

Belmore

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Belmore, in the City of Canterbury, is part of the traditional land of the Bediagal people. The area was once covered by a forest of Sydney blue gum, blackbutt, red mahogany and ironbark trees, growing on clay soils derived from Wianamatta shales. Water came from three small creeks, which flowed in a north-easterly direction into Cooks River.

The earliest colonial surveyors followed an Aboriginal pathway (which became Punchbowl Road/Milperra Road) which led from Cooks River to Georges River. Before 1810, this pathway became a convenient access road from Sydney through Canterbury Farm, crossing Cooks River at the 'Punch Bowl' ford, and land grants were surveyed along the route. Once over the ford, travellers could turn south on a track, now Burwood Road at Belfield, and pass through country which is today's suburb of Belmore, south-east to King's Grove Farm and the land grants beyond. Canterbury Road was not formed as an access road into Sydney until after the 1830s, and it was not gazetted until 1856.

Timber and agriculture

The early land grantees and their tenants cut timber for building, for Sydney's firewood, and later for sleepers for the first railway from Sydney to Parramatta. When the timber was cleared, they planted crops in the fertile clay soil. In the 1850s Daniel MacNamara grew potatoes and melons, with corn planted through them to shade the lower plants from the sun, on his farm on the site of today's St Joseph's Catholic Church. The Bradburn family had an orchard on Blossom Farm, north-west of today's railway station, and William Redman had a six-acre (2.4-hectare) vineyard in the vicinity of today's Belmore-Campsie Park, as well as grazing paddocks on his St Clair Farm. Later in the nineteenth century, James Leyland rented the Collins family's 'Collins' Clear' for a poultry farm, and there were other small poultry farms throughout the area, which was then known as St Clair.

The name Belmore was first given to the district around Belmore Road, Punchbowl, a few kilometres west of today's suburb of Belmore. On 5 January 1869, a committee of residents in that district applied to the Council of Education for the establishment of a new public school at a locality named Belmore, a name chosen to honour the new Governor, Somerset Richard Lowry-Corry, 4th Earl of Belmore.

Subdivision and speculation

From 1880, land speculators began to buy up farmland in the area south of Cooks River. They agitated for the government to build a railway to the district, so they could subdivide their land and make a profit. The Towers in Forsyth Street, built about 1888, was part of this speculation; David Jones, the owner, was the builder of Bathurst and Goulburn courthouses. At first, the railway was planned as a Loop Line to run to Liverpool through the valley of Cup and Saucer Creek south of Canterbury Road, but later more powerful political interests decided on the route we have today. As

the first stage of the railway to Liverpool, the line from Marrickville to Burwood Road opened on 1 February 1895. The railway station at the Burwood Road terminus was named Belmore, and the locality name gradually moved from its initial location to describe only the new suburb forming around the railway station. The railway was extended to Bankstown in 1909.

Early suburban houses in Belmore were built on Blossom Farm, just north-west of the railway station, subdivided as the Terminus Estate in 1895, and on estates around Canterbury Road near the St George Hotel, opened in 1893. The choice of location for schools and churches at Belmore North and Belmore South reflected this early settlement pattern. The vacant paddock of St Clair Farm north of the railway was briefly used as a coursing ground after the railway opened.

In the centre of Belmore, Redman's estates and Collins' Clear, immediately north-east and south of the station, were not subdivided until after 1911; the shortage of subdivided land near the railway meant that Campsie's shopping centre was established much earlier than Belmore, and grew much more quickly. Around World War I, Federation-style houses were built on the large suburban blocks of Redman's Estate (the former St Clair Farm) for professional men and senior public servants, and the suburb became known for a time as 'the Strathfield of the Bankstown Line'.

Interwar development

After the War, many returned servicemen settled in Belmore. The first home in Australia to be financed by the War Service Homes Commission was built for Private Frederick Baxter and his English wife, Nellie, at 32 Kennedy Avenue, Belmore, in 1919. Many more War Service Homes were built between 1920 and 1925, especially in The Towers Estate and at Belmore North and Belfield, where the men found work in the new railway yards at Enfield, opened in 1916.

Shaw's Hall in Burwood Road between Leylands Parade and Reginald Avenue was the location of the first moving pictures shown in Belmore about 1917. There was a picture theatre in Canterbury Road, believed to have been called the Alcazar, which opened about 1921 and may have closed in the late 1920s. The Paragon No 1 theatre in Bridge Road opened in 1923 and closed in November 1958. It is now part of the Canterbury League Club. The Paragon No 2 in North Belmore at the corner of Burwood Road and Knox Street opened in 1928 and closed in June 1958.

From the 1920s to the early 1980s, Belmore had a flourishing shopping centre. The Belmore Hotel opened in 1928. The Post Office, built in 1924, was the centre of the village, and, next door, the 'barrow' sold fruit and vegetables. Among other shops, there were four chemists, several grocers and greengrocers, three butchers, two fish shops, three newsagents, two delicatessens, two dress shops, two hardware stores and four cake shops. There were six doctors in practice in the suburb and three dentists, as well as two private hospitals, Ardee in Sudbury Street and Macleay in Redman Parade.

Change and growth

The Conveyancing (Strata Titles) Act of 1961 created an opportunity for developers to make speculative profits by demolishing the large Federation homes in parts of Belmore and building blocks of walk-up home units, particularly for the rental market, in their place. There were many changes in the ethnic composition of the population, as the flats provided short-term housing for successive waves of people newly arrived in Australia. Small businesses in the shopping centre

became less and less profitable after Roselands Centre opened in 1965, and by the end of the twentieth century, specialist shops offering goods and services to Korean- and Greek-speaking people predominated.

Belmore retains much of its early twentieth-century Federation and interwar California Bungalow housing stock, and four large areas, including Redman's Estates, the Towers Estate and Belmore shopping centre, were classified by the National Trust in 1999 as Urban Conservation Areas.

Lesley Muir and Brian Madden are Sydney historians

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