## Captain William Oldrey, RN

By John Sewell

This Broulee park and its Community Hall are named after an important figure in the early history of the area.



Captain William Oldrey, RN had a distinguished career in the Royal Navy. He enlisted in June 1804 to serve as a midshipman on the *Warrior* under Captain William Bligh. When Bligh co-captained the *Porpoise* on his voyage to become governor of New South Wales in 1806, he specifically called for Oldrey to act as a navigator<sup>1</sup>. Oldrey returned home two years later on the *Buffalo* and saw active service against the French.

7 May 1813 saw him commanding the *Undaunted* and engaged in a battle in which "he attacked a French national schooner of the largest class, with a fleet of coasting vessels under her protection; two of the latter were taken, and several driven on shore; but unfortunately, just as he was about to board the schooner, a squall of wind arose, and she was enabled to effect her escape, notwithstanding that he made every effort again to close with her, and resolutely continued the chase as long as the most distant hope remained of doing so, although his boat had already suffered a severe loss, and he himself had had his thigh-bone fractured."<sup>2</sup>

He was permanently lamed and received a life pension of £91.5s.0d. He ranked as Captain in June 1838 and in September of that year was given two years leave to go to New South Wales as a bearer of dispatches including new land regulations. He left Portsmouth on 8 October 1838 as a cabin passenger on the barque *Andromache*, which carried 231 immigrants and arrived in Sydney on 31 January 1839. The Sydney Gazette listed his arrival but misspelt his name as Aldrey.

He is mentioned as a serving naval officer in December 1839. A USA naval vessel the *Vincennes* was in Sydney and its medical officer went ashore where he "was very kindly treated by ....those off duty on leave of the Naval Service, among whom was a Captain Oldrey with whom he became quite intimate". Presumably Oldrey retired after his two years ended in September 1840. By then he had already begun to acquire land in Broulee, his area of choice.

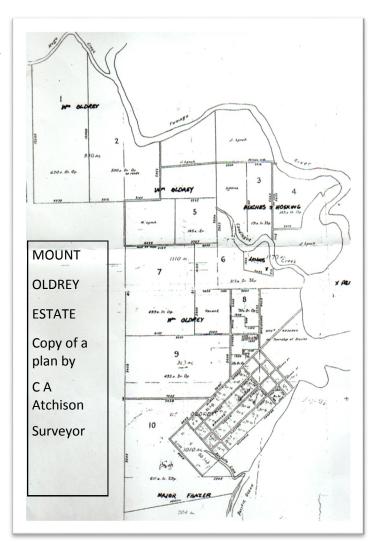
The Broulee area was surveyed by James Lamar from Braidwood who gave it an unfavourable report "Browlee, which may be called East and West Browlee, being divided by a narrow neck of sand subject to be overflowed at very high tides, appears not to possess.....any favourable feature for the formation of a town". On East Broulee (the island) he mapped eight streets and 55 blocks. On the west he

mapped Broulee Township allotments and larger holdings to the north and west. The area was gazetted in 1837.

Land sales commenced, with Captain Oldrey a prolific buyer. Within a month of his arrival he had applied for two portions, one of 960 acres, the other of 240. On 23 March he was given possession of the first portion for which he paid £192, claiming £300 remission as a serving officer. 4

Land speculation was rife. A Government sale of land at Broulee in January 1840 offered 36 blocks. One went to Moruya resident Alexander McLean and three went to Oldrey – all the rest went to absentee buyers.

By purchase and lease, his acquisitions went on. By the end of 1843 he had the following properties:<sup>5</sup>



## LAND PURCHASE.

VICTORIA, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom Great Britain and Ireland, Queen, Defender of the Fait! and so forth.

WILLIAM OLDREY. 30th January, 1840. SAINT VINCENT. 1970.

EMPTTAS, in conformity with the Regulations made for the sale of Crown Lands in or pritory of New South Wales, William Oldber, of Broulee, has become the purchaser of the Land hereinaft cribed, for the sum of Four hundred and ninety-two pounds ten shillings sterling. Note knote pg, that for a consideration of the said sum of Four hundred and ninety-two pounds and ten shillings sterling by the said WILLIA CORNING to the Colonial Treasurer of our said Territory, for and on our behalf well and truly paid in the mann reinafter mentioned; and in further consideration of the Quit Rent hereinafter reserved, we have granted, and or be heirs and successors, do hereby grant unto the said WILLIAM OLDBEN, his hers and assigns, subject to the construction of the Colonial Treasurer and provisos hereinafter mentioned, all that piece or parcel of Land in our said Territory, contain ins, reservations and provisos hereinafter mentioned, all that piece or parcel of Land in our said Territory, contain the control of the control of

Oldrey's Ford 960 acres Woodside 1,010 acres Mount Oldrey 733 acres Bengello 392 acres Hotel 'Erin-go-bragh' 3 acres Broulee allotments 210 Auburn allottments 111 Mt Oldrey allotments 115.

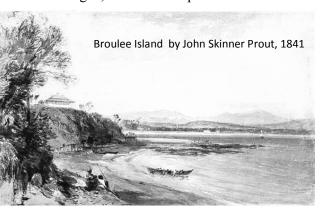
He was no absentee land holder. The census of 1841 recorded that Broulee contained six buildings and 46 people, 40 of whom, including convicts, were working for Captain Oldrey. His home, Mount Oldrey was the only large homestead in Broulee. He described it in an overblown lengthy advertisement in the Australian of 29 December 1840 which offered the property for sale, possibly to address a mounting debt problem.

"...consists of about eleven hundred acres of land ....with seventy Town Allotments in section 33, 34, 41, and 42. The Homestead is situate on the crest of Oldrev which forms splendid Mtaamphitheatre....commanding the Township and Harbour of Broulee, Scarborough and the Glorious Pacific. The cottage is sixty feet in length with verandah. It contains five rooms and three skilling rooms, plastered and colored. There is a store house, slabbed and shingled, twenty four feet by eighteen with three rooms -a store, an office and a bedroom. There is also a detached kitchen and servants' bedroom of the same material, In addition to these there are six men's huts, a four stalled stable and a saddle room built of bark,

The entry goes on to detail the garden and the stock of horses, bullocks, milking cows, pigs and poultry with all their associated farm equipment, crops of wheat, maize, oats, etc. There are also "several small farms from thirty to three hundred acres situated on the banks of the Tomago River will be sold or leased." There is the promise of a regular steamship service and Oldrey is confident that the estate "would be an admirable investment for any person wishing to apply his surplus cash in some more desirable manner than gambling in the shares of public companies."

In 1841, while the properties described above were on the market, he built a hotel on the island, using imported American redwood. The building was leased to Bernard McCauley who named it Erin-go-*Bragh*, which translates as "Ireland Forever"

although the town remained uninhabited, it was the port for the St Vincent region and it acquired status as an administrative centre. It gained a Police Station with three constables. A Court and Watch House was set up with Captain Oldrey and John Hawdon as its magistrates. Later, Francis Flanagan, William Campbell and others were



added to the Bench which had a troubled history of internal squabbles'. There was a Clerk to the Court, a Scourger and a Pound Keeper who also acted as

In February 1840, Oldrey was appointed as Commissioner of Crown Lands within the Colony of New South Wales.<sup>8</sup> This gave him magisterial authority over unsettled lands. As Police Magistrate he was also responsible for Aboriginal matters and there are two accounts which evidence the care and consideration he devoted to the local Yuin tribes.

The first is in Oldrey's handwritten Return of Aboriginal Natives taken at Broulee the 6<sup>th</sup> day of May, 1842. Around 100 Aborigines had gathered at for the annual distribution of blankets coupled with a census of their numbers. The return gives details of families, their ages and native names. The covering notes say that he had distributed 170 blankets and include unsuccessful pleas for more<sup>9</sup>.

The second example is his follow-up of the wreck of the schooner Rover on 13 October 1841 near the Candalagan end of the bay. Eleven Aborigines led the rescue, dashing into the raging sea to retrieve ten of the travellers, passing them one by one to a human chain extending from the beach. Oldrey felt Aborigines deserved that the individual recognition. When the Colonial Secretary did not agree, Oldrey himself paid for the manufacture of individual brass plates, or gorgets, to be worn round the neck, each engraved with the name of the wearer and details of the rescue.<sup>7,10</sup>

Also to his credit is his follow up of the loss of his whaleboat which was wrecked at the bar to the Moruya River on 19 November 1842 with the loss of five lives. In a letter to the Colonial Secretary on 24 November, Captain Oldrey asks that "something in the way of a subscription will be commenced in Sydney" to support Mrs Wilson and her four daughters. She had lost her husband and her son. Michael Fitzpatrick left a 25 year old widow and a 15 month old child. It is not evident that the plea was answered. <sup>11</sup>

By 1843 it was clear that the glowing future for Broulee that Oldrey had forecast in his advertisement in December 1840 was not happening. In 1841 a flood washed out the bar at the mouth of the Moruya river, opening it up to coastal shipping. Broulee was no longer the port for the district. The colony entered a depression with failures of banks and large investment companies. Oldrey was among the bankrupt. On 8 January 1844 his estate was placed "under sequestration in the hands of the Chief Commissioner of Insolvent Estates."

John Lord was appointed as Trustee and investigated a mess of unpaid bills and defaults on various loans amounting to a total of £11,801.2s.8d. Offsetting this was real estate valued at £8,228.10s.0d (though this seems to be based on a valuation made in connection with a loan back in 1841, leaving unanswered the question of how much it could be sold for in 1844).

Personal property was valued at £415. It included such items as his purchase of the wreck of the *Rover*, his books and a second hand sextant. There was a disputed sale of cattle included in monies owed to Oldrey by various bodies which came to a total of £1,541.7s.1d. The final figure was a deficit of £1,616.5s.7d.<sup>13</sup>

Oldrey moved to Port Macquarie. He had told the Bankruptcy enquiry that he was entitled to "half pay of £166 and pension of £88.11s.9d after deducting the income tax", so presumably these continued.

Comments on his life are found in the letters of & Images, Tani William Augustus Miles to fellow writer Joseph Sydney, c.1993. Phipps Townsend.

11 Eurobodalla

8 November 1847 "Oldrey has taken a new lease of his life. He lives at Chippendale and always enquires after you. He is the same warm hearted old fellow."

15 May 1849 "Old Oldrey trots about as usual—always in a bother about something and of course never without a budget of papers."

2 June 1850 "Oldrey is at Port Macquarie. Always in hot water. <u>He has married.</u> Good nature, shortsightedness as to his men and long credit ruined him" <sup>14</sup>

According to the *Colonial Times and Tasmanian* he was married at the Military Barracks, Port Macquarie, by special license, on the 30 August 1849, to Jane Caroline relict of William Brown, Esq, late commander of the *British Sovereign* of Sydney. Jane Caroline was 23 years old.

A daughter, Victoria Jane Blanch was born the same year. A son, Edward William Oldrey, was born in 1852, and died two years later. Sadly, Oldrey did not see his son. He died on 29 December 1851, aged 63<sup>15</sup>

## References

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14 Extracts held by MDHS. 15 Family research by Mark Oldrey 2003.

