a later article) will deal with the period after that.

Firstly, to help the reader get their bearings – shown below are before/after sketches of the general location.



Above: The site as it is believed to have been in Circa 1890 (adapted from historical Parish Maps [ex LPI]).

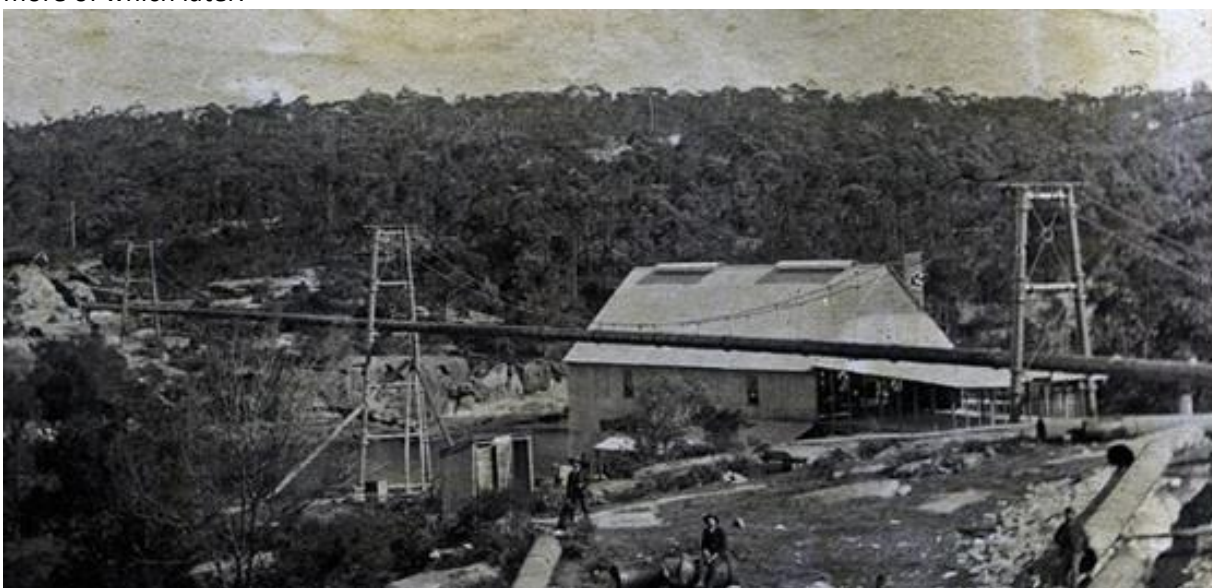
- The original purchase from the Crown of 25Ac by John Jones was sold to Henry Whatmore in the 1860's (and likely neighbouring lots).
- The 1st Pipe Bridge was completed in 1891
- Note the gazetted Mowbray Road alignment continuing straight to water's edge



Above: The same site as it is today showing key features (adapted from Lands Department Maps).

- Construction of the Rotary Athletics Field included land reclamation. Note the changes to the river bank.
- Note the position of the LCRK shed – built over what used to be water...
- Note the new Mowbray Road alignment down the hill
- Note the encroachment of the mangroves

Below is a picture of the factory at Duck Corner in circa 1890 (1st pipe bridge still under construction) taken from the East side of the river. Evidence suggests the large building behind is the (probably unoccupied) Boiling Down Works more of which later.



Source: <http://dictionaryofsydney.org/image/43779> Titled - Construction of the suspension bridge carrying water pipes across the Lane Cove River 1890. By Blomfield, Harold Arthur. Contributed by Private Collection (Courtesy of Charles Blomfield, Wagga Wagga)

Summary

The following pages provide elaboration on the timeline shown below:

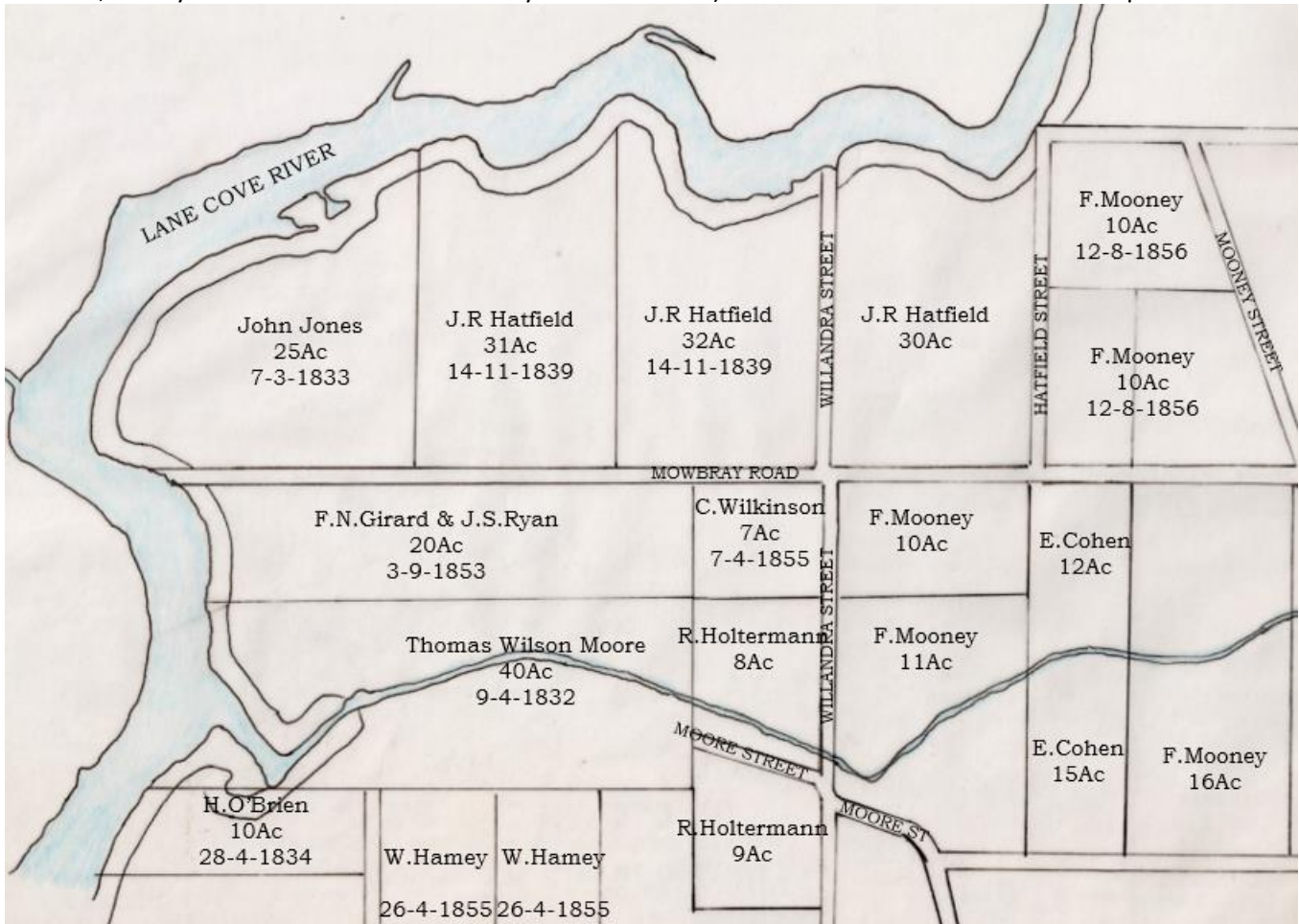
| Time | Event | Explanatory Note |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 7 Mar 1833 | John Jones recorded as purchasing 25 Acres from the Crown | The 25Ac would seem to exclude a fair bit of marsh land on the block. |
| 1860's | Henry Whatmore acquires multiple lots in the area including the John Jones allotment. | 1882-83 Royal Commission identifies an 80Ac holding |
| 1868-69 | Henry Whatmore noting Lane Cove (Wilson's Creek) as his address advertising for let/sale 40acres for Tanners or Woolwashers | Corresponds to the Charles Wilson Moore 40Ac Farm. Includes Stone Cottage, outhouses, orchards. |
| 1876 | Henry Whatmore advertising for let 40 acres with deep water frontage | 6 miles from North Shore Ferry |
| Dec 1881 | John Sugden Berry occupies a portion of the Whatmore estate and establishes a Boiling Down works having relocated from Botany after upsetting the locals there. | Stated as 22 acres in the Royal Commission – and likely corresponding to the original John Jones purchase – with the exclusion of Willoughby Councils '100ft Reservation' from 1880. |
| Apr 1882 | John Sugden Berry starts operating the Boiling Down works. | Berry had previously had a similar facility at Botany but community complaints drove him to find a more remote location. |
| 1882-83 | Royal Commission into Noxious Trades | Apparently politically motivated and aimed to create a 'noxious precinct' in Kurnell. Failed... |
| Aug 1885 | Henry Whatmore dies – leaving his estate to Mrs Sidney Brodie Whatmore (the 'Whatmore Estate') | ...and 10 children |
| 1886-88 | John Sugden Berry bankruptcy proceedings | Protracted series of court appearances. |
| 27 Sep 1886 | Mortgagee sale for leasehold of the Berrys Boiling Down Works | The leasehold, plant and buildings – the latter taken to be the property of Whatmore..... |
| 1887 | Sidney Brodie Whatmore advertising land, building and improvements for rent | Implies the earlier lease had been forfeited, perhaps with some arrangement around plant. |
| 1890-91 | Construction of first pipe suspension bridge | |
| 1891 | Clifford Love occupies the site for Flour Mill | Opened with great fanfare in 1894 |
| 1895 | Fire destroys Whatmore's Boiling down works at Lane Cove River? | Conjectural – but thought to be a separate building to the Flour Mill and operated by Henry Whatmore's son |

Glossary

- Stringy Bark Creek (previously Wilson's Creek) is the 1st creek on the left after the factory when paddling towards Figtree Bridge. It meanders up through the Lane Cove industrial area, then under Epping Road and continuing to its source upstream of Centennial Ave (between Mowbray and Epping Roads).
- Mowbray Road was one of the earliest roads in the area steadily extended down from the Great Northern Hotel on the Pacific Highway (then known as St Leonards Road). By 1890 – the road seems to have petered out at the top of the hill – which was the top corner of the John Jones allotment. The original alignment was to continue Mowbray Road directly in a straight line to the river – where a bridge reserve was noted (and possible indications a bridge to Magdala Road was envisaged).
- Boiling Down is *"the process of rendering fat from animal carcasses to produce tallow. It was a common small-farm activity for making soap and candles for domestic use, but was industrialised in the early 19th century, particularly in Australia"* (Source: Wiki). Bone dust is the result of crushing remnant animal bones – which was typically used for fertiliser (hence Blood and Bone).
- Noxious Trade. In the nineteenth century, the term 'noxious trade' applied to any industry that created a stink, especially if this was associated with offensive waste. Primarily it covered industries associated with the processing of animal carcasses and hides – places such as tanneries, abattoirs, piggeries, fellmongers and boiling-down works (source: Dictionary of Sydney)

1830's – 1850's

From the early 1830's there is evidence of much of the land being taken up – either by purchase from the Crown or by Grant. Historical Parish records carry the name of the original purchaser as well as the requisite detail on lot/plan numbers and acreage. The map shown below shows the original lots together with first date of acquisition. The LCRF facilities, Rotary Athletics Field and the factory at Duck Corner) are all in the John Jones block at top left



Source: Redrawn from various Parish Maps ex NSW Lands Department/LPI

There are predictably a series of land sales throughout the 1830's to 1850's including subdivisions (not shown).

As an example, in April 1865 the SMH carries an advertisement for the sale of Moore's 40 Acre grant – include a stone cottage and a wooden house. Of interest here is the reference to use as Wool-washing establishing which would have done wonders for Stringy Bark Creek at the time.

(Source: [via Trove](#))

Whilst conjectural – the evidence suggests that Henry Whatmore probably purchased land through the 1860's and perhaps 1870's:-

- i) The John Jones allotment of 25 acres (being the site on which Berry's Boiling Down was established.
- ii) The adjacent Girard and Ryan allotment of 20 acres¹
- iii) The adjacent Thomas Wilson Moore allotment of 40 acres though which Stringy Bark Creek flows – perhaps as a result of the advertisement shown above.

LANE COVE RIVER.

MOORE'S 40 ACRE GRANT, with extensive frontage to the river, and having a never-failing stream of fresh water passing through it. This property was formerly occupied as a **WOOL-WASHING ESTABLISHMENT**, for which, or any other trade requiring a constant flow of water, it is admirably adapted. There is a Stone Cottage of 2 rooms, and a Wooden House of 2 rooms on the property. A portion of the Land is laid out as a small orangery and orchard, now in bearing.

RICHARDSON and WRENCH have received instructions to sell by public auction, at the Rooms, Pitt-street, on **THURSDAY, 13th April**, at 11 o'clock.

The above described property on the **LANE COVE RIVER.**
Plan on view at the Rooms.

¹ In November 1864 the Empire newspaper carries For Sale advertisements for 20 acres 'the land originally selected by Girard and Ryan'.

If this is correct – Whatmore would then have a total holding of 85 Acres which is quite consistent with what was reported to the Royal Commission in 1882-83. Searching Land titles records would prove or disprove this hypothesis but goes beyond the scope of this paper.

The earliest specific evidence of Henry Whatmore in the region is a 28 May 1868 advertisement which references his address as Wilson's (Stringy Bark] Creek, Lane Cove River. By 1869, Henry Whatmore was looking to lease/sell at least part of his property with the description being entirely consistent with the Thomas Wilson Moore farms. The pitch would suggest attractiveness for industrial uses.

To Woolwashers, Tanners, etc – To LET or SELL, a Forty-acre Farm, within an easy distance of Sydney, approachable by land or water. On it are a substantial stone cottage, outhouse, orchard, etc with an abundance of fresh water, a creek running through the place. H. WHATMORE, 30 Erskine street, Sydney. SMH 28 Feb 1869

To BE LET, a BLOCK OF LAND, about 40 acres, situate on the Lane Cove River, with Cottage and any amount of fresh water; deep water frontage suitable for any business requiring plenty of water, six miles from North Shore Ferry. H. Whatmore, 22 Erskine Street. SMH 25 Mar 1876

1882-83 Berrys Boiling Down Works – and a Royal Commission

By the time we get to 1881, we note that John Sugden Berry has leased approximately 22 acres from Henry Whatmore, evidence suggesting this represented the majority of the original John Jones allotment. John Berry had for some years been operating a Boiling Down Works at Botany which was causing all sorts of negative community sentiment and drawing the attentions of various authorities. The Lane Cove River site was attractive due to its remoteness, and river access (for transport of raw materials and processed goods) and the convenience of the river for disposing of by-products.

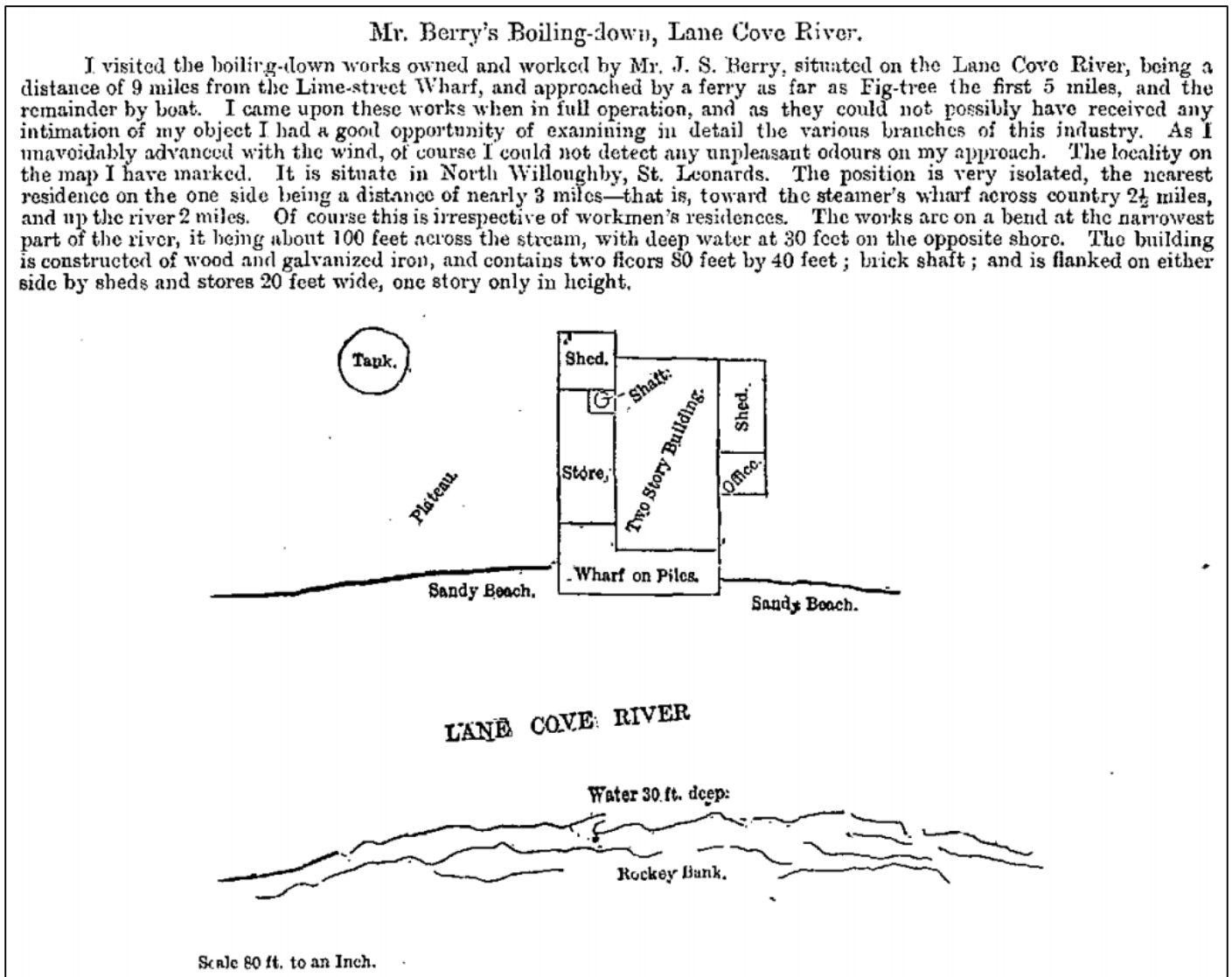
The Lane Cove River location at the time had no road access, and reportedly no neighbours within a 2 mile distance. Mowbray Road at the time appears to have been a rough track through to Pacific Highway [then St Leonards Rd and subsequently Gordon Rd] with Willoughby Council decided to clear/stump the road through to the River in 1882. Berry reported in January 1883 that his road access was not practical from 'a ¼ of a mile away' (400m) – which is consistent with the point at which Mowbray Road starts its current dogleg down to Epping Road (not the original intended alignment).

Below is a photo of the site circa 1890 with the Boiling Down Works visible under the pipe bridge – and probably little changed from the diagram of the site on the next page dated Circa 1883.



Source: <http://dictionaryofsydney.org/image/43779> Titled - Construction of the suspension bridge carrying water pipes across the Lane Cove River 1890. By Blomfield, Harold Arthur. Contributed by Private Collection (Courtesy of Charles Blomfield, Wagga Wagga)

The schematic below (Source: [Hansard 1883](#)) shows the factory location – Flour Mill records suggests it is the near identical position as the main jetty/wharf of the current operation. Whilst the Duck Corner bend in the river is not shown on this map, it is referenced in the description and the rocky cliffs on the opposite bank adjacent to the footbridge give some reference point.



Source: NSW Parliament Hansard 1883 ([via Trove](#))

Unfortunately, (for Berry) there was a Royal Commission (The Noxious and Offensive Trades Inquiry Commission) which was well under way by late 1882 with John Berry as a key witness. The Royal Commission despite significant time and expense appears to have had no particular outcome – you can read more about the Royal Commission [here](#) (you might think you're in 2016 – how little things change??)

The proceedings of this Royal Commission provide a good understanding of just what was going on at (and in) the Lane Cove River at the time and an interesting extract is provided below.

NOXIOUS AND OFFENSIVE TRADES INQUIRY COMMISSION—MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

MONDAY, 15 JANUARY, 1883.

Mr. John Sugden Berry examined:—

992. *President.*] Your name is —? John Sugden Berry.
993. In what occupation are you engaged? I am one of those unfortunate men who boil down bones.
994. Anything else? Bone-dust.
995. Whereabouts are your premises? On the Lane Cove River now,
996. How long have you been there? About thirteen months; I have been at work about nine months.
997. At Lane Cove? Yes.
998. Where were you before? At Botany.
999. What part of Botany—near the road? Yes, about 100 feet off the main road.
1000. Far from the bay? About a quarter of a mile.
1001. May I ask what induced you to move from Botany to Lane Cove? There was nothing that induced me—I was compelled.
1002. Are your present works near any habitations? The nearest place, barring those who are working for me, is, I think, about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles.
1003. What is the area of your holding? I think 22 acres now.
1004. Is it freehold? I leased it under certain conditions, with the privilege of buying, providing no one interrupted me within a certain time.
1005. If any habitations should be erected close to your boundary, would the parties be likely to complain—would your works annoy them? No one could get very near to me, because the party from whom I got the land has 80 acres, and I am in the middle of it; and one clause of my agreement is that he cannot sell any part of the 80 acres to any one who would have any objection to my works.
1006. That makes it how many acres together? 80.
1007. Would that be sufficient to protect you against complaints, do you think? Yes, I think so; that is against any one who would honestly complain and who would not complain unnecessarily.
1008. Is it difficult to get to your works with your bones and other articles you require to carry to and fro? It is expensive, but it is not difficult, if you can understand.
1009. It involves a good deal of carriage? I have the bones collected in town and delivered at a wharf on the road to Glebe Island, and then they are put into a steamer and taken right up to the works.
1010. *Dr. Garran.*] Where is this wharf—near the bridge? You know the Glebe Island Bridge; it is about a quarter-of-a-mile this side of it. You know where you turn up to Saunders' Wharf; it is just opposite there.
1011. *Mr. Chapman.*] Is it a Government wharf there? No; it belongs to Harris, but Saunders has either a lease or promise of a lease. There is nothing certain about it, because I believe the Government are not settled about what is to be done at that particular part. Saunders has therefore no lease, and Harris cannot give one, or rather no one would take one if the Government would stand in.
1012. *Dr. Garran.*] Are you limited to any particular time—any part of the day—for loading there? No.
1013. It is within the city limits? Yes.
1014. *President.*] How do you dispose of the waste fluids? They run into the river—into the Lane Cove River.
1015. Is that method apt to lodge anything on the shore? No; there is such a current that 20 yards from the building there is nothing to see, either up or down; there is a strong tide just there.
1016. Then without that river, and with no sewer to carry off this waste fluid, you would not know how to dispose of it? If I had no river and no sewer it would have to do as it does in many other places—find the best hole it can and get into it.

Source: NSW Parliament Hansard 1883 ([via Trove](#))

The evidence prattles on for some pages in a similar vein to the above. Of interest is the sheer strength of the current and tide flushing away the waste fluids (or perhaps there was a little artistic license...)

1885 – an alleged nuisance on the Lane Cove River

Despite apparently weathering the attentions of the Royal Commission – the Boiling Down works continued to attract the attentions of various Local Councils and government authorities as evidenced by the excerpt below

AN ALLEGED NUISANCE ON THE LANE COVE RIVER.

John Sugden Berry was charged before Mr. Yates, D.S.M., at the St. Leonards Police Court yesterday, with an alleged nuisance at common law. The information was to the effect that from the 1st January last until the present time the defendant, in the municipality of North Willoughby, in the district of Sydney, and near to the Lane Cove River, being the Queen's common highway, did unlawfully and injuriously maintain and use, and still maintained and used, certain premises wherein were boiled and subjected to the action of steam the heads, bones, and offal of beasts for the purpose of converting the same into bonedust, and that he so managed and used the said premises that divers noisome, offensive, and unwholesome stenches were emitted and issued, so that the air then and there was, and yet is, filled and impregnated with stenches and smells which were offensive, uncomfortable, and injurious to the health, damage, and common nuisance of persons living at Hunter's Hill. Mr. T. M. Slattery appeared for the prosecution. Mr. Gannon appeared for the defendant. Subj.

To Mr. Gannon: Witness resided near to the defendant's establishment than the River View College was: he was not aware that there was a boiling-down establishment nearer to his place than the defendant's place was.

Herbert Sinclair Lumsdane, accountant in the southern branch of the Bank of New South Wales, deposed that he lived near the Figtree Wharf, on the southern bank of the Lane Cove River; he had resided there nearly five years, and knew the defendant's place; he frequently passed the defendant's place in a boat; he noticed a very putrid kind of smell, such as would come from decaying matter; the smell was "simply terrific;" the smell came from the defendant's establishment; witness lived about a mile and a half from the defendant's place; he had seen a boatful of bullocks' heads lying alongside the defendant's establishment festering in the sun; he had seen this frequently within the last three months; the smell was quite enough to contaminate the air, and to prove injurious to the health of those in the neighbourhood; he had also seen bullocks' heads floating in the river on more

Source: SMH 29 Jul 1885 ([via Trove](#))

Later in 1885 – the death of Henry Whatmore (the owner of the land and buildings) is recorded.

WHATMORE. – August 6, 1885, at his residence, Lane Cove River, Mr. Henry Whatmore, senior, aged 56 years, native of Westminster, London, after a long and painful illness, which he bore with Christian fortitude, leaving a sorrowing wife and 10 children to mourn their sad loss. His end was peace. Home and New Zealand papers please copy. SMH 15 Aug 1885

1886 Insolvency and Mortgagee Sale

From 1886-1888 there is a protracted series of appearances at the insolvency court for John Sugden Berry.

INSOLVENCY COURT – Saturday September 18.
Surrenders

... John Sugden Berry, bonedust manufacturer, Botany, near Sydney. Liabilities £5571 11s. 2d. Assets £6286 13s. Mr. A. Morris, official assignee. SMH 20 Sep 1886

The following week there was an advertisement for a mortgagee sale of the lease, plant and machinery of Berry's Boiling Down Establishment as shown at right:

Perhaps coincidentally, earlier in September 1886 there is reference to a Mr. Edgar Hope seeking to set up a wool-washing works at Wilson's Creek (Stringy Bark Creek) Lane Cove. It is not clear if this was a prospective reuse of the Berry's works vs a new development, however the community reaction is indicative of sentiment at the time. A public meeting of the inhabitants of the Borough of Hunters Hill including the following comments "*the action of the tide in the river alone offered an almost insuperable difficulty in the way of the discharge of the foul waters from these works, and they would become a permanent source of nuisance, polluting all the foreshores. Lane Cove was a favourite pleasure ground for boating parties and the establishment of a factory such as this would go very far to destroy it for recreation purposes*" (SMH 8 Sep 1886).

Later reports indicate the wool washing works did not proceed.

LANE COVE RIVER.
FOR POSITIVE SALE.
By order of the Mortgagee.
THE LEASE FOR ABOUT 26 YEARS
of
80 ACRES 7 ROODS and 10 PERCHES of LAND,
situate near the head of the
LANE COVE RIVER,
together with the Plant and Machinery thereon, known as
BERRY'S BOILING-DOWN ESTABLISHMENT.

The plant is complete in every respect, and comprises the following:—
• 2 BOILERS (1 Cornish and 1 vertical)
• 1 8-horse power ENGINE
• 4 DIGESTERS, fitted with steam pipes and covered with asphaltum composition
• 1 TANGYE PUMP, with the necessary water tanks, pipes, and connections, &c.
• 2 BONE-CRUSHING MILLS, in good order, one of which has never been used, together with the pulleys, bolting, hand barrows, and all the requisite tools and fittings required for the proper working of the plant.

The whole is erected in a large two-floored corrugated iron shed, and is equal to boiling down five tons of tallow, and turning out 60 tons of bonedust per week.

The Lease is subject to a rental of £160 per annum, with the right to an additional period of 30 years at a rental of £230 per annum, making 56 years in all, with a further right to purchase the freehold at £200 per acre.

RICHARDSON and WRENCH have received instructions to sell by public auction, at the Rooms, Pitt-street, on FRIDAY, the 1st day of OCTOBER next, at 11 o'clock.
The above leasehold property, plant, and machinery.
PLAN on VIEW at the ROOMS.
TERMS AT SALE. (643.)

Source: SMH 27 Sep 1886 ([via Trove](#))

1887 To Let

Moving ahead a few months to 1887 and the apparently now vacant Boiling Down works is being advertised for lease. Comparing this description to the earlier photos above suggests the same building.

TO LET, a large 2-story BUILDING, brick chimney 50 feet high, large wharf, abundant supply of fresh water. And 5 COTTAGES, suitable for any manufactory, with seam of pure clay. Mrs. H. Whatmore and Sons, Miller-st., St. Leonards.

Source: SMH 29 Jan 1887 ([via Trove](#))

TO LET, large two-storey BUILDING, wharf, high brick chimney, suit large manufact., abundance of fresh water, also land for poultry farm or garden, with cottage, Lane Cove River. Mrs. H. Whatmore, Miller-street, North Shore.

Source: SMH 5 Nov 1887 ([via Trove](#))

1891

The property (and it would seem the buildings erected by Berry) were subsequently leased from Mrs Sidney Brodie Whatmore in July 1891 by Harry Clifford Love for the purposes of establishing a cornflour mill (the story of which will be picked up in Part 2).

1895 a boiling down Reprise?

The Boiling Down works on the Lane Cove River did not apparently disappear quietly. Noting that the Chicago Flour Mills opened on its current site with some fanfare in 1894. It is a little surprising to read that the year after there was a major fire in a Boiling Down works still operating on the site.

The building dimensions are significant (and close in size to original Boiling Down works reported at the Royal Commission). Whilst only conjecture – the following are perhaps relevant:

In June 1895, A fire resulted in the complete destruction of Whatmore's boiling down works.... There were between 15 and 20 casks of tallow in the building at the time ... A very large quantity of tallow, which was in the process of being rendered down, was also lost. The building, which was of wood and iron about 100ft by 40 ft was insured....

Source: Evening Star 24 June 1895 ([via Trove](#))

- it seems likely that the original plant and machinery was retained after Berry's insolvency/departure (perhaps in payment of outstanding rents etc?)
- Henry Whatmore was a butcher – and at least some of his (10) children carried on the trade. Boiling Down was a necessary downstream activity...
- The building described may well have been a separate building in the vicinity of the Flour Mill.

In July 1895, the month after the fire - Mr W. Whatmore applied for a license for a boiling-down works on Lane Cove River.... He referred to the recent fire on his premises which had resulted in their destruction and promised.... to comply with the Noxious Trades Act. It was decided to grant the license. [Source: SMH 13 Jul 1895]

At roughly the same time the Hunters Hill Council resolved to write to Willoughby Council to ask them to use their power to prevent the erection of boiling-down works on the Lane Cove River at the site of the late boiling down works destroyed by fire. Clearly Hunters Hill Council was not keen on upstream 'noxiousness' wafting their way. [Source: The Cumberland Argus 6 Jul 1895 ([via Trove](#))]

However, the License was stymied in August 1895 the Board of Health notified the [Willoughby] council that "a license for boiling-down works had been refused... to the proprietor of the works, Mr. W.W.Whatmore" [Source: Australian Star 1 Aug 1895 ([via Trove](#))]

To be continued.....Part 2 of this article will provide some detail on the Flour Mill operations from 1890....