

THE CORNISH IN NEW SOUTH WALES IN THE CONTEXT OF FEDERATION OF THE AUSTRALIAN COLONIES

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Introduction

When first asked to arrange for a paper from NSW on the Cornish contribution to Australian Federation for this Conference it was easy to say 'of course'. 'A short talk ...easy enough ...maybe pick up a relevant name or two'. Little did I know what this would actually mean!

I may as well admit up front that the digging done in NSW for this talk has not been of the scale of the fabled deep Dalcoath mine, but on the other hand it has been deeper than those alluvial scratching of our ancestors in the moor land valleys thousands of years ago.

In our search so often the sparkle in the quartz seduced me to believe that gold was to be found at any moment and make my talk shine with a rich lustre. Even after following the seam deep down it turned out to be pyrites – someone with a possibly Cornish name but who really came from 'up country.' Often when the gleam was the real thing the lode ran under a neighbours boundary and the person was actually from Victoria, or Queensland.

What was this telling me about NSW, Federation, and particularly the Cornish in NSW, as I scanned web sites, waded through conference proceedings, dug in archives, and even dabbled in genealogical books? As you come with me on a small journey of discovery perhaps we will all find the answers to those questions!

What is NSW?

The colony of NSW was in essence formed on that day in January 1788 when Captain Arthur Phillip came ashore in Port Jackson. He landed at what is now called The Rocks with his First Fleet contingent of Marines, sailors, and male and female convicts.

Today on the site a battle rages over the mooted demolition of an Art Deco office block and its possible replacements but no battle occurred then as the convicts, including six with identifiable Cornish backgrounds, erected their tents in a harsh and foreign land. The curious and apprehensive native peoples, the Aboriginal tribes of the Eora watched from afar.

Some say that after 213 years Sydney, the Capital of NSW, has progressed little from that convict camp, run on land grabbing, rum, gambling and prostitution.

That's very harsh - as those who enjoyed the city during the Olympic games last year would attest.

Seriously however it is important to understand that NSW alone among the colonies was not only already a century old at the time of peak Federation movement activity but also has always had a special character stemming from that first settlement.

The Cornish in NSW

Thus nearly half a century before serious European settlement in the recognised "Cornish heartland" colonies of South Australia or Victoria Cornish people walked the new land. Among them the well known like Governor King, Captain Piper, Major Grose, convict farmer James Ruse; but probably also the unknown - the first devout Wesleyans as well as the first rogues and vagabonds that scatter within the Cornish names in our history.

Ruse, born at Lawhitton, Launceston, in Cornwall in 1759, was a rare but not unknown type of Cornish settler, the convict. Granted land to farm, after he had almost single handedly shown the way from starvation for the colony through agriculture on lands well away from the sandstone and sandy coastal fringe, Ruse goes down in history as the first 'farmer and husbandman' despite dying poor in 1837¹.

Another Governor, the notorious William Bligh, had Cornish roots being born in St. Tudy before going to sea at 7 years of age. His ill-considered approach to governing a fledgling colony effectively brought to an end the 'penal settlement' era of New South Wales. In the new 'colony-building' era of the Scot Lachlan Macquarie as Governor the driving force of the sheep and fine wool industry in Australia was John Macarthur's wife Elizabeth Macarthur, born in Devon from a Cornish family.

It is the competency, independence, and vision of such people of Cornish strain as James and Elizabeth that anchored the colony of NSW and made it inevitable that one day nation building would be coming along - all in good time.

After 25 years locked into famine and then relative but limited prosperity on the coastal plain a way was found in 1813 over the Blue Mountains barrier, leading quickly in 1817 to the establishment of the town of Bathurst on the Macquarie River. For years settlement was banned to the west but when the land was released in 1823 a small group of Cornish farmers were among the first to settle at a place called soon after Cornish Settlement and now Byng. These Cornish were from the lesser property owning 'class' and families such as the Lanes,

¹ *My Mother Reared Me Tenderley*, The Life of James Ruse, Janice Ruse Israel, 1988, Possum, Eastwood NSW. ISBN 0 7316 3294 X.

Toms, Hawkes, and Glassons came with some amount of capital, even is small by today's standards².

Pat Lay in her book, 'One and All, The Cornish in NSW'³ writing in 1998 makes the point that (and I quote) "Cornish immigrants to New South Wales last century established and maintained recognisable and cohesive groups". "There were several factors causing them to do this: their sense of Cornish identity (and their feelings of being different from English and Irish settlers), chain migration and intermarriage within the Cornish community in NSW, the shared job skills of farming, mining, and trades (and in some cases because of specific recruitment), bonding on the long voyage by sailing ship, and their involvement in certain community activities such as religion, trade unions, lodges and friendly societies, and in politics".

The Cornish Settlement in the valley at Byng is probably unique in Australia among Cornish clusters in that it was settled so early, the 1820's, and retains its Cornish 'memory' to this day, some 180 years later. This is probably because it started as an isolated farming community, with its clannishness enhanced by the Wesleyan church as the valley's focus, and chain migration. It later serviced Gold fields to the north and it became a Copper mining centre for 80 years but reverted to pastoral lands after the 1930's.

The copper mining mini-boom of the 1840's drew many more people, including those directly from Cornwall into the area; to Byng and to the west and south of Byng. Discovery of payable quantities of Gold at Ophir by one of the Tom's boy's, William from Byng, and an Irishman Lister drew tens of thousands from many lands to the area but passed Cornish Settlement largely by.

The other centre to rival Byng, from the 1840's to the 1930's, but today part of a massive mining operation which can be seen from planes flying from Sydney to Adelaide, was Cadia. A massive load of copper, with gold, and other metals, to the south of Mt Canobolas in the Orange District, attracted Cornish miners to Cadiangullong Creek. Little remains today except the Cornish Engine house (The White Engine house) and the graves of mine captain Josiah Holman from Gwennap and those of many miners and their families. The Engine-house has been conserved and Newcrest Mining has moved these graves to a new site recently.

By the time of the Federation movement in the 1870's Byng's excess population had moved out to Molong, Eugowra, Cudal, Millthorpe, Carcoar, and of course Orange and Bathurst. A trip from Orange around Mt Canobolas for example today reveals Cornish names of properties and Cornish names of owners in high proportion.

² *One and All* - The Cornish in New South Wales, Patricia Lay, Heritage 2000 Plus, Queanbeyan, NSW, ISBN 0 9588684 9 2, Page 2

³ *One and All* - Ibid , Page 2

Of all the centres of Cornish population in NSW it would seem to have been the most likely to have thrown up a champion of the Federation movement, yet so far no one has been identified. There is however evidence that later the Central West area looked for the siting of the National Capital – to no avail of course.

Today the ‘central tablelands and slopes’ of NSW is still one of the clearly identifiable centres of the Cornish. Yet, according to the methods used by my fellow speaker Dr Charles Price its population’s Cornish content is perhaps much less than 5%. If this area has a thinly spread Cornish bloodline then what about the rest of the State?

The early Cornish settlement of NSW was more dispersed than the mining centre dominated colonies of Victoria, South Australia, and Western Australia. Settlement early in the 1800’s was already strong to an established urban centre in Sydney (Sydney Cove and the port areas surrounding, and the 2nd centre of Parramatta miles inland). Other than those names mentioned there are many names of Cornish families who could be mentioned however I need to mention the Rev. Walter Lawry who was the first Methodist minister and had a enormous influence on the Cornish and Methodist communities in NSW in early colonial days.

The Cornish gathered in clusters even in the urban areas, with inner city suburbs like Darlinghurst, Surry Hills, and Woolloomooloo. As the city grew, from 35,000 in 1843 to 50,000 in 1851, 96,000 in 1861, to 400,000 in 1891, the Cornish moved through chain migration into Paddington, Woollahra, Waverley, Balmain, Glebe, Pyrmont, Chippendale, Redfern, Newtown, and Botany. ⁴ By the late 1800’s the Cornish born population of Sydney was about 1% however if descendents are added this may be doubled.

The Cornish moved out to semi-rural areas on the then fringe, such as Gladesville, (where in my class in 1960 there were 25% with Cornish names.)

Family ties to rural settlements often linked to the clusters in Sydney, and retirement from these settlements, unlike today, would occur into the city clusters.

The Hunter Valley of NSW was another area of settlement, with the landowning Dangar family from St Neot settling quite early and being joined in chain migration by other. Maitland, Singleton, and Paterson were key clusters. The growth in Coal mining drew some Cornish as well, who settled in villages which are now suburbs of Newcastle (NSW 2nd city) such as Adamstown, Wallsend, Lambton, and Hamilton. Alfred Goninan of St Just who emigrated late in the 19th c. did so due to family ties, and went on the establish a major engineering business in Newcastle – some Sydney trains bear the family name due to their manufacture by the business.

⁴ Ibid, Ch 4, Page 52

Cornish settling as farmers is a common theme in NSW, with early settlements along the coast. For example Kiama, and Eden in the south, and Kempsey and MacLean in the north. Later on, outflow from short-term mining settlements inland would settle other coastal areas.

Mining had been a factor as we had seen in the Central West, but the later 1800's saw more Cornish come to NSW for mining. The centres were however relatively small and scattered, and with two notable exceptions short lived.

Adelong in 1875 had 13% Cornish born population but by the end of the century it had fallen to over 1%. Many Cornish had come direct from Cornwall, but many across the colonial border from Cornish clusters in Northeast Victoria, such as Chiltern. Even allowing for local born replacing deceased Cornish born the drop in % indicates the mobility of the Cornish miners and their families. From Adelong, and the short Gold boom at alpine Kiandra at the turn of the century, as well as the Araluen gold fields the Cornish and their descendents seemed to have moved to the coast to take up newly opening pastoral land left by the loggers. Places such as Moruya and Bega have strong Cornish roots. They also moved to the high plains areas such as Queanbeyan, where some would later lobby for the site of National parliament, and Bombala

The north of the state had a similar area in the Emmaville/Torrington tin mining fields just north of Glen Innes. As late as 1990 the area had small tin mines run by Cornish descendents, and the only continuously active 'Cornish buddle'. The area still has some Cornish 'memory' and the 1990's 'Celtic revival' in the Severn Shire brought tourist focussed Cornish language street signs to tiny Torrington. Unlike Adelong many Cornish settled but others moved outward to the west to Inverell, and east to the coastal pastoral areas that opened up after logging depleted the Red Cedar.

Other centres of Cornish in NSW were ones drawing not so much directly from Cornwall but mainly on Cornish born and descendents in other NSW areas. Nundle as a gold mining area drew largely on the Hunter Valley. Sunny Corner near Lithgow drew on the Central West and Sydney.

The two NSW exceptions mentioned before, that 'prove the rule', are the large scale mining centres of Broken Hill and Cobar. Both started late in the 1800's and they are in many ways extensions of the Cornish mining experience in South Australia and Victoria rather than indicative of NSW Cornish experience.

The Broken Hill story is so well known I won't detail it here. Suffice it to say that it was in so many ways a 'line of lode' extension of the Moonta and Burra mines. South Australians should know of the famous Cornish wheelbarrows wheeled all the way loaded with the Cornish miner's (and his family's) worldly possessions. Unlike the Western Australian Goldfields which had a profound effect on the Federation vote (14 to 1 in favour) the relatively smaller size of The Barrier could not have swung the vote significantly, even if a similar inter colonial sentiment existed.

The copper at Cobar was first found in 1870 and identified by Mrs Sidwell Kruger, a former Cornish Bal-Maiden. Cobar is a very isolated place. Access to it was first via the Darling River and later via what is now called the Kidman Way north overland from the Murrumbidgee River. Most Cornish miners then, and especially Mine Captains and the like, came from South Australian or Victorian Cornish mining areas.

The history of the Cornish in NSW is then a varied one, but one which is different in two main ways from its cousins in other colonies. Firstly it happened so early on and then continued as a steady trickle over the 1st century of settlement – ie. up to the 1890's in our talk context. Secondly it was diverse in that farming and urban pursuits were as prominent, if not more so, than the better-known Cornish mining clusters elsewhere.

NSW – A colony apart

When Captain Arthur Phillip arrived in 1788, New South Wales comprised about half of the continent (with Tasmania). The western half of the continent (which became Western Australia after some shifting of borders) was claimed by Britain in 1829 and Tasmania became a separate colony in 1825.

The mainland colonies were progressively carved from New South Wales: First the new 'free settler' colony of South Australia in 1834, Victoria in 1850, and then Queensland in 1859. From in effect being 'Australia', New South Wales had become just one of several Australian colonies. With the Gold Rush in Victoria driving growth and prosperity even being the 'premier' state was looking uncertain.

Federation – All the players eventually fell over the line.

The big 18th C. economic depression, which commenced in 1893, was deeper in Victoria than elsewhere. For Victoria, one remedy became obvious in the 1890s. A common market embracing the six Australian colonies and, possibly, New Zealand, might end the depression. In that Australasian common market, Victoria, as the hub of manufacturing and finance, could snatch business from New South Wales and every other colony.⁵

Hitherto, supported by the massive Gold finds and good pastoral land Victoria had been the leading colony during the 1870s and the booming 1880s, and Melbourne had been the premier city. Geoffrey Blainey however proposes that they were now so humbled by the depressions and drought that they were not likely to dominate a new Commonwealth of Australia.

Without the financial crash of 1893 and the drought that went with it most New South Wales politicians would have been reluctant to work for the creation of

⁵ Geoffrey Blainey - "Our Side of the Country: The Victoria Story"
ISBN 0 454 00655 1

'one Australia' for the simple reason that Victoria – or the main ideas it espoused – would probably have tended to control that new Australian nation. The financial disaster of 1893 was mud on the face of Victoria. New South Wales was not unhappy in consequence but not so happy that it instinctively cheered for a federation. Much persuasion, and crucial gifts, would be needed before the electors of New South Wales would accept a federation.⁶ In the end concessions to NSW (the location of the nation's Capital in the future for example) and to Queensland may have swung it.

The differences would later emerge within the Federated Parliament between what could be described as 'free-trade' NSW and protectionist Victoria, although of course each colony had proponents of each side.

The dominant drivers in NSW for Federation were most probably defence and 'free-trade'. NSW Premier Sir Henry Parkes late conversion to the cause in his famous Tenterfield speech in 1889 was reportedly driven by security concerns, with other European powers incursions in to the South Pacific. NSW politician and legal mind Edmund Barton was rather more driven by 'free trade' concerns to break down inter-colonial barriers.⁷

The final YES votes of each colony in favour of Federation make interesting reading:

Tasmania	94.4%
Victoria	94.0%
South Australia	79.5%
<i>Australia AVG</i>	<i>72.4%</i>
Western Australia	69.2%
NSW	56.5%
Queensland	55.4%

NSW had more NO votes than all the other colonies combined. Perhaps this indifference, which even today has provided little passion for celebration of Federation on the eastern seaboard, was 'out and about' in the largely integrated but not assimilated Cornish clusters in NSW.

Tasmania with its long history and largely rural settlement by Cornish – not unlike NSW Cornish in some ways – voted 94.4% for Federation. Queensland with its mix of Cornish settlers and dispersed population clusters, again with similarities to NSW – voted similarly to NSW. The diffuse Cornish population of NSW – less than 3% - would not have had a dramatic effect anywhere outside Broken Hill and Cobar – so it is hard to draw any conclusions on how we voted.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ http://www.naa.gov.au/Publications/Books/federation_-_the_guide_to_reco.html

Well I haven't dug up any Cornish worthies who were prominent in the Federation story, or hard evidence of Cornish feelings about Federation, but that does not mean they don't exist. As in all mining there may be more to find yet by new methods or more diligent miners.

What we have seen however is what the nature of Cornish Settlement was and to an extent still is in NSW. We have seen that it differs from many colonies. We have looked at the general NSW context. We have seen the contributions made by Cornish people to nation building in practical ways. Perhaps they were focussed on the here and now, and the life to come, rather than a vision coming from outside their own communities.

What we might learn from that I won't speculate further but leave it to you, one and all.

Appendix

A: A Graph of Colony votes

	NSW	VIC	SA	QLD	WA	TAS	
YES	107,420	152,653	65,990	38,488	44,800	13,437	422,788
NO	82,741	9,805	17,053	30,996	19,961	791	161,347
% Yes	56.5%	94.0%	79.5%	55.4%	69.2%	94.4%	72.4%
Total	190,161	162,458	83,043	69,484	64,761	14,228	584,135

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