DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this thesis is the result of my own original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to another University or similar institution.

Erik Eklund
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<thead>
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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Australian Archives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAM</td>
<td>Australian Aborigines' Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AI&amp;S</td>
<td>Australian Iron and Steel Ltd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APB</td>
<td>Aborigines' Protection Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASC</td>
<td>Australian Smelting Corporation Ltd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWU</td>
<td>Australian Workers' Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>BHP</td>
<td>Broken Hill Proprietary Company Ltd</td>
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<tr>
<td>ER&amp;S</td>
<td>Electrolytic Refining and Smelting Company of Australia Ltd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEDFA</td>
<td>Federated Engine drivers' and Firemens' Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIA</td>
<td>Federated Ironworkers' Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUIOOF</td>
<td>Grand United Independent Order of Oddfellows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IHSC</td>
<td>Illawarra Historical Society Collection</td>
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<tr>
<td>IOOF</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Mitchell Library, Sydney</td>
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<td>NSWSL</td>
<td>New South Wales State Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSWV&amp;P</td>
<td>New South Wales Votes and Proceedings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBU</td>
<td>One Big Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSCPW</td>
<td>Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWD</td>
<td>Public Works Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCF</td>
<td>Telephone Cable Factory, Metal Manufactures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>United Australia Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>UWM</td>
<td>Unemployed Workers' Movement</td>
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<td>VSL</td>
<td>Victorian State Library</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Workers' Industrial Union of Australia</td>
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I wish to thank Associate Professor Stephen Garton, a skilled and dedicated supervisor whose involvement in this project was crucial to its completion. Many of the ideas and arguments presented in this work benefited from his scholarly advice. I also owe a great debt to the people who shared their memories of Port Kembla with me. They included: Ces Catterel, Wally Clausen, Dulcie Clausen, Ethel Combes, Sarah Drury, Iris Jenks, Mavis King, William King, Ursula Lindsay, Danny McNamara, Laurel Murray, Stan Murray, Edith Neaves, John Parsons, Mona Parsons, the late Albert Rieck, Hilton Rieck, Bob Rees, Ted Roach, Gordon Rodwell, and Morgan Simon. Those reading and quoting from this work are requested to respect the privacy of these individuals and check with the author before utilising any oral evidence quoted in this work.

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Metric measurements of weight and distance are used throughout the text, except where Imperial measurements appear in quoted original documents. Pounds (£), shillings (s) and pence (d) were the contemporary units of currency. Dollar and cent equivalents (at 1966), along with other conversions, are set out below:

<table>
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<th>Metric</th>
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<tr>
<td>One kilometre</td>
<td>0.661 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One hectare</td>
<td>2.471 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One metre</td>
<td>3.281 feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One metric ton</td>
<td>1.102 tons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One pound (£)</td>
<td>2 dollars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One shilling (s)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>One pence (d)</td>
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Introduction

In 1924 at a public meeting to lobby for a new ambulance service at Port Kembla, George Simon, a foreman at the local copper smelting works, spoke earnestly about the future of his town: 'We are of age. Residents here think the time has come that Port Kembla should have a district of their own.' Simon's comments reflected a widespread belief at Port Kembla in the 1920s that the town was a self-sufficient locality with a bright future. Optimistic descriptions such as 'Birmingham of the South', or 'Newcastle of the South' became common in this decade. With the arrival of the Hoskins Iron and Steelworks in 1927, Port Kembla became popularly known as a 'steel town'. By the 1990s the idiom 'steel town' with reference to Port Kembla is rarely heard or seen. The common phrase now is 'steel city' and that is almost always associated with Wollongong, a large city six kilometres north of Port Kembla. In the mapping of centre and margin on the landscape of the Illawarra region, the name 'Wollongong' has assumed a dominance and the region itself has also become more integrated and powerful. Port Kembla is now often called a 'suburb' of Wollongong, or 'the industrial area' of the Illawarra region; the town's centrality to those who lived and worked there relegated to the margins of other places. This thesis seeks to challenge this hegemonic ordering of names and spaces by analysing a period when a viable town-based identity was present at Port Kembla, and when the dominance of Wollongong and the Illawarra region was only in its formative stage.

Port Kembla is located on the South Coast of New South Wales; Sydney lies ninety kilometres to its north. From 1900 to 1940 the town was

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1 South Coast Times, 28 November 1924.
transformed from a small coaling port surrounded by dairy farms to a major site for the steel and metal fabrication industries of Australia. Although the process of industrialisation provides an important context for this study, the principal focus is on how the people of Port Kembla responded to and negotiated their changing world. Local and regional analysis reveals new perspectives on Australian social and political history, and this study focuses on two central issues arising out of local experiences—the relationship between class and locality, and the locality in a regional context.

In a town famous for its rough-and-tumble union politics and at times bitter class conflict, local identity was still vital in shaping the lives of Port Kembla people. To analyse co-existing class and local loyalties, I focus on the political expression of these loyalties in the context of the economic structure, social patterns and cultural representations of local society. The intersection of identities within the structures of the locality offers a profitable site for analysis and reflection because it highlights the complexity and specificity of local politics and ideology.

As well as addressing the politics and social structure of Port Kembla itself, I also contextualise the town within a broader regional frame. I analyse the contradictory role of competing political interests in the Illawarra region; the way in which regional groups worked to both promote and undermine local identity. The centralisation of transport services and the regionalisation of the labour market were also powerful forces impacting upon the integrity of the Port Kembla locality.

What emerges from this analysis is the centrality of 'localism' to working-class politics and ideology at Port Kembla. In fact, in specific conditions, localism could override all other loyalties, including those of class. Localism, in this work, is defined as an ideology which elevates local interests above all others, and attempts to build alliances or coalitions of classes that
obscure class interests and mediate class conflict. While similar to notions of labourism and populism prevalent in this period, localism, as I will argue, was more relevant to the everyday lives of the working class at Port Kembla, more closely linked to their experiences of work, home and town life.

This thesis both complements and offers new perspectives on two different historiographies—the historiography of class and politics, most closely associated with Australian labour history, and the historiography of Port Kembla itself, which, although fairly extensive, has focussed mainly on the economic or trade union history of the town. Many of the key texts of labour history, such as R.W. Connell and T.H. Irving's *Class Structure in Australian History* or James Hagan's *A History of the ACTU*, focus on national or state-based developments in the labour movement and the Labor Party to develop insights into working-class consciousness and class relations. Despite

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3Hagan argues that what he terms 'labourism' gained widespread acceptance as trade unions recognised the value of state intervention through the arbitration system, a whites-only immigration policy and tariff protection; policies which were increasingly being implemented by liberal protectionist administrations in coalition with State Labor Parties from the late 1890s, and the Federal Labor Party from 1904. 'In the circumstances of the time', writes Hagan, 'a Labor Party which sought office was essentially a populist and not a class party. By 1910, when the Labor Party won office in New South Wales and the Commonwealth, trade unionists generally had little trouble accepting this limitation.' See James Hagan, *A History of the ACTU*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1981, 14. In contrast Connell and Irving see the rise of reformism as more problematic. In their view reformism was not so much adopted by the working class as inculcated, the result of the reorganisation of bourgeois hegemony on a broad political and cultural front to disempower the radical and militant aspects of working-class mobilisation. See their, *Class Structure in Australian History: Documents, Narrative and Argument*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1980, especially 202—213. In a recent revision, Raymond Markey has looked for the origins of reformism
differing perspectives and conclusions these historians have a shared interest in explaining the growth of a reformist political strategy by what was then the main political expression of working-class mobilisation, the Labor Party. I am presenting a different perspective on these nation-wide debates by theorising 'localism' as a major competitor to both radical class-based ideologies, and more moderate notions of parliamentary reform and labourism. In considering many of the same issues at a local level, the particular conditions at Port Kembla become vital parts of the analysis itself, and the way society and politics was constituted locally opens up new areas of enquiry and presents new theoretical problems which I shall address.

For historians, Port Kembla has mainly been of interest as a site for industrialisation or trade union activity, and a number of works have outlined the economic development of Port Kembla or the experiences of paid work in local industries. More recent studies, concentrating on the late 1930s, have extended this focus to include an analysis of the labour process at Australian Iron and Steel Ltd (AI&S), and the social history of paid work in the town.

within the social structure and working environments of the colonial society, especially through the rise of populism in the 'intermediate strata' of society as an alternative to class-based ideologies. See his, The Making of the Labor Party in New South Wales, 1880—1900, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, 1986.


economic historians it was the establishment of Al&S in 1928 and its takeover by BHP in 1935 that has attracted most attention, while labour historians have concentrated on the effects of the depression and the industrial conflicts of the late 1930s, in particular the well-known 'Dalfram' or Port Kembla pig-iron dispute. From November 1938 to January 1939 local waterside workers clashed with the Federal Government and Attorney-General R.G. Menzies over their refusal to load a ship with pig-iron bound for Japan. This industrial conflict, which attracted nation-wide attention and left Robert Menzies with the nick-name 'Pig Iron Bob' after his controversial visit to Wollongong, has been extensively covered by historians.6

This specific focus on economic and industrial history leaves a large area of the Port Kembla's history untouched, and provides an opportunity for this thesis to present a more town-centred approach covering the political and social history of Port Kembla. Historical research on the Illawarra as a whole has also focused on the trade union or economic history of the region.7 A key theme of these works on the Illawarra is the passivity of the region, the way its


fate was determined by forces beyond the control of locals.\textsuperscript{8} Such an emphasis was influenced by historians researching and writing during the 'economic restructuring' of the 1980s, when almost 20,000 jobs were lost in the manufacturing and coal mining industries of the Illawarra. The region did appear to be a 'hapless victim' of industrial capitalism, over-reliant on one industry and therefore vulnerable to economic change.\textsuperscript{9}

This dominant presentation of the history of the Illawarra also presents an opportunity for this thesis. By locating the analysis within Port Kembla itself I problematise assumptions of powerlessness, and shift the focus from the history of the region's economic development and growth of the organised working class, to consider the way the people of Port Kembla both responded to and were a part of broader processes of economic and political change.

Two landmark studies concerning the economic and political history of Port Kembla require greater attention: Beverly Firth's thesis on the role of class, capital and the state in the industrialisation of Port Kembla, and Len Richardson's study of the labour movement in the Illawarra during the 1930s.\textsuperscript{10} These works provide a framework within which to situate my analysis, for it would have been very difficult to maintain a close focus on Port Kembla society and politics without referencing the broader developments


\textsuperscript{9}Two studies were clearly influenced by this experience. Beverly Firth carried out her research at Port Kembla during a period of major retrenchments. Henry Lee begins his economic history of the coal trade in nineteenth-century Illawarra with an outline of developments in the 1980s, using them as a parallel with the earlier period.

they cover. For all their insight, however, once again the people of Port Kembla are absent and in fact, the term 'Wollongong' is deployed in both works in a way that subsumes Port Kembla's history within that of its northern neighbour, much like notions of 'steel city' do in the contemporary popular consciousness.

Firth's work focuses on the nature of ruling-class power in collusion with the state in determining the pattern of Port Kembla's industrialisation. 'Investment decisions', she argues, 'made by a relatively small group of businessmen determined the future of Wollongong as a whole', and state involvement through the sale of land and the provision of infrastructure like railways and ports, 'was both massive and subservient' to the interests of capital.\(^{11}\) Her argument is informed by debates within Marxism in the 1970s and 1980s, and is partly a response to a call for more 'capital history'.\(^{12}\) Her central question is about economic power and who wields it. For Firth the 'commercial bourgeoisie who play such a large part on the local scene are inconsequential when compared to the political and economic might of Al&S', and likewise even the wide-ranging political mobilisation of the working class in the Illawarra in the late 1930s does not alter the inexorable patterns set by capital and the state.

Such an approach represents a challenge to local history for it highlights the dangers of abstracting places out of their wider political and economic context, and of ignoring the local political and economic power of

\(^{11}\text{Ibid.}, 63 and 247.}\n
\(^{12}\text{The task of writing a history of the capitalist class or 'capital history' was championed by Humphrey McQueen. See his, 'Review Article: Class and Politics II', Labour History, no.32, May 1977, 91—94. This project also influenced Andrew Moore. In his history of the Old Guard in New South Wales he seeks to analyse 'how members of this ruling class mobilised at a time of profound structural crisis.' See his, The Secret Army and the Premier: Conservative Paramilitary Organisations in New South Wales, 1930—32, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, 1989, 8.}\)
those not present within the locality. Even so, it has a number of drawbacks. Firth underestimates the role of locals in negotiating with the ruling class, the state and their allies, and mediating the impact of decisions made by the captains of industry. She presents a picture of Illawarra society as a blank slate upon which forces of capital and state draw. The social diversity of the Illawarra region is reduced to a notion of Wollongong as an essentially working-class city:

Because Wollongong is the centre of heavy manufacturing many of the theoretical problems associated with defining proletariat and bourgeoisie can be avoided ... The history of the struggle with the capitalists has produced a community which is extremely 'trade union conscious 'though not necessarily 'socialist consciousness.' It appears uncontroversial to categorise Wollongong as a working class city.13

Given the nature of her research interests it is understandable that Firth adopts this shorthand, however, the claim that Wollongong is a working-class city is highly misleading for two reasons. Firstly, the claim is based on the modern boundaries of the Greater City of Wollongong, but these boundaries were not formalised politically until 1947. Moreover, while these boundaries were politically and administratively significant after 1947, region, as I will argue, was only one of a number of spatial identifications available to Illawarra residents.

Secondly, by equating Wollongong with working class, she overlooks the diversity of regional class structures—the working-class mining

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13 Firth, op.cit., XIX.
communities of Bulli and Mt Kembla, the petite bourgeois and commercial middle class stronghold of Wollongong, the farming towns of Dapto and Figtree, and the industrial working class with a small technical and administrative middle class at Port Kembla, to name a few. Taking occupation as a measure of class for the moment, the town of Wollongong was, in fact, the least working class area in the Illawarra! While Firth's work illuminates the broad processes of ruling class and state power, her argument renders locals invisible and leaves their history untouched.

Richardson's work on the labour movement of the Illawarra represents an important and in some ways unique contribution to Australian labour history. He studies unions and other working-class organisations of the Illawarra in their economic, social and political context from 1928 to 1940. The strength of his work lies in the consideration of the two principal working-class groups in the Illawarra—the coalminers and the steelworkers—and their relationship to each other, to major employers in the region and to the urban and rural middle class. Richardson's broad theme is the political and social impact of industrialisation, and he charts the transformation of what he characterises as an essentially 'rural and mining community' to a modern industrial region and the conflicts and tensions that arose in the process.

Richardson, like Firth, employs the term 'Wollongong' to represent the whole of the Illawarra region. He acknowledges that this is problematic for the 1930s, but he is unable to deal with the diversity of reactions to industrialisation in the Illawarra from different town-based political interests. Both Firth and Richardson are constrained by their choice of descriptive

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14 Richardson, 'The Labour Movement in Wollongong, New South Wales: 1928—1939'. Later published as The Bitter Years: Wollongong during the Great Depression, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1984, XI.
terms. The use of 'Wollongong' to denote the Illawarra region fails to capture the social complexity of the different towns in the region, and leaves the Port Kembla experience unnamed and categorised under a broader term with unspecified boundaries. This problem, common to both Firth and Richardson's work, highlights the necessity to go beyond the term 'Wollongong', and specify the differences and interactions between Wollongong-based interests, Port Kembla-based interests and Illawarra-wide interests, in order to fully understand the social and political history of Port Kembla.

Having established the central concerns of this work and its role in providing new perspectives on Australian labour history and more specific studies of Port Kembla, I will now discuss some of the broader theoretical and conceptual issues which arise in undertaking a local history. Firstly, I will review of the historiography of Australian local history, and discuss one of local history's principal methodological problems—conceptualising the boundaries of the study. My argument is that Port Kembla is best understood through the concept of 'locality'—rather than the more common, though ambiguous concept of 'community'—and that the locality was in constant tension and conflict with the Illawarra region. Secondly, I will outline the other major structure of local society, the class structure, and argue that these two structures, locality and class, represented the origins of two major forms of politics at Port Kembla, the politics of locality and class politics. Finally, I will discuss some of the principal historical sources used in this study and outline the argument of each chapter.

My decision to study the history of one town stands in opposition to the concentration on 'nation' as the major unit of analysis in Australian history.

15 Richardson's later article on the Dalfram dispute continues this confusion. He uses the term 'Wollongong—Port Kembla district', as if he is uncertain about the boundaries of his subject, or whether it refers to political, social or geographical boundaries. See his, 'Dole Queue Patriots', 145.
Major works in the Australian historical cannon have been largely concerned with charting distinctive characteristics of a national culture and politics.\textsuperscript{16} Local history has been by no means ignored, but the overarching national historiography has influenced the choice of subject area, and most academic local histories are centred on major capital cities or the rural communities and mining towns of inland Australia. The binary opposition between the City and the Bush, prevalent in debates surrounding national identity, fails to capture the complexity of living environments uncontained by city limits or farm fences.\textsuperscript{17} As a result of this frame of reference the capital cities and their suburbs have a burgeoning number of urban and social histories, and rural areas like the New England, the Riverina, and the Darling Downs have been


\textsuperscript{17}See Graeme Davison, 'Sydney and the bush: an urban context for the Australian legend', \textit{Australian Historical Studies}, vol.18, no.71, October 1978, 191—209
well covered by regional histories. Smaller non-metropolitan industrial towns like Port Kembla represent sites which lie beyond the urban/rural dichotomy, and cannot be easily integrated into this dominant national paradigm, although some larger industrial localities like Broken Hill and Newcastle have received historical attention.


19 J.C. Docherty, Newcastle: The Making of an Australian City, Sydney, 1983 and Brian Kennedy, Silver, Sin and Six Penny Ale: A Social History of Broken Hill, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1978. For a different approach which looks at the relationship between the city and the country see J.B. Hirst, Adelaide and the Country, 1870—1917: their social and political relationship, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1973. Other non-metropolitan industrial towns which deserve historical attention include the coal and steel town of Lithgow, the smelting towns around Cockle Creek near Newcastle, and the mining and smelting towns of Mt Isa and Mt Morgan (Queensland), Zeehan and Mt Lyell (Tasmania) and Wallaroo and Moonta (South Australia). These places appear briefly in economic or industrial histories, such as Geoffrey Blainey's, The Rush That Never Ended: A History of Australian Mining, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1963, or in studies of specific moments of class conflict, such as Peter Cochrane's, 'The Wonthaggi Coal Strike, 1934', Labour History, no.27, November 1974, 12—30, but their social history is generally neglected.
The dominance of national history also influenced the themes of local history. The regional histories of the 1960s like Waterson's *Squatter, Selector and Storekeeper* and Buxton's *Riverina*, for example, were undertaken in the context of debates surrounding land legislation in the late nineteenth century, and these studies were motivated by the desire to test the operation of this legislation at a detailed regional level.\(^{20}\) Similarly, many local histories written by prolific local historians from outside of the academy, such as James Jervis and William Bayley, outlined at a local level the themes of national history—progress, nation building and national unity. The primary aim of such local history was to apply, test and refine the assumptions of national historiography by examining them in miniature, an approach one American historian has characterised as 'national history localised'.\(^{21}\)

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\(^{20}\) Buxton, for example, wrote that his study of the Riverina began 'as a research project in which the initial aim was to discover, as far as possible, exactly what happened in the process of implementing the New South Wales land legislation of 1861 ... The final study, while carrying out this aim for part of the colony, came inevitably to acquire an extended purpose by developing, in detail, a textured picture of Riverina society.' See Buxton, *op.cit.*, 1. See also Waterson, *loc.cit.* and Walker, *loc.cit.* The operation of land legislation at a regional or local level is still a question which attracts historical attention. See, for example, Bill Gammage, 'Who gained and who was meant to gain from land selection in New South Wales?', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol.24, no.94, April 1990, 104—122. I see 'regional history' as a particular form of local history which concentrates on larger areas, specifically towns and their hinterlands.

While, as Australian social historian Graeme Davison argues, '[I]ocal history has always been one of the most popular forms of historical writing in Australia', it was only from the 1950s that academics began to have a significant impact on the discipline. Geoffrey Blainey's 1955 article criticising the 'scissors and paste' approach of many local histories exemplified the professions' dislike of local history in its 'amateur' form, but it also highlighted a new willingness to engage with local subjects.

This engagement was revealed more clearly in the 1960s, when there was a small boom in academic local history. Geoffrey Bolton produced a study of North Queensland in the early 1960s, and John Turner at the University of Newcastle has been active in researching and publishing local history from the early 1970s. This was partly the result of the growth of non-metropolitan universities and colleges of advanced education. In these institutions, often located some distance from capital city libraries and archives, the availability of local sources made local history a viable proposition. The growing acceptance of local history was also related to the publication of major works in the field by city-based academics. In 1972, for example, perhaps one of the

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best-known historians of the period, Sir Keith Hancock, published a history of the Monaro region in New South Wales.\textsuperscript{26}

In the 1980s a new style of local history emerged which was influenced by more recent trends in Australian historiography—social history, feminist history and labour history. One common feature of these new local histories, by academic historians at least, is that they moved from examining broad historiographical issues at a local level, to presenting detailed pictures of local society.\textsuperscript{27} Building on these newer works—many of which are widely regarded as major contributions to Australian social history—the profile and status of local history within the academic community has increased. In 1990 there were at least seventeen postgraduates working in the field of local or regional history in Australian universities, almost half of those at doctoral level\textsuperscript{28}, while in non-metropolitan Universities, such as Charles Sturt University and the


\textsuperscript{27}Alan Atkinson, \textit{Camden: Farm and Village Life in Early New South Wales}, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1988; Carol Liston, \textit{Campbelltown, The Bicentennial History}, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1988; Lack, \textit{A History of Footscray} and McCalman, \textit{loc. cit.} The boundaries between academic, professional and popular history are not absolute. The relatively new area of 'public history' provides a forum for interaction between historians working in these different areas, especially surrounding issues of heritage, community history and commissioned history, however, it is the work of local historians based in Universities that is most relevant to the issues covered in this study. For a discussion of 'public history' see Ann Curthoys and Paula Hamilton, 'What Makes History Public?', \textit{Public History Review}, vol.1, 1992, 8—13.

\textsuperscript{28}See 'A Directory of Postgraduate Research in History in Australian Universities', \textit{Melbourne Historical Journal}, vol.21, 1990, 105—142. This figure should be regarded as an absolute minimum, for there were other works under the headings of 'social history', 'Aboriginal history', and 'urban history' which can also be defined as local studies. This thesis, for example, at that time in preparation, was catalogued under 'social history'. For a review of recent developments in local history generally see Victoria Peel and Deborah Zion, 'The Local History Industry' in John Rickard and Peter Spearritt (eds) \textit{Packaging the Past} (special issue of \textit{Australian Historical Studies}), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1991, 208—214.
University of Newcastle, courses on Australian regional history are taught to undergraduate and postgraduate students.\textsuperscript{29}

Although some historians still dismiss local studies, arguing that they are flawed and limited because local society cannot be abstracted out of general national or international patterns of historical change\textsuperscript{30}, in the areas of Aboriginal history, labour history and cultural history, many researchers have embraced local studies as a means to challenge, modify or verify more general works in these fields.\textsuperscript{31} There are, however, a number of important issues which require careful consideration if the value of local history is to be fully realised, and one of those key issues is the conceptualisation of boundaries.

\textbf{The boundaries of local history}

The practice of local history inevitably constructs boundaries and maps out areas (rather than subjects or events) to study. The boundaries themselves, however, have rarely been interrogated, even in more recent work. This is partly due to the focus of these works on other aspects of local society. McCalman, for example, utilises the geographical boundaries of the Melbourne suburb of Richmond, but her interest is not so much in the meanings or social relations characteristic of the locality, as in using this area

\textsuperscript{29}For the MA programme in community history at Charles Sturt University see \textit{Locality}, September/October, 1991, 17.

\textsuperscript{30}Donald Denoon, 'Open and Closed Histories', \textit{Australian Historical Studies}, vol.24, no.99, October 1992, 175—188. For a reply to Denoon which argues that local histories are not necessarily 'closed' or limited because of their geographic focus see Bill Gammage, 'Open and Closed Historiographies', \textit{Australian Historical Studies}, vol.24, no.97, October 1991, 443—446.

\textsuperscript{31}A few examples include Andrew Metcalfe, 'Mud and Steel: The Imagination of Newcastle', \textit{Labour History}, no.64, May 1993, 1—16; Mark Peel, 'Making a place: women in the "workers" city', \textit{Australian Historical Studies}, vol.26, no.102, 19—38 and Jennifer Sabbionni, "I Hate Working for White People", \textit{Hecate}, vo.19, no.2, 1993, 7—29.
to explore the public and private life of the local working class. The growing market for professionally-researched and written histories for local councils has meant that municipal boundaries for local studies are increasingly common, however, the implications of using such arbitrary political boundaries are rarely considered.

The conceptual and theoretical questions which arise in studying geographically-bounded areas are considerable, and have been addressed by disciplines other than history. Both sociology and anthropology, for example, have a lengthy history of involvement in local studies, and their engagement in this area requires greater consideration by local historians.

In Australia a number of important 'community studies' of local areas have been carried out, notably Bryson and Thompson's study of 'Newtown', Wild's study of 'Bradstow', Oxley's work on Kandos and Rylstone, and more recently Dempsey's study of 'Smalltown'. Community studies, their origins in the disciplines of sociology and anthropology, usually highlight themes of social stratification (often utilizing a Weberian perspective), the lines of power

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32 McCalmun, *op. cit.*, 1. 'This book*, McCalmun writes, 'is an attempt to construct a social history of twentieth century working-class life by means of a group biography of a generation and its community. Readers seeking a comprehensive account of the Melbourne suburb of Richmond may be disappointed.'


and authority in communities, and patterns of leadership and social interaction. In tackling these issues, local studies were seen to offer an opportunity for researchers to come to terms with the totality of local social relations, and then draw conclusions about general sociological processes, since the nature of most 'communities' were understood to be representative of wider society.

But community studies are less useful for analysing the historical dimension to localities. Many focus on contemporary society, being usually restricted to the years in which participant observation was undertaken.\textsuperscript{35} Moreover, while cities have been the preserve of urban anthropologists and urban historians, community studies have focused on working-class mining or industrial communities, or the small towns of rural Australia.\textsuperscript{36} Once again urbanised or industrial non-metropolitan localities remain largely uncharted by this approach, since the processes of industrialisation crucial in the formation of these towns are of less interest to community studies than the analysis of local social relations.

Another drawback of community studies is the problematic and ambiguous concept of 'community', the most common theorisation of a

\textsuperscript{35} Many practitioners are aware of the criticism that their work lacks historical depth (see, for example, \textit{ibid.}, XXIII and Andrew Metcalfe, \textit{For Freedom and Dignity: Historical Agency and Class Structures in the Coalfields of New South Wales}, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1988, 10), but even when historical material is included it is usually to set the background for contemporary analysis, thus understating the historical shifts and developments which were formative of current social structure. See, for example, Dempsey's short historical introduction to the history of Smalltown. Dempsey, \textit{op. cit.}, 20—26. Metcalfe is a notable exception. His study of the coalfields of the lower Hunter region successfully straddles the disciplines of social history and anthropology. However, the overwhelmingly working class nature of the coal mining communities Metcalfe analyses means that the creation of a cross-class local identity is not a major issue, unlike at Port Kembla.

geographically-bounded area. The concept of community has been influential in sociology and anthropology since important figures in these disciplines (Ferdinand Tonnines and Max Weber among others), were centrally interested in the social impact of modernisation on 'traditional' society. Community, in this case, came to mean the social world of rural or small town life displaced by modern industrial society. This somewhat ahistorical lament for 'traditional' community values has left an enduring legacy, and continues to undermine the concept's value by setting it up as something desirable, yet indefinable. As Raymond Williams argues:

unlike all other terms of social organisation (state, nation, society, etc), it [community] seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term.\(^{37}\)

Some Australian social theorists and social policy analysts also see community as 'a feel good' term, employed as a 'spray-on solution' for Governments and some policy makers.\(^ {38}\) The intellectual baggage of the term emphasizes unity at the expense of class difference, thus eliding the divisions and conflicts within the local social structure. Such consensual pictures of local society stand in marked contrast to a significant amount of evidence, especially from the work of labour historians, which shows that localities can


be crucial sites of class tension, industrial conflict and political struggle. As the cultural historian Chris Healy suggests, community usually implies 'lots of happy little communities existing within one big happy community.'

Rather than community, I employ the concept of 'locality' to develop an historical understanding of Port Kembla. Originating in the discipline of human geography, the term spread through English sociology and cultural history in the 1980s. The concept of locality represents one part of the considerable body of work on the role of space in social relations which offers new insights for social historians. This is especially the case in relation to the history of

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39 Connell and Irving, op.cit., 202. Some Australian labour historians have a more optimistic approach to the concept of 'community'. Lucy Taksa, for example, argues that community can be redefined in terms of working-class mutualism, particularly the kind that develops during industrial conflicts. I would argue, however, that the links that Taksa refers to (with reference to the 1917 General Strike), are better understood as patterns of class mobilisation, and that the term is beyond rehabilitation. See her, 'Defining the Field' in Louella McCarthy (ed) History and Communities: A Preliminary Survey, Proceedings of the Community History Programme Seminar, University of New South Wales, June 1989, Sydney 1990, 11—30.

40 Chris Healy, 'Community Based History', Melbourne Historical Journal, vol.16, 1984, 11. See also Ellen McEwen, 'The Ties that Divide' in Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee (eds) Staining the Wattle: A People's History of Australia since 1788, McPhee Gribble/Random House, Fitzroy, 1988, 27—47 and Chris McConville, 'Conflicting Loyalties' in ibid., 13—26. It should be noted that some within the disciplines of sociology and anthropology are also critical of community studies. In an influential contribution, English sociologist Margaret Stacey rejects the concept of community arguing 'that it was doubtful whether [it] refers to a useful abstraction.' She instead posits a continuum between 'local social systems' where aspects of society such as work and the family are locally-based, and areas which are more open to wider society. See her, 'The myth of community studies', British Journal of Sociology, vol.20, no.2, 1969, 134—147. Metcalfe also argues that it is inadequate to treat community as an identifiable 'thing', and that the process of abstraction is an arbitrary one which disconnects the area under study from important social and political processes which occur beyond the boundaries of the study. Metcalfe, op.cit., 10.

41 See, for example, the issue of Environment and Planning A, vol.23, 1991 devoted to the 'locality debate.' Anthony Giddens has been influential in bringing these ideas into the social sciences generally. See his, Central Problems in Social Theory and Consequences of Modernity, Polity Press, Stanford, 1990.

42 A different and increasingly common approach, exemplified in the work of Paul Carter and Kay Schaffer for example, sees 'space' as constituted through language and discourse. This approach has provided
Port Kembla, where notions of local or regional space underpin significant aspects of the local political and cultural scene.\textsuperscript{43} As economic geographer Doreen Massey argues it is no longer tenable for research and theorising to 'proceed blithely ... as though the world existed on the head of a pin, as though it were distanceless and spatially undifferentiated.'\textsuperscript{44} The work on locality, with its examination of spatial diversity and its recognition of the geographically uneven nature of capitalist development, can help the historian of locality refine notions of 'urban' and 'rural', and present a more subtle and encompassing picture of the living environments inhabited by Australians.

A feature of the work on locality and space is its critique of such terms as 'nation', and detailed regional or local analysis. Duncan and Goodwin, in their analysis of English local government for example, question the efficacy of the 'national' which, they argue, could be seen as 'fictional aggregates of local differences.'\textsuperscript{45} Urry makes a similar point in arguing for an analysis of class at a local level: 'When added together there may be a 'national class structure' which is not in fact pertinent to anybody's specifically local class experience.'\textsuperscript{46} This empiricist concern with detailed local analysis together

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[43] For an introduction to this work see David Gregory and John Urry, Social Relations and Spatial Structures, Macmillan, Hampshire, 1985. For a reaction from an Australian geographer to this work see Katherine Gibson, 'Considerations on Northern Marxist Geography: A Review from the Antipodes', Australian Geography, vol.22, no.1, 1991.
\item[44] Doreen Massey, 'New Directions in Space' in Gregory and Urry, op.cit., 12.
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with (strangely enough) critiques of universal structures and narratives associated with post colonial and post modern theories, has meant that the specific and limited subject matter of local history are now understood as theoretically and politically valuable whereas formerly, the value of local history was seen to be circumscribed by these same characteristics.\(^{47}\)

I define the locality of Port Kembla as a spatial expression of a specific type of capitalist development. The locality's boundaries were defined by the limits of industrial, commercial and residential development as Port Kembla grew and developed in the period 1900 to 1940. The nature of these boundaries, their importance for society and politics and the way they were perceived by locals and non-locals, was very much a matter of social and political conflict. As the primary site for social interaction and everyday life, the Port Kembla locality had the potential to cater for the everyday needs of the majority of inhabitants, however, the extent of its exposure to the 'outside world' was constantly shifting.\(^{48}\) The nature of the locality was redefined and contested by the efforts of locals to boost and diversify their locality, and the power of surrounding interests to undermine this self-sufficiency. Such political conflict occurred in the context of other economic and social processes like new transport technology and the changing labour market, which in turn influenced the localised or exposed status of the locality.

Identifying the locality as an important site for political conflict between locals and non-locals highlights the crucial role of economic and political interests in the surrounding towns. Proponents of community studies commonly choose their subject areas because of their isolated and distinct

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\(^{48}\) My definition of 'locality' is influenced by Giddens' discussion of 'locales'. See his, *Central Problems in Social Theory*, 206.
boundaries, but Port Kembla was located within the well-populated and
growing Illawarra region, and was only six kilometres from the large
commercial centre of Wollongong. 49 By 1940 there was a high level of
interaction between towns in the Illawarra region, and this represented a
significant challenge to a self-sufficient town like Port Kembla. The impact of
the region, and the relationship between the region and the locality must be
taken into account as the interplay between the two represented a major
fracture in regional politics, and could both promote and undermine local
identity.

The Illawarra region is defined as the coastal area between the town of
Helensburgh in the north and Shellharbour in the south. 50 These towns
formed the geographical and political boundaries marking the northern and
southern edges of the region. 51 There were strong economic and political links
between the towns within this area, and the region was characterised by the
economic interrelationships between coal mining and dairying, centring on the
commercial hub of Wollongong. The region, then, was a major competitor to
locality and the relations between these two spatial units were an important
part of the changing political environment.

Having defined the locality of Port Kembla and its regional context, I will
now focus on the internal divisions within Port Kembla’s social structure, the
most important of which were divisions based on class. The crucial point here

49 See Wild, Australian Communities Studies and Beyond, 125.
50 ‘Illawarra’ is a Koori word possibly meaning ‘water far off’ or ‘a pleasant place.’ See Michael Organ (ed)
Illawarra and South Coast Aborigines 1770—1850, Aboriginal Education Unit, University of Wollongong,
1991, Appendix 2 and 3. Other geographical terms used in this study include, the ‘South Coast’, referring
to the area between Helensburgh and Nowra, and the ‘far South Coast’, which represents Nowra to the
Victorian border
51 The contemporary meaning of ‘Illawarra’ extends to Nowra, forty-five kilometres south of Port Kembla,
however, during the period 1900 to 1940, Nowra formed the centre of its own regional economy and
society.
is that definitions of class need to be framed with reference to the Port Kembla experience, as well as the broader national historiography of class in Australian history and an awareness of different theoretical models of class.

While Australian labour historians have written extensively on class politics, they have been less enthusiastic about charting the class structures of Australian society. Robin Gollan's major study of the working class in eastern Australia, for example, avoids any analysis of the economy and the structures of the labour market, and Ian Turner briefly considers the occupational make-up of the working class and in a now infamous footnote confines his analysis to the organised working class.\(^{52}\) This tendency to avoid the 'objective' dimensions of class was taken to its full extent by Humphrey McQueen, who argued that there was no Australian working class as such because of the petite-bourgeois nature of working people's consciousness.\(^{53}\)

Connell and Irving's work, *Class Structure in Australian History*, remains the principal guide for the changing shape of the national class structure, however, a local perspective on class structure provides a greater level of specificity and allows questions about the links between the objective dimensions of class and their political and cultural expression to be addressed more directly. What is clear from the Port Kembla experience is that the class structure formed by the expanding industrial economy was a vital influence on the allocation of work and wealth, and central to the development of class politics and class identity. The way people laboured and under what

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conditions reveals much about the nature of society. As E.O. Wright argues, 'class structure constitutes the central mechanism by which various sorts of resources are appropriated and distributed, therefore determining the underlying capacities of various social actors.'

The theorisation of class and class structure has generally had a national focus, but local expressions of an overarching class structure contain complications that need to be examined. In their introduction to a text on the relationship between class and space, Thrift and Williams argue that:

Classes can no longer be thought of as unified and uniquely determined objects set in an abstract space-less realm. Given the fact that classes are geographical objects, they can never be anything but fragmented and overdetermined ... In other words, the relations of production (and reproduction) do not float above places. They are constituted within them.

What could be seen as the 'fragment' of the class structure present at Port Kembla consists of three separate classes—the working class, the middle class and the petite bourgeoisie. The 'working class' are defined as those who sell their labour power for income or resources. A 'bourgeoisie' or 'ruling

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55 See, for example, the national class structure project initiated by E.O. Wright and the Australian study which came from it. *ibid.* and Janeen Baxter, Michael Emmison, John Western and Mark Western, *Class Analysis and Contemporary Australia*, Macmillan, South Melbourne, 1991.
57 There is a wealth of material and debate on the issue of what constitutes the 'working class'. Within the Marxian model the definition of 'productive' and 'unproductive' labour is generally seen as crucial to the definition of working class. The working class are seen to be those whose labour provides surplus value.
class' as such were not present, and their local representatives—managers, engineers, foremen and clerks—almost never owned shares and seldom had a controlling influence on the production processes. These workers in supervisory positions or with technical qualifications I define as 'middle class', a term that effectively captures their position sandwiched between the working class and the bourgeoisie.¹⁵⁸ The local experience of class also indicates the need for a separate class grouping for those who laboured in the stores and small businesses of Port Kembla, and I have named them 'petite bourgeoisie', or at times 'storekeepers' for brevity.¹⁵⁹

To develop this picture of the class structure, I examined electoral rolls from Port Kembla and allocated people one of the three classes according to their occupation. Such a project is necessarily limited; partly because debates concerning the definition of class raged throughout the 1970s and 1980s and came to no satisfactory conclusion¹⁶⁰, and also because electoral rolls have

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¹⁵⁸For a theorisation of the 'middle class' which builds on Marx's work with Weberian modifications see Anthony Giddens, The Class Structure of Advanced Societies, Hutchinson, London, 1973. Some Marxists reject the need to theorise a 'middle class.' Milliband, for example, argues that managers, engineers and accountants are 'explicably bound to capitalist rationale and so are part of the bourgeoisie. The fact that they are propertyless doesn't matter.' Ralph Miliband, Marxism and Politics, Oxford University Press, London, 1977, 27.

¹⁵⁹The definition of 'petite bourgeoisie' has links with Marx's original work, but principally comes from Poulantzas' concept of the 'traditional petty [or petite] bourgeoisie'. The traditional petite bourgeoisie were hangovers from previous modes of production. They were small-scale owners of property and employed mostly family labour. Ideologically they were dialectically placed between the working class and the bourgeoisie, with some peculiar petite-bourgeois elements. See Poulantzas, op. cit., 285—289.

¹⁶⁰Wright's work, for example, became increasingly complex and his class structures further divided into new categories and sub-categories. His position in 1978 was a three class model with four 'contradictory class locations'. By 1985 he had moved to a six class model, which incorporated a consideration of skill and organisational assets along with the ownership of capital to define class. See E.O. Wright, Class,
distinct limitations as representations of the paid workforce, especially in relation to women's work. They are important, however, for providing a considerable amount of useful data on the shape of the formal economy at Port Kembla.  

**Forms of politics at Port Kembla**

Two principal forms of politics arose out of the structures of locality and the structures of class at Port Kembla; a 'politics of locality', based on shared experiences of local life, and 'class politics', based on divisions in the local class structure. The politics of locality was political activity that drew social classes together and called for local development and progress. This form of politics was most clearly expressed at Port Kembla through the local Progress Association, formed in 1908, but was also influential in a number of political organisations and movements established at Port Kembla to lobby governments and councils for investment and infrastructure.

The politics of locality was sustained by an ideology of localism which stressed classlessness, political consensus and economic development. Localism can be seen as a particular local manifestation of populism—a broad collection of ideas, which, as Love argues, have been influential in twentieth-century Australian history. Both localism and populism had a reformist

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61In framing this part of the project I was influenced by Ellen McEwen's thesis, 'The Newcastle District of New South Wales, 1860—1900'. PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1979, which uses electoral rolls in an extensive and systematic fashion.

62I do not want to be sidetracked into debates about the definition of populism. Much like community, it is a notoriously difficult concept to define, and has been mobilised by very different political traditions. For an introduction to this area see Ernest Gellner, *Populism: Its Meanings and National Characteristics*, Weidenfield, London, 1970. My use of the term should be seen within a particular historical and social formation of late nineteenth and early twentieth century politics in Australia, as identified by Peter Love in
approach to the current economic and political structure and a belief that the state was a neutral and powerful force for the amelioration of social problems. Populism identified 'the people' as its principal electorate, and this parallels the call to 'locals' by localism. Both ideologies also defined threats like banks or land companies in the case of populism, and nearby towns and their dominant political elites in the case of localism. These two ideologies led to interpretations of social conflict that elided class differences, and this was one of the major effects of localism at Port Kembla.

Localism has been employed in other studies, particularly Dempsey's work on 'Smalltown', and Gray's analysis of politics in the rural town of Cowra, but with Port Kembla I attempt to contextualise the ideology, linking its rise and fall to changes in the economic and social structures of local society.\textsuperscript{63} I argue that localism, while a powerful ideological force in many Australian towns in the twentieth century, was afforded credibility and strength at Port Kembla because of periods of relatively stable and consensual relations between the major classes. It was an ideology with a specific and identifiable material context.

Class politics was grounded in the local class structure, and here my theorisation of class at Port Kembla goes beyond outlining a class structure to include class as an identity and lived experience. Structuralist readings of Marx such as those by Poulantzas and Althusser focus on the forces that

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\textsuperscript{63} Dempsey defines localism as an ideology which works to 'mask particular practices of subordination or function to lower levels of resentment that are acknowledged to exist.' Dempsey, \textit{op.cit.}, 4—5. Gray sees localism as an ideology which links farm interests and business interests 'by fostering a perception of the social whole to which all residents belong, and moreover by proposing a unique common interest'. Gray, \textit{Politics in Place}, 161.
made classes rather than on the agents themselves, and such an approach is not sympathetic to a social history, especially when the evidence from Port Kembla overwhelmingly suggests class was as much a product of people's actions and identities, as their position within the division of labour.\textsuperscript{64}

Therefore, I also consider class as a political mobilisation based on perceived class differences. In this sense class becomes a relationship which locals participated in, replicated and negotiated. This concept of a class-based politics will be familiar to many labour historians, and my own understanding has benefited from Rickard's analysis of the emergence of class in the period 1890 to 1910 'as a major determinant of political loyalties in Australia', as well as Connell and Irving's work on the patterns of class mobilisation.\textsuperscript{65}

Despite the presence of periods of class conflict, and moments of specific class tension (such as industrial action), the politics of locality was a pervasive force at Port Kembla. This highlights the crucial issue of the relationship between class and local loyalties raised at the outset of this introduction. What aspects of Port Kembla society promoted local identity and obscured the deep-seated class divisions that industrialisation engendered? A useful starting point for understanding the construction of local identity and

\textsuperscript{64}Poulantzas, for example, argues that classes are not 'empirical groups of individuals, social groups that are composed by simple addition' because 'the principal aspect of an analysis of social classes is that of their places in the class struggle.' Poulantzas, \textit{Classes in Contemporary Capitalism}, 17. See also Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, \textit{Reading Capital} (second edition), New Left Books, London, 1977, 267. 'Individuals ... really are only class representatives ... Classes are functions of the process of production as a whole. They are not its subjects, on the contrary, they are determined by its form.' (original italics) For the classic text which shows the working class active in its own making see E.P. Thompson, \textit{The Making of the English Working Class}, (second edition) Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968. See also Thompson's polemic against Althusser and other structuralist readings of Marx, \textit{The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays}, Merlin Press, London, 1978.

the presence of periods of consensual class relations at Port Kembla is David Harvey's conceptualisation of 'fixed capital' and 'mobile capital'. Harvey outlines the creation and destruction of 'space' (or human environments) by capitalism. To generate profit capitalism creates 'fixed capital' in the form of wharfs, factories, and houses; in short a geography of production and reproduction. This process creates a 'structured coherence' in localities or regions, a sense of homogeneity with spatial limits. This coherence, however, is always threatened by other processes endemic to capitalism. Economic effects 'spill over' into nearby localities or regions, technological changes increase linkages with other areas and leave spatial boundaries 'porous and unstable'. In these unstable conditions the formation of alliances of local capital and local labour are not unusual in a bid to protect fixed capital. Harvey's analysis identifies the overarching common interest that all classes in one locality have in protecting fixed capital, and reveal the grounding of non-class politics within the conditions of local society. These insights, as I will argue, are particularly relevant to the history of Port Kembla, and represent a way of linking the shape of local politics and society to the nature of industrial development and its spatial effects.

Moving beyond the circulation of capital for the origin of a powerful local identity, Harvey's argument recalls Connell and Irving's perceptive comments about the regional patterns of working-class mobilisation from the late nineteenth century. This mobilisation commonly involved local capital and local labour allied against 'city interests', a situation that highlights the links between local or regional boosterism and demands for decentralisation and

67 Ibid., 150—153.
68 Connell and Irving, op.cit., 190.
anti-city sentiments. At Port Kembla such alliances of local capital and local labour were key features of local society, and the structural basis for the politics of locality.

As well as the common interest in protecting local capital, class cooperation and local unity was also promoted by the structures and experiences of local life at Port Kembla. From 1900 to 1940 the shared space of the town, cross-class organisations, and locally-centred kin and friendship networks brought residents together, despite their class differences. There

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69 Graeme Davison has charted the increasing ambivalence towards the city of Melbourne from the 1880s, precipitating the growth of decentralisation leagues and utopian rural communities in the following decades. The declining confidence in, and admiration of, 'Marvellous Melbourne', propelled the growth of anti-city, anti-urban and pro-decentralisation sentiment in the late nineteenth century. Davison, The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne, Chapters 7 and 8. Positive images of the city were also dealt a blow by public outrages against 'slums' and urban crime, and the bubonic plague of 1900 which affected Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne.

70 Conditions where the working class see their interests as allied or similar to the interests of dominant class can be understood as a type of 'hegemony'. Most analyses of hegemony suggest that it operates through a number of political and cultural institutions, but without any particular spatial implications. For example, John Wanna explains the moderate politics of the South Australian working class in terms of the 'specific conditions of capital accumulation in South Australia', emphasising the state-organised arbitration system and the historical origins of the South Australian working class. Raymond Evans' account of social conflict in Queensland during and immediately after World War One focuses on 'the importance of bourgeois hegemony exercised through the rostrum, the school, the church and the press' and also how 'in periods of acute crisis, hegemonic power is not enough. Here, the "State-as-force" begins to show its coercive hand.' See John Wanna, 'A Paradigm of Consent: Explanations of working class moderation in South Australia', Labour History, vol. 53, November 1987, 54—72 and Raymond Evans, Loyalty and Disloyalty: Social Conflict on the Queensland Homefront, 1914-18, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987, 3—4. For an argument that the ideology of liberalism was the central feature of bourgeois hegemony see Tim Rowse, Australian Liberalism and National Character, Kibble Books, Melbourne, 1978. Within Australian labour history, Connell and Irving's discussion of the alliances of local capital and local labour is the exception to these generally aspatial notions of the construction of hegemony. See Connell and Irving, op.cit., 202. The major theorist of hegemony is Antonio Gramsci. See his, Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, (translated and edited by Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith), Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1971.
were also cultural and symbolic dimensions to the formation of these links. The people of Port Kembla shared a interpretation of local society as united and conflict-free, often regardless of the realities of exclusion and conflict. In this view the main street, Wentworth Street, became a symbol of local harmony and identity.

But not all local people were understood to warrant inclusion in the category of 'local'. In this thesis the word 'local' is deployed in two ways. Without the quotation marks, local is a descriptive term for those who lived in or around Port Kembla. Placed in quotation marks 'local' signals the ideology of localism, which defined some locals as 'locals' and excluded others. Itinerant male labourers living in the town's boarding houses, or in camps on its fringes, were often denied an identity as 'locals', and an even more comprehensive exclusion confronted the Kooris who lived at Port Kembla.

The Koori history of Port Kembla highlights the social and racial boundaries of the locality, since 'local' society was a white-dominated and defined construct. In the last ten years local history has been a valuable forum for Aboriginal history, as research into the history of the indigenous peoples of Australia has moved from establishing broad national patterns to focus on particular local experiences. The Koori history of Port Kembla problematises the notion of a town-based local history (since Koori lived on the margins of Port Kembla, both spatially and socially), and expresses a very different experience of locality. It also reveals the presence of another locality on the margins of the town during the period 1900 to 1940.

Those beyond the boundaries of the town, in the Illawarra region, also had a vital role in promoting unity at Port Kembla by providing common enemies. Surveying a range of cultures the anthropologist, A.P. Cohen, argues that outside threats reinforce 'communality.' Historians have reached

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similar conclusions studying the history of Australian towns. At Broken Hill, a mining town in the far west of New South Wales, the distant State Government in Sydney was a commonly-evoked opponent.72 On the Darling Downs in Queensland the three major towns of Toowoomba, Warwick and Drayton, all measured their own progress in the shadow of each other's development.73

For those in Port Kembla, Wollongong-based political and economic interests, the regional farmers, and the absentee landlords of the land surrounding the district, the Wentworth trustees, were defined as 'outside threats' by a particular understanding of the social and political world of the Illawarra. The ideology of localism drew locals away from town-based class conflict and disunity by identifying those beyond the borders of the town as their principal adversaries. Such understandings could unite those at Port Kembla, despite an entrenched class structure, industrial conflict and class politics.

The two concepts of the politics of locality and class politics form an important analytical framework in this thesis, and while they do appear to be paired opposites, they were not mutually exclusive and, in fact, I argue that they had a close and interactive relationship, as the people of Port Kembla called upon different though often co-existing loyalties of class and locality.

The social history of Port Kembla, then, provides an opportunity to study the social and political consequences and experiences of large-scale industrialisation, urbanisation and social change. The years 1900 to 1940 are eminently suitable for such an analysis for this was a period when Port Kembla was transformed from a small rural village to a major urbanised

73 See Waterson, op.cit., 66—65. In North Queensland the outside threat was represented by the climate and the 'untamed frontier', which Bolton argues created a 'growing sense of community'. See Bolton, A Thousand Miles Away, 177.
industrial centre. My focus on the relationship between society, politics and identity, however, means that some aspects of Port Kembla's history are neglected. Issues such as the history of the family, the nature of private life and the history of leisure and recreation are only briefly discussed. Religious, ethnic and gender-based identities are not given full treatment and, while I discuss the gendered experience of locality and the gender segmentation of the labour market, the focus on male-dominated public politics has sidelined—to some extent—the relationship between women and locality.74

Sources

This thesis draws on a wide range of primary sources including Government reports and archival material, extensive company records, council minutes, local newspapers and oral history. While all primary sources have to be carefully scrutinised and their conditions of production considered, the use of newspaper records and oral evidence requires more lengthy discussion. Two regional newspapers, the Illawarra Mercury and the South Coast Times and Wollongong Argus (which I have abbreviated to the South Coast Times), have been important sources for this work. Although there are concerns about the uncritical use of newspaper evidence by historians75, their value lies in the multitude of voices they contain.76 This was most obviously the case in letters to the editor, but it was also common for articles and reports

74 For an introduction to this area see Louise Johnson, 'Making Space for Women—Feminist Critiques and Reformulations of the Spatial Disciplines', Australian Feminist Studies, no.9, Autumn 1989, 31—50. For an example of this approach see Jeanne Kay, 'Landscapes of women and men: rethinking the regional historical geography of the United States and Canada', Journal of Historical Geography, vol.17, no.4, 1991, 435—452.

75 See Ken Inglis, 'Questions about Newspapers', Australian Cultural History (Books, Readers and Reading), no.11, 1992, 120—127.

from friendly societies, charities, co-operatives, trade unions, political parties, hospitals and members of parliament to be published (after editorial scrutiny as with all newspapers). Many court cases (Licensing Court, Police Court, Court of Petty Sessions and the Quarter Sessions) and Government enquiries were reported nearly verbatim.

This multiplicity of voices reveals many different perspectives on the Illawarra. For example, in his history of the Electrolytic Refining and Smelting Company of Australia Ltd (ER&S) focussing on the issue of pollution, Mitchell argues that both regional newspapers 'extolled the virtues of industrial capitalism', and this is an accurate description for developmentalism was a major theme of much of their content.\textsuperscript{77} But at the same time a competing interpretation of economic and social change from Illawarra's rural and farmer interests was also present in both papers. Reports of annual agricultural shows held at Albion Park and Wollongong, for example, suggested a different rural vision of the Illawarra. The pro-capitalist rhetoric was also muted by the number of coal miners in the Illawarra who were potential readers. Neither paper could afford to alienate this large section of their readership, and it was not unusual for the \textit{Illawarra Mercury} to support the miners in some of their industrial campaigns.

Oral history has also been an important component of this study. I carried out twenty formal interviews with local or former residents, and twelve of these interviews were taped and transcribed. I also consulted the large amount of oral history that had already been done at Port Kembla, and much of this is available in local libraries.\textsuperscript{78} Rather than structuring interviews with set questions, I adopted a 'life history' approach, beginning by asking a respondent when and where they were born. For some this lead was enough

\textsuperscript{77} Mitchell, \textit{op.cit.}, 97.

\textsuperscript{78} See the bibliography for details of this material.
and they would speak for hours, while others preferred more formal questioning. As much as possible, I tried to let the respondents decide what was important in their life histories, although my own research interests, constraints of time and limited resources imposed some influence on the direction of interviews.\textsuperscript{79}

Oral history is a valuable source for a number of reasons. It represents one way to redress the dominance of national history and the assumptions of powerlessness in some local and regional history. Oral history can widen the window on the past by giving a voice to those groups excluded from organisations which have traditionally generated copious amounts of historical documents—Governments, companies, middle-class organisations, or the organised working class.

Oral history is also valuable because it can challenge dominant notions of what constitutes history by producing evidence and locating analysis at the level of the everyday lives of 'ordinary' individuals. This is especially important for the history of localities because a powerful theme of oral history is the way people's lives were located, and to some extent contained, within neighbourhoods, villages, towns or cities; in what Giddens has called the realm of people's day to day 'practical and discursive consciousness.'\textsuperscript{80} Oral history serves as a reminder that social life is constituted within places, however defined, and that the spatial component of any social history is crucial.

But oral history does not provide unproblematic evidence that can easily be added to the fund of sources that historians use. In the late 1970s oral history enthusiasts such as Paul Thompson in Great Britain and Wendy

\textsuperscript{80}Giddens, \textit{Central Problems in Social Theory}, 71.
Lowenstein in Australia believed that they had come across a new type of history 'by allowing the voices of the past to be heard directly.' 81 This approach suggested that 'the facts', once revealed, would speak for themselves, but oral history presents special problems surrounding the issue of memory and its relationship to the past being recalled. 82

Those who are sceptical of the value of oral history argue that memory is the act of an apparently unified subject placing an artificially-unified past on record. Efi Hartizimanolis, writing about nostalgia and migrant women writers, has characterised the textual recollections of some migrant writers as 'nostalgic subject positions.' This writing position 'reconstructs ideas of the unified self according to essentialist notions of home, community and continuity.' 83 Both textual and oral narratives emphasise choice, freedom and continuity, while downplaying conflict, oppression and discontinuity. Critics of oral history argue that memories are psychological constructions with very little to do with the events being remembered. The present is used as a reference point by respondents, who construct historical narratives which lead inexorably to their current situation or self-identity. 84 Memories can also be gradually altered according to their reception over the years before the interview. Historian Heather Goodall argues that the presentation of some Aboriginal

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84 Lowenthal, while generally supportive of oral history, neatly summarises its inherent complexities as an historical source: 'Memories are not ready-made reflections of the past but eclectic, selective reconstructions based on subsequent actions and perceptions and on the ever-changing codes by which we delineate, symbolize and classify the world around us.' See David Lowenthal, The Past is a Foreign Country, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, 210.
respondents' stories has become more strident and simplistic because, in the context of the 'unequal power relations of colonialism', their memories of oppression were regularly denied or ignored by white authorities.85 But this doesn't lead Goodall to reject oral history. In fact, she uses it extensively in her work. She found that 'Aboriginal peoples' memories record a more accurate account of the broad reality of Aboriginal experience' but she reached that conclusion not by using oral history to reveal 'new facts' but by 'think[ing] about those memories beyond their literal meaning.86

Oral history is a source that should be 'read' in the sense that a literary critic or cultural analyst reads a text.87 In this work it is used in conjunction with written sources in order to minimise some of the vagaries of memory and the interview process, but the relationship between the past being recalled and present-day memory is not as problematic as some believe. Oral evidence from Port Kembla has been collected for over two decades, and despite the economic and social change during these years, many of the themes in the oral record remain the same. At a certain level memories are assembled out of the materials of the time being recalled. As historical geographer David Lowenthal notes 'even an error of memory involves the recall of something,

85Heather Goodall, 'Aboriginal history and the politics of information control', Oral History Association of Australia Journal, no.9, 1987, 22. She also found a degree of 'minimisation' of racial oppression in oral testimony for a variety of reasons which related to the state of race relations in Australia; speaking out could mean further oppression or recognising oneself as a victim or the subject of abuse was psychologically untenable and so on. See ibid. 28—29. Kevin Gilbert also notes 'an automatic self-censorship' because 'Aboriginals have been acutely aware of their white audience.' See his, Living Black: Blacks Talk to Kevin Gilbert, Penguin, Ringwood, 1977, 1.

86Goodall, 'Aboriginal history and the politics of information control', 17.

87Similarly, Murphy argues that an 'interpretative reading' is the most profitable approach to oral history, 'recognising that memory is a cultural and historical artefact'. Murphy, op.cit., 173. His preference for a psychoanalytical framework, however, as Heather Goodall notes, is 'a retreat into an older concept of historian as interpreter'. Goodall, 'Aboriginal history and the politics of information control', 30.
however distorted; no memory is totally delusive." Moreover, despite the oral record from Port Kembla emphasising local unity and downplaying conflict, the narratives also hint at other ways of understanding Port Kembla (for no set of memories are devoid of contradiction and juxtaposition), and it is in these contradictions and inconsistencies that historians can find evidence which goes beyond nostalgic memories of a united locality. I have not set out to analyse the collective memory of Port Kembla people, nor the discursive meanings of 'Port Kembla' as revealed through oral evidence. Instead, I use oral history to supplement and flesh out the available written sources, and provide a more people-centred vision of Port Kembla.

In Chapter One, *Locating Port Kembla*, I explore the spatial consequences of industrial change by describing Port Kembla as a party of travellers may have seen it in 1900, 1920 and 1940. This strategy is not without historical precedent, as Port Kembla was often the subject of visits by official delegations consisting of politicians, businessmen and members of the press. Moreover, this 'slice approach' to social history has been deployed with illuminating results in recent years. One of its dangers is that it can

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88 Lowenthal, op.cit., 200.
89 See, for example, Illawarra Mercury, 7 September 1901 for a report of a visit to Port Kembla by Wollongong citizens including the Mayor J.P. Calvin, George Fuller (Federal Member for Illawarra), and other 'prominent citizens'. In February 1909 the Premier of New South Wales, C.G. Wade, inspected ER&S (See Illawarra Mercury, 12 February 1909). Representatives from the New South Wales Chamber of Commerce visited in the same year (See Illawarra Mercury, 21 September 1909). The Pan-Pacific Science Congress visited in 1923 (See Pan-Pacific Science Congress, *Guide Book to the Excursion to the Illawarra District*, Sydney, Government Printer, 1923.) A reporter from the Sydney Morning Herald, (Percy Meggy) visited ER&S in 1927 (Sydney Morning Herald, 11 March 1927, 10).
90 The best examples of this approach include the '1838' volume of *Australians: A Historical Library*, (Alan Atkinson and Marian Aveling (eds) *Australians 1838*, Fairfax, Syme & Weldon, Sydney, 1987), Atkinson's evocative description of Camden in 1841 (Atkinson, op.cit., Chapter 1) and Ken Inglis' essay on Canberra (Ken Inglis, 'Ceremonies in a Capital Landscape: Scenes in the Making of Canberra' in Stephen Graubard
overlook historical change, but the use of three separate yearly descriptions minimises this drawback. The three sections stand on their own as descriptions of the physical and social space of Port Kembla, and considered together they provide a sense of the changes that occurred over the forty years.

The aim of Chapter Two, *Industry, commerce and the formal economy*, is to outline the industrialisation of Port Kembla and chart the changing nature of the paid workforce. I discuss the class structure and gender segmentation of the 'formal economy', that part of the labour market characterised by waged work, regular hours, and defined rules and procedures of work. The activities of some of Port Kembla industries, namely AI&S, ER&S and Metal Manufactures Ltd (MM), have received considerable historical attention, but others such as the Mt Lyell Cokeworks, Australian Smelting Corporation Ltd (ASC) and the Public Works Department (PWD) remain less well known. Consequently, this chapter contains essential background information on these industries, as well as outlining the changing formal economy.

The focus on Port Kembla's industries, by both contemporaries and later historians, and a narrow definition of work based on wage labour, overlooks the importance of work in the 'informal economy'. In Chapter Three, *Beyond wage labour*, I outline the 'informal economy' at Port Kembla,
the often-neglected underside of the formal economy, and chart the re-
organisation of the informal economy and households through the increasing
dominance of male wage labour and control and depletion of Port Kembla's
natural resources. The definition of 'work' used in this chapter extends beyond
wage labour to include any productive activity that provides income, resources
or material comfort to a household.

Chapter Four, Kooris and Port Kembla, considers the Koori history of
Port Kembla. I briefly outline the relevant features of 'traditional' society and
the nineteenth century experience, and then consider in more detail the Koori
experience of displacement from living places and camp sites as Port Kembla
grew in the early to mid-twentieth century. I argue that on the edges of a white-
dominated town Kooris maintained their own locality on Hill 60, despite the
pressures from industrialisation and town growth.

In Chapter Five, The structures of locality, I follow the spatial and social
formation of the town from 1900 to the late 1920s, and explore the character of
the society that these changes produced. Commercial and residential
development at Port Kembla, along with new ways of perceiving the town,
came together at the beginning of the 1920s to create a locally-centred
society, largely independent of its neighbours for major services and facilities.
This engendered strong feelings of local identity, providing fertile ground for
localism and the politics of locality.

Chapter Six, Class, locality and politics, deals with politics until 1930,
and I outline the dynamic relationship between locality and class. The politics
of locality, a loose alliance of locals of all social classes, was a major force in
the town, supported by an ideology of 'localism' which posited 'outsiders' as
unifying common enemies. Class politics broke through in times of industrial
conflict revealing the competing allegiances of locals.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, The challenges to locality, I isolate the long-
term challenges to a self-sufficient locality at Port Kembla, particularly the
regionalisation of the Illawarra, and then focus on the most significant threat to
the politics of locality—industrial action and militancy by the working class at
the end of the 1930s. The chapter concludes by considering the implications
of this wide-ranging attack on the locality as it was politically and socially
constituted in the 1910s and 1920s.
Chapter 1: Locating Port Kembla

In 1899 an advertisement for a house for sale in Wollongong included a view of Port Kembla harbour as a selling point.\(^1\) Coastal steamers manoeuvring into Port Kembla must indeed have been quite a sight and a desirable feature for any Wollongong home. Over the next 40 years the small coaling port changed rapidly to became a major centre for the steel and metal fabrication industries of Australia. No longer a pleasant outlook for the well-to-do in Wollongong, by 1940 Port Kembla was a rapidly-growing 'steel town', dominated by the industries that surrounded it. This chapter outlines the spatial dimensions of these economic changes by describing Port Kembla as a party of travellers may have seen it in 1900, 1920 and 1940. Detailing the space of Port Kembla brings into focus the town's sense of centre, boundary and definition, and the role of space in social relations. These issues are then developed in later chapters.

The 1900 Tour

In 1900 the Illawarra region was split into a north/south economic divide, with the north, from Mt Keira to Helensburgh dominated by coal mining, while the south from Figtree to Shellharbour was 'dairying and nothing but dairying from one end of the place to another.'\(^2\) Port Kembla, and the nearby

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\(^1\) Illawarra Mercury, 17 October 1899. 'For Sale or To Let "Ocean View" Wollongong, containing 20 rooms and conveniences, paddock, etc. Extensive sea views and Port Kembla harbour; within one minutes walk to railway station. Now under repair and painting.'

\(^2\) Australasian Agricultural Reporter quoted in South Coast Times, 8 February 1905. For a survey of the economic and urban development of the region see R.V. Cardew, 'Urban Settlement in
Map 1: A portion of NSW showing the Illawarra region in relation to other major urban areas and outlining major coal deposits in this area.

Map 2: The Illawarra region, showing major towns and principal coal mines.
Map 2: The Illawarra region, showing major towns and principal coalmines.

The towns of Piggot, Unanderra, Brownsville, Dapto and Mt Kembla formed the principal towns of the Central Illawarra Municipality. The Municipality's population had grown substantially during the 1890s, fuelled by the development of grazing pastures, along with produce destined for Sydney markets for beef and milk, had brought considerable prosperity. Sydney men such as J. Beattie, J. Bull and J. C. Elffers were joined by farmers such as F. W. Bonner and J. H. Brown, who were established on farms of about 500 acres. They lived on the estates and a large number of men employed three men during milking time, and the local produce was sold through the rail depot at Dapto, which was the largest in the Illawarra, and one of the largest in the country. The local political platform, as a cattlemen's association, was a regional political platform, as an alternative to the farmers' association. The Illawarra Mercury, 9 March, 1922. John Brown was the first secretary of the Dapto Agricultural Show in 1857 and one of the founding Alderman of the Central Illawarra Municipality in 1858. He was a widely-respected Alderman for fifty-one years. For his obituary see Illawarra Mercury, 23 August 1912.
towns of Figtree, Unanderra, Brownsville, Dapto and Mt Kembla formed the principal towns of the Central Illawarra Municipality. The Municipality’s population had grown from 3247 in 1891 to 4464 in 1901, and was a substantial portion of the Illawarra’s regional population of 19,111. Rich grazing pastures, along with proximity to Sydney markets for butter and milk, had brought considerable prosperity in the 1890s, and the Municipality was dominated by large dairy farmers and cattle breeders. Wealthy farmers such as George Lindsay, Thomas Armstrong and John Brown, ran herds of about 50 cattle and lived on large estates in the area.

These established dairying families dominated the Central Illawarra Council through long-serving (and occasionally related) Alderman such as John Brown (an Alderman from 1859 to 1911), Frank O’Donnell (1890 to 1906; Mayor eight times) and J.W. Gorrell (1908 to 1935; Mayor twelve times). Not all the local dairy farmers were so well off, and a large number of


3 According to the definition of the Illawarra region used in this study, this figure consists of the Shire of Bulli and the Municipalities of Central Illawarra, Illawarra North and Wollongong.

4 George Lindsay from Dapto had a herd of 50 cows and employed three men during milking time. He sent milk to the Sydney market four mornings a week through the rail depot at Dapto, and produced butter with the surplus. He was also shire clerk of the Central Illawarra Council from 1891 to 1929. See his obituary in South Coast Times, 8 November 1940 and Evidence of George Lindsay, ‘Royal Commission on Food Supply and prices: Sectional report on the Supply and Distribution of Milk’ in NSWPP, 1913 (2nd session), vol.3, 250—252. Thomas Armstrong, one time Mayor of the Shellharbour Municipality, operated a herd of 32 cows. He was a staunch methodist with a ‘cultivated taste for literature’, who had secured a regional political platform, as was common with these men, through involvement in dairy farmers’ Co-operatives and local Agricultural shows. See Evidence of Thomas Armstrong, ibid., 250—252 and Frances McCaffery Papers, D92/1/3, Wollongong University Archives (WUA) and Illawarra Mercury, 3 March, 1922. John Brown was the first secretary of the Dapto Agricultural Show in 1857 and one of the founding Alderman of the Central Illawarra Municipality in 1858. He was a widely-respected Alderman for fifty-one years. For his obituary see Illawarra Mercury, 23 August 1912.
farming families struggled on properties leased from large landowners. The Board of Health had continual trouble in the Municipality with insanitary dairies, and many were without clean water supplies or proper water closets. Leaseholders were usually family-run farms of eight to twelve hectares and had a high rate of failure.

At the hub of this economic divide between north and south Illawarra was Wollongong, with a population of 3545 in 1901. Wollongong dominated the Illawarra because of its importance as a service centre. The *Sydney Morning Herald* noted in July 1902 that on mine pay days Wollongong stores were a 'very busy picture indeed, and thronged with people in them from the mines at [Mt] Keira, [Mt] Kembla and Bellambi.' Wollongong's commercially-minded middle class were active in real estate, accountancy, law and medicine. Storekeepers, tinsmiths, blacksmiths, bootmakers, tanners, and watchmakers, also enjoyed local and regional trade, making Wollongong the middle-class and petite-bourgeois stronghold of the Illawarra.

To the north of Wollongong, along the narrow plain between the coast and the escarpment, small villages such as Mt Pleasant, Balgownie, Corrimal, Bellambi, Bulli and South Clifton clustered around the coal mines. In 1900, 1300 men worked in the region's eleven mines (all but one north of Wollongong), while many others were employed in related industries such as shipping, the Government railway and the coke industry. Mining towns were

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5 See Dairies Supervision Act Book, 1886—1929, 5/5867, NSWSA.
6 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 July 1902, 7.
7 Wollongong had experienced only light industrial development such as a cordial manufacturer, a timber merchant, a few brickworks and an iron foundry. *Sands' Sydney and New South Wales Country Directory*, 1900, Mitchell Library (ML) and Mitchell and Sherington, *op.cit.*, 64—66.
8 For the estimate of the number of miners in the Illawarra see Winnifred Mitchell, 'The Miners of Southern New South Wales: A History of the Union', 131. There were six cokeworks altogether in the Illawarra including works at Unanderra, North Wollongong, Mt Pleasant, Corrimal, Bulli and South Clifton. Thirroul was a centre for railway employment in the northern Illawarra. See T.A.
essentially working-class towns and inhabitants were strongly parochial. In 1894, Helensburgh, a mining town on the northern edge of the Illawarra, formed the first Progress Association in the region. Many town-based union lodges had strong local traditions and proved difficult to coordinate, hampering the regional development of the coal miners' union.

Like the land-owning dairy farmers, the mine owners were also active in regional politics. Henry McCabe, owner of the Mt Keira mine served as Alderman on the Wollongong Municipal Council and was Mayor in 1899. Ebenezer Vickery, owner and manager of the Mt Kembla Coal and Oil Company, was a member of the New South Wales Legislative Council and was best remembered for his trips to Port Kembla by company train where he would give out religious tracts to his employees.9

The mine owners were firmly behind the development of a Government-built harbour at Port Kembla because the port had become crucial to the local coal trade. By the mid-1890s almost 40 per cent of all the coal mined in the Illawarra was shipped through two private jetties at Port Kembla.10


9 Illawarra Mercury, 23 April 1904. Ebenezer Vickery—merchant, mine owner, property owner, pastoralist and member of the New South Wales Legislative Council (1887 to 1906)—was born in London in 1827 and died in Leeds in 1906. He arrived in Sydney in 1833 with his parents. In 1851 he took over his father's boot factory, and in the following decades he acquired interests in the shipping and coal mining industries of the South Coast. In 1879 he became Chairman of the Mt Kembla Coal and Oil Company. He was a devout Methodist and between 1901 and 1904 donated £10,000 to the tent mission movement. See C.N. Connolly, Biographical Register of the New South Wales Parliament, 1856—1901, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1983, 342.

10 Report together with Minutes of Evidence, Appendices and Plans relating to the Proposed Construction of a Deepwater at Port Kembla', Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works in NSWV&P, vol.7, 1897,13 (hereafter PSCPW, 1897, Deepwater harbour at Port Kembla). These joint parliamentary committees were established in 1888 to provide
principal reason for the construction of the harbour at Port Kembla was, in the words of the Parliamentary Committee on Public Works, a 'good safe port, safe and accessible to large vessels in all weathers, is absolutely necessary for the development of the coal trade of the district.' The rival ports of Wollongong and Bellambi were considered for development, but were found to be more costly and less suitable than Port Kembla. The influence of the mine owners and their parliamentary allies was decisive in securing the passage of the Port Kembla Harbour Act in December 1898. The Act authorised the construction of a deep water harbour at Port Kembla with an eastern breakwater (at the southern side of the port), and the resumption of two private jetties and land belonging the Wentworth estate, which owned much of the land surrounding the port. Construction work began in January 1900. It was into this regional context that the industrialisation of Port Kembla began.

Our imaginary tour of Port Kembla in 1900 is undertaken by a party of gentlemen, autodidacts on holidays from the City with a keen interest in ports, ships and railways. Their route would have taken them by horse-drawn coach from Wollongong via the road that ran from the end of Corrimal Street past the Wollongong race track to Tom Thumb’s Lagoon. Coal trimmers and labourers who worked at Port Kembla and lived in Wollongong had constructed a rough walking bridge there in the 1880s, and performed makeshift repairs to keep it

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parliamentary scrutiny on public works spending over £25,000. After 1896 they were placed under the joint control of the Speaker of the House and the President of the Council. See Lenore Coltheart, A Guide to the History of the PWD in NSW, Public Works Heritage Group, New South Wales, 1991, 28.

11 PSCPW, 1897, Deepwater harbour at Port Kembla, 13—14.

12 Ibid., 8.

13 See Evidence of Charles Brynes (manager of Mt Pleasant Coal Company), 71 and Henry McCabe (manager of Mt Keira mine), 100—103 and Walter Evans (shipping manager), 3 [sectional committee] in PSCPW, 1897, Deepwater harbour at Port Kembla. See also Firth, op.cit., 160—164.
serviceable. Another road, Five Islands Road, connected Port Kembla to Unanderra, a small village six kilometres to the west, but it was poorly drained and inadequate. Bad roads gave the port a sense of isolation. In 1900 many who lived at Port Kembla, public works employees and cokeworkers camped on crown land, were according to the *Mercury*, 'undergoing a kind of semi-imprisonment by being isolated so much from the town of Wollongong and elsewhere by want of roads.'

Tom Thumb's Lagoon, located between Wollongong and Port Kembla, was a major hurdle for any traveller to Port Kembla. The Reverend D'Arcy Irvine from Wollongong could be seen on Sunday mornings wading his horse across the lagoon to attend monthly services for the faithful at Port Kembla. The lagoon was a tidal marsh, surrounded by mangroves and reedy swamps, rich in fish and bird life. Fringing the lagoon was low-lying, marshy land,

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14 Illawarra *Mercury*, 7 October 1899. Some of the descriptions in this section are based on Parish Maps of Wollongong, County of Camden, Lard District of Wollongong, 1897 and 1907, WPL.
15 Illawarra *Mercury*, 12 March 1901.
16 Illawarra *Mercury*, 30 June 1900.
17 St Stephens Port Kembla, 'History', [no author, 1953?], St Stephens Records, D101, Box 3, WUA. Another version has the Reverend having to undress and wade across the lagoon. See South Coast Times, 8 March 1940.
18 See William Bailey, (Interviewed by Glenn Mitchell, 14 October 1976), WPL and photograph entitled 'Tom Thumb's Lagoon, 1890?', WPL. There are complex issues involved in using photographs as historical evidence which are beyond the scope of this study. I have not subjected photographs of Port Kembla to any detailed analysis, but used them to back up fairly unproblematic claims. For an introduction to this area see Noel Sanders, 'Angles on the Image' in Gunter Kress (ed) *Communication and Culture: An Introduction*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, 1988, 131—156. For an example of the use of photographs for historical analysis with some relevance to Port Kembla see Gary Griffin in ‘J.H.Lundager, Mount Morgan Politician and Photographer: Company Hack or Subtle Subversive?', *Journal of Australian Studies*, no.34, September 1992, 15—31.
covered with dense scrub and the occasional golden wattle and tea tree.\textsuperscript{19}

The lagoon was usually closed to the sea by banks of white sand which extended around the harbour's foreshores. Although rough seas would sometimes open the lagoon to the ocean, its main source of water was Allan's or Salty Creek. Off the coast lay the Five Islands—Big Island, Flinder's Island, Bass Island, Martin's Island and Rocky Island. Called 'low ugly things' by Lady Franklin, the wife of the Governor of Van Diemen's Land who toured the Illawarra region in 1839, these islands protected Port Kembla from the southerly swell, and gave the area its common name in the early nineteenth century of the Five Islands District.\textsuperscript{20}

From the edge of the lagoon the travellers could see the two private coal jetties of Port Kembla. The Southern Coal Company's jetty, just over 300 metres long, was built in 1887 and from here coal was shipped from the Company's mines at Mt Keira, Mt Pleasant, Corrimal and South Bulli.\textsuperscript{21} The wharfinger, Thomas Frederick Downie, had lived near here since 1882 with his wife Connie Downie, and their four children. The jetty was a two-level coaling facility where wagons rattled out along the top level, delivered their load to waiting ships via one of three chutes, and then circled around underneath and returned to the mines. Coke from the Federal Cokeworks at Unanderra was also shipped from the jetty, and in 1899 there were small shipments of lead ingots from the Dapto Smelting works.\textsuperscript{22}

Further south stood the Mt Kembla Coal and Oil Company's jetty, smaller than the Southern Coal Company's jetty (at 230 metres), and more


\textsuperscript{20}Lady Franklin quoted in \textit{ibid.}, 121.

\textsuperscript{21}\textit{PSCPW}, 1897, Deepwater Harbour at Port Kembla, 4.

\textsuperscript{22}See \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 7 January 1899.
protected by the southern headland and the Five Islands. The jetty was completed in February 1883 and the Mt Kembla Company’s association with the port was the origin of the name ‘Port Kembla’, which came into popular usage in the late 1880s.23 The Mt Lyell Cckeovens, constructed in late 1899, stood at the base of the Mt Kembla jetty, where its 62 ovens smouldered away, burning coal from the Mt Kembla mine.24

If the travellers turned west towards the Illawarra escarpment they could see, in the foreground, the higher parts of future Port Kembla. Some of this land was open grassland prior to European occupation, although considerable clearing and fencing had occurred in the last 75 years.25 It was dotted with dairy cattle, and was described by Lady Franklin in 1839 as ‘fine

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23 In 1879 the Company applied to the New South Wales Parliament for permission to construct a railway line from its mine at Mt Kembla to Wollongong and Red Point. It received parliamentary approval in March 1881 to build a rail line and jetty which would cost between £20,000 and £25,000. See Illawarra Mercury, 2 March 1883 and ‘Minutes of Evidence, Select Committee on the Mt Kembla Coal and Oil Company’s Railway Bill’ in NSWV&P, 1880—81, vol.2, 1031—32. ‘Kembla’ derives from the Koori name for Mt Kembla, ‘Dgenbella’ or ‘Djemba’. See Organ, op.cit., Appendix 2 and 3.

24 By November 1899, 50 ovens were operating and a further twelve were added in September 1900. See General Manager’s Report, March 1900, 24 and Director’s Report, September 1901, 8 in Mt Lyell Mining and Railway Company Ltd, Half Yearly Reports and Balance Sheets, 1900—1901, Victorian State Library (VSL).

25 For example, David Allan (1780—1852), the first land grantee in the area (1817) had cleared 243 of his 890 hectares, known as ‘Illawarra farm’, by 1819. Allan was employed as Deputy Commissary by the New South Wales Colonial Administration from 1813 until a scandal in 1817 led to his dismissal. He had at least 500 cattle and a ‘considerable’ number of horses on his property. He left the colony in 1819 and lived in Scotland until returning to New South Wales in 1829. See John Ritchie (ed) The Evidence to the Bigge Report, vol.1 and 2, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1971, 101 (vol.1) and 165—167 (vol.2) and Sydney Gazette, 22 June 1822. See also B.T. Dowd, The First Five Land Grantees and their Grants in the Illawarra, Illawarra Historical Society, Wollongong, 1960, 11—14.
grazing forest and soil. There are numerous swamp oak and causaurinas.\textsuperscript{26}
Since this description intensive grazing had caused considerable deterioration in the environment. Witnesses at the Public Works Committee inquiry into the construction of Port Kembla harbour in 1897 described the land as 'very poor' and 'sour land, and worth nothing to speak of.'\textsuperscript{27}

All of this land was part of the Wentworth estate. Originally a land grant of approximately 890 hectares to David Allan in 1817, it was purchased by W.C. Wentworth in 1828. The estate had been divided into 33 small holdings of eight to twelve hectares in the 1840s and leased to family-run dairies. The land was placed in the hands of trustees upon Wentworth's death in 1872, and became known as the Wentworth estate. The estate's local managers were the O'Donnell family, who also owned land in the Port Kembla area.\textsuperscript{28} The manager in 1900 was Frank O'Donnell, who lived on the estate in a large homestead on the north-western side of Port Kembla. In the next forty years

\textsuperscript{26}Lady Franklin quoted in Henderson and Henderson, \textit{op.cit.}, 121. Swamp oak and Causaurina glauca are actually the same tree, commonly found near wet marshy areas such as Tom Thumb's Lagoon. See Kevin Mills, 'The Clearing of Illawarra Rainforests: Problems in Reconstructing Pre-European Vegetation Patterns', \textit{Australian Geographer}, vol.19, no.2, November 1988, 230—240.

\textsuperscript{27}Evidence of Archibald Campbell (State Member for Illawarra) and Evidence of G.S. Yuill (Agent for the Southern Coal Company) in \textit{PSCPW, 1897}, Deepwater Harbour at Port Kembla, 34 and 23 respectively.

\textsuperscript{28}After David Allan left New South Wales in 1819 his holding was leased out and eventually sold to Richard Jones in 1827. W.C. Wentworth (1790—1872) bought the land in 1828 and renamed it the 'Five Islands estate'. Wentworth was an explorer, land owner, author, barrister and important colonial politician in the colony. The land was subdivided in 1842, a common practice in that decade, (see Atkinson, \textit{op.cit.}, 58) and Michael O'Donnell, a former school teacher at a Catholic school in Wollongong, was employed as resident manager. See A.G.L. Shaw and C.M.H. Clark (eds) \textit{Australian Dictionary of Biography, vol.1, 1788—1850}, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1967, 582—589 and Notes on the 'Wentworth family', Frances McCaffery Papers, D92/2/64, WUA.
the Wentworth estate and the O'Donnell family were important players in the
development of Port Kembla.

Beyond the Wentworth estate was the Berkeley estate, originally a land
grant to Robert Jenkins in 1817.29 Prior to European occupation it was a stand
of rainforest outlined by open woodland on the lower, wetter flats.30 This area
would become the site of first Hoskins Iron and Steel Company Ltd blast
furnace in 1927. In 1900 it was owned by dairy farmers, the Duncans, who had
only partly cleared the land. In the coming years, trees from here would be
utilised as fuel for the furnaces and home fires of Port Kembla. These open
woodlands formed a boundary at the western edge of Port Kembla.

The houses and company buildings of Port Kembla clung around the
two jetties which had given white settlement its impetus and life. Near the Mt
Kembla Company’s jetty were four houses, a store and the school. Likewise,
there was only a handful of houses at the Southern Coal Company’s jetty.
Both coal companies had leases with the Wentworth estate which stipulated
limited housing construction. This meant that while the port had been in use
since 1883, it remained an isolated collection of scattered houses and dairy
farms.

Surveying the houses of Port Kembla our travellers would have found a
small number of company homes, surrounded by makeshift camps and tents.
West of the Mt Kembla Company jetty were four houses built by the company
for their permanent employees. While some workers with the Mt Lyell
Cokeworks and the Public Works Department (PWD) travelled daily from
Wollongong, others lived in tents and roughly-constructed huts in this area. In

May 1900 the Council Health Inspector reported that these 'bag and bark gunyahs' were in an insanitary state.\textsuperscript{31}

To the southern side of the Mt Kembla Company jetty stood the wharfinger's house, the flagstaff used for signalling ships and the school. George Sinclair, the wharfinger, had been with the company since 1887. He lived in a cottage not far from the flagstaff that he controlled with his wife, Catherine Sinclair and their two teenage daughters. Altogether, there were about twelve wooden houses, and a few temporary shacks and tents at Port Kembla with a European population of about 100.\textsuperscript{32}

The school was originally a Mt Kembla Company house, and later a rope shed, built in 1879. It was without a ceiling and had a blacksmith's forge in one corner. The company had carried out some improvements (the Department of Public Instruction had refused to pay), but the \textit{Illawarra Mercury} described the atmosphere on a summer day as being 'more suitable for Turkish bath purposes.'\textsuperscript{33} It was constructed of wood with a galvanised iron roof and was a modest six metres long by three metres wide. In this small space an average of twenty-four children a day came under the watchful eye of Thomas Collins, the school master. He was remembered as 'a quiet, steady unassuming young man', and had been in charge since 1890.\textsuperscript{34}

The school was also used from March 1899 by local Anglicans for monthly services given by Reverend Irvine from Wollongong. In November 1900 twelve local residents took communion. Their names were not recorded but the local committee that organised the service consisted of Peter Rieck,

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 12 May 1900 and St Stephens, 'History', \textit{loc.cit.}

\textsuperscript{32} Evidence of George Sinclair in \textit{PSCPW, 1897}, Deepwater Harbour at Port Kembla, 241 and State Electoral Roll, Electoral District of Illawarra, Wollongong Division, 1899 and 1900, ML.

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 1 October 1894.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Port Kembla Public School Centenary, 1890—1990}, Port Kembla, 1990, 9. See Appendix 2 in that publication for the attendance figures.
Thomas Downie, William Harris, a labourer and John Peterson, an engine driver. Early on Sunday mornings the harmonium, kept at Downie's residence, was carried along the beach between the two jetties to the school. Services continued here until 1903 when a new church was built on land donated by the trustees of the Wentworth estate.\footnote{St Stephens, 'History', \emph{loc.cit.} and St Stephens, Service Register, 12 March 1899, D101, Box 11, WUA.}

Beyond the homes of the Mt Kembla Company workers and the fence enclosing the property, a public works railway line from the tip-face of the eastern breakwater to the quarry which was under construction. The kilometre-long line was completed in July 1901, running part of the way over an earthen embankment that was constructed using horse and cart. Construction of the breakwater was commenced the following month.\footnote{\textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 6 August 1901 and \textit{South Coast Times}, 27 July 1901.}

The public works railway embankment curved, forming a water dam which the employees and their locomotives depended on, for the years around the turn of the century were drought-stricken, and the white inhabitants of Port Kembla suffered constant water shortages.\footnote{For reports of water shortages at Port Kembla see \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 7 September 1901 and Public Works Department (PWD), Annual Report for 1901, 126. For the effects of the drought on New South Wales between 1897 and 1900 see T.A. Coghlan, \textit{Wealth and Progress of New South Wales, 1900–01}, 13th issue, Government of New South Wales, Sydney, 1902, 347.} Salty Creek was used by both coal companies, but the water here lived up to the creek's name. In February 1899 the manager of the Southern Coal Company, Walter Evans, noted before the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works that the water was 'scarcely fit for the purposes of household supply at present, although unfortunately, some people have to use it.'\footnote{Evidence of Walter Evans, 'Report together with Minutes of Evidence, Appendices and Plans relating to the Wollongong Water Supply', Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works in 	extit{NSWV&P}, vol.1, 1899, 46. (hereafter \textit{PSCPW, 1899}, Wollongong Water Supply.).}
was taken, Salty Creek had stopped flowing because of the drought and consisted of a series of stagnant pools which leached salt from the coastal soil.\textsuperscript{39} The Mt Lyell Cokeworks had constructed their own dam in 1899, but found it necessary to enlarge it in April 1901.\textsuperscript{40} The company had continuing problems with a lack of fresh water and often had to use salt water in their works, much to the detriment of their machinery.\textsuperscript{41}

Past the quarry was more low scrub leading to the grassy slopes of Red Point, bordered to the east by Perkin’s Beach and to the south-west by sand hills and the long Surf Beach that ran all the way to the entrance of Lake Illawarra. If our travellers ventured to this southern side of Port Kembla they would have encountered Kooris living at Red Point, an area which they knew as Nitoka.\textsuperscript{42} There were other Koori camp sites around Port Kembla. One camp was in ‘thick scrub’ on the southern banks of Salty Creek.\textsuperscript{43} Koori families like the Saddlers and the Timberrys lived in this area, supporting themselves mainly by fishing.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{39}\textit{Ibid.}, 46–47.
\textsuperscript{40}\textit{South Coast Times}, 20 April 1901.
\textsuperscript{42}The language and customs of the indigenous people were often favourite topics of European travellers and antiquarians. See, for example, the Frances McCaffery Papers, D92, WUA and Archibald Campbell Papers, Illawarra Historical Society Collection (IHSC). Both men wrote of Aboriginal customs, language and religion around the turn of the century. For the reference to Nitoka (sometimes spelt Nihorka) see Organ, \textit{op.cit.}, 454 and 486.
\textsuperscript{43}Interview with Albert Rieck, 5. Oral history interviews carried out by the author will be noted in this form. For details of each interview see the Bibliography. The page number refers to transcripts of the interviews. Only Rieck, who was 96 when interviewed in 1992, was old enough to remember the Koori camp at Salty Creek.
\textsuperscript{44}See Organ, \textit{op.cit.}, 336 and 342. William Saddler and Joseph Timbery applied for a fishing boat from the Government in 1876 which they received eventually in 1883, when they sailed it from Sydney to Port Kembla.
Another important place for Kooris was Tom Thumb's Lagoon. In 1972 Koori elder Jack Cummins unsuccesssfully sought compensation from the industries at Port Kembla for the loss of sacred land at Salty Creek and Tom Thumb's Lagoon claiming that 'the area of land served as a sacred tribal ground for the earliest Aboriginal tribes in the Illawarra region.' Likewise, Joan Wakeman, another Koori elder, was told by her mother of a large camp of Kooris near Tom Thumb's Lagoon.

One white resident, Thomas Rieck, in his memoirs written in the early 1940s, recalled that land in between the two jetties 'was covered with Black Huts, made from bark of the ti tree [sic].' This land was at the centre of the public works resumption, and in 1904 the PWD complained to the Aborigines' Protection Board (APB) about the presence of a number of half castes on the harbour works reserve at Port Kembla. The APB visited the area and found the inhabitants engaged in permanent employment, probably on the waterfront and as fisherpeople, and unwilling to leave the area. Other traditional camp sites were at Wonwongorong (named 'Red Point' by James Cook and after the First World War renamed 'Hill 60') and Coomaditchie, a freshwater lagoon to the south of the port.

Many of the places seen through the eyes of our white travellers had different meanings for Kooris. In 1969 a single grave was uncovered on the slopes of Wonwongorong. The body was buried facing west on its side according to local Koori custom, and was dated at approximately 80 years

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45 Jack Cummins quoted in the Daily Express, 28 June 1972.
48 Aborigines' Protection Board (APB), Report for 1904, 5.
49 Ibid.
old.50 Not only was Wonwongorong a burial site, it was also a dreaming place. Coomaditchie is still known today as a spiritual place, its name commonly evoked by elders to discipline Koori children. The area behind Coomaditchie, in 1900 steep sand hills covered with low scrub, contained another burial site and caves adorned with paintings.51

In 1900 our travellers would have seen Port Kembla as an undefined and scattered place. They would have searched in vain for a town centre and definite boundaries. Yet they wouldn't have been overly concerned with its future for the town was seen as being of marginal importance in the Illawarra region; evident by the location of the PWD office at Wollongong harbour, despite the big plans for Port Kembla. New South Wales statistician, T.A. Coghlan's list of harbours and ports of the state for 1900 excluded Port Kembla, although it listed Wollongong, Kiama, Ulladulla and Lake Illawarra, all smaller and less economically-important harbours.52 As Albert Rieck, who was born in one of the Mt Kembla Company houses in 1894, recalled of his childhood:

She was a pretty lonely place ... All the cattle straying around there kicking up of a night ... Yes she was wild then.53

50 Illawarra Mercury, 18 September 1969.
51 Interview with Carol Speechley, (University of Wollongong Aboriginal Education Unit Liaison Officer), 22 November 1991. From the early 1960s these sand hills have been mined by South Coast Equipment Company Pty Ltd. See Terry O'Toole, "Under The Thumb": Race, Class and the State in the Housing Problems of Urban Blacks in Wollongong', BA (Hons) thesis, University of Wollongong, 1982, 89.
52 Coghlan, op.cit., 8—11.
53 Interview with Albert Rieck, 7.
The 1920 Tour

According to the 1921 Census the Illawarra region had a population of 33,908. The geographical confines of the coast and the escarpment had largely determined the shape of settlement, and urban consolidation rather than new developments accounted for the population increase.\textsuperscript{54} Illawarra's north/south divide remained prominent. Dairying was still important in the south, though slowly declining with many people drifting from rural to urban areas. The Central Illawarra Municipality experienced modest population growth from 4664 in 1901 to 5472 in 1921, while the population of Shellharbour municipality, a rural area just south of Central Illawarra, actually declined from 1929 to 1512 during the same period. The north of the Illawarra grew faster. Population in the Bulli Shire for example had almost doubled since 1901 because of the expansion in coal mining, and the growth of Austinmer and Thirroul, largely the result of increasing numbers of Sydneysiders seeking a pleasant day at the beach. Wollongong's continued economic dominance in the region was highlighted by the location of the majority of professional and commercial occupations in that town. Despite Wollongong's dominance, the major industrial developments of the last twenty years were located mainly at Port Kembla.

In 1920, our travellers may have been Sydney day trippers—a group of middle-class women and men who had resisted the allure of the Guest houses to the north at Austinmer and Thirroul and journeyed by train from Sydney to Port Kembla. The line was completed in 1916 for general goods, and passenger services began in January 1920. From Wollongong the line to Port Kembla afforded many vantage points, and a glance south-east would have revealed Tom Thumb's Lagoon, still largely untouched by the industrial expansion that had occurred in the intervening years. Beyond the lagoon was

\textsuperscript{54}Cardew, op.cit., 89.
a section of farming land covered in low scrub. All this land would eventually be drained, filled in and sold to industry. Considerable reclamation work in the harbour area had already been carried out by the PWD using smaller stone from the quarries. The Government railway skirted Tom Thumb's Lagoon, Salty Creek and the future site of the Hoskins Iron and Steel Company Ltd Steelworks. In 1920 this site was a stand of eucalyptus trees, some thirty metres tall, frequented by timber cutters. Port Kembla was still surrounded by some beautiful forested areas. Among these eucalypts grew wild orchids, sarsparilla and elkhorns. Further south was the Government quarry, in its second location since 1900. The quarry was dug into the northern aspect of a hill that backed onto Port Kembla, where it remains today, fenced off with discarded and aged crushing equipment still visible.

Looking to the town from their train, the travellers would have seen that the area around the jetties was now more or less abandoned to industry and residential Port Kembla now occupied an undulating, hilly section behind the harbour. Much of the area had been cleared either by the farmers of the nineteenth century or by the copper smelting firm Electrolytic Refining and Smelting Company of Australia Ltd (ER&S), established in 1907, which used the trees on their property as furnace fuel. A few large gums remained, but they suffered from the onslaught of sulphur dioxide emitted from ER&S, and many were dead or dying.

55This was remnants of the open woodland that surrounded the Berkeley brush forest. See Mills, 'The Clearing of the Illawarra Rainforests', 237.
56T.G. Rieck, op.cit., 7.
57Mitchell, op.cit., 53—54.
58See Photograph 1; Photograph of Port Kembla, 1921, Tourist Bureau, Loc M7629, ML and Photograph of Port Kembla, Tourist Bureau, Loc M7630, ML.
ER&S was, as the Illawarra Mercury put it, 'practically a branch as it were of the wonderful Mt Morgan Company.'\footnote{Illawarra Mercury, 19 March 1907.} Mt Morgan, in partnership with the German firm, Aron Hirsch und Sohn, established ER&S to treat Australian copper- and gold-bearing ore in Australia rather than shipping it to the United States of America. Mt Morgan held two-thirds of the share capital of £150,000, while the rest was held by Aron Hirsch. The German company also signed long-term contracts with ER&S, and acted as ER&S's sole agent outside of Australia.\footnote{See Minutes of Directors' Meetings, ER&S Records, 15 February and 9 March 1907 and Peter Richardson, 'The Origins and Development of the Collins House Group, 1915—1951', Australian Economic History Review, vol.XXVII, no.1, March 1987,16. The group of uncatalogued records I have named 'ER&S Records' were consulted on site at ER&S, Port Kembla (now Southern Copper). They consisted of three principal records: ER&S Company of Australia Ltd, Engagement Book, 1908; ER&S Company of Australia Ltd, Share Transfer Register, 1907—1929 and ER&S Company of Australia Ltd, Minutes of Directors' Meetings, 15 February 1907 to 18 November 1918 and 17 March 1926 to 14 January 1929. These records have since been transferred to the Melbourne University Archives.} Mt Morgan supplied blister copper (that is 98.5 to 99.5 per cent pure copper) to Port Kembla from 1909 until its liquidation in 1927.\footnote{J.W. Long, The Early History of Mt Morgan, Dawson and Callide Valleys, [Mt Morgan?], 1962, 2. The company was refloated in 1929, but it was never again a major source of copper ore for ER&S.} Construction work began at ER&S in early 1908 and production started the following year.

Metal Manufacturers Ltd (MM) was the other major industry in Port Kembla by 1920. MM was incorporated in March 1916 and construction work began in early 1918.\footnote{Director's Report, Metal Manufactures, 21 June 1917 and Director's and Manager's Reports, Metal Manufactures, 8 July 1918, D21/11/1, WUA.} The company was an initiative of the large copper mines in the Commonwealth, Mt Morgan Gold Mining Company, the Mt Lyell Mining and Railway Company and their English partners, British Insulated and
Helsby Cables Ltd. As a subsidiary of Mt Morgan, ER&S was also a shareholding company, and MM used refined copper from ER&S to fashion rod and wire products.\textsuperscript{63} The Commonwealth Government, at the urging of Prime Minister William Morris Hughes, also played a crucial role in the formation of MM. Hughes believed that the works in war-time were of ‘national importance ... from a defence point of view.’\textsuperscript{64} The Government through the Post Master General’s office was also to be one of MM’s biggest customers. MM was some distance from the main part of the town, nevertheless the rattle and crash of industry, electric motors, steam engines, furnaces and rolling equipment, would have greeted the ear of residents and travellers—twenty-four hours a day when there were orders to fill.

The town was physically dominated by the buildings and chimneys of the major works, ER&S, MM and the Mt Lyell Cokeworks. The larger works, ER&S and MM, had three stacks each, although the ER&S stacks were far taller. Its largest towered 64 metres over the town and constantly emanated a wispish white smoke of dubious chemical content—a mix of sulphur dioxide, lead and acid gases.

Port Kembla railway station served as our traveller’s introduction to the town itself. Port Kembla had become more accessible and it was no longer the isolated locality of 1900. The growth of transport options, such as trains and motor omnibuses, had increased links with nearby towns. Waterside workers no longer had to ford lagoons or construct their own bridges to get to work. Roads had been constructed, although horses and carriages tore away at the

\textsuperscript{63} \textit{MM Gazette} (21st Anniversary Issue), Port Kembla, 1939, 7—8.

\textsuperscript{64} Memo from Secretary, Attorney-General’s Department to Secretary, Prime Minister’s Department, 13 December 1932 in ‘Metal Manufacturers [sic] Pty Ltd, Port Kembla, Manufacture of Telephone Cable’, Item No.1933/163, CRS A432, Attorney-General’s Department, Correspondence Files. See also Forster, \textit{Industrial Development in Australia, 1920—1930}, 123.
Photograph 1: Port Kembla takes shape. This photograph shows some of the shops and houses in Wentworth Street in 1910. The dead trees are the result of sulphur dioxide pollution from ER&S, whose stack can be seen to the far left.

Photograph 2: Port Kembla in 1914 photographed by G. Oyston. This photograph shows some of the new cottages in Wentworth and Horne Streets. The grazing horses and cattle are a telling reminder of Port Kembla's not-so-distant rural past.
Photograph 3: Four unidentified children pose outside of a Billiards Saloon in Military Road, circa 1914. Across the road the ER&S Workman’s Cottages stand in a neat row, while behind them a strong north-easterly wind whips up dust from ER&S.

Photograph 4: Small groups of men gather outside of Laughlin’s Barber Shop in Wentworth Street circa 1914. Down the road is the imposing structure of the then new Great Eastern Hotel.
dirt or base-metal surfaces. Motor cars had just made their appearance in the town too, although ownership was restricted to wealthy staff from the local industries and local doctors.

The station was surrounded by small industry, the South Coast Timber and Trading Company on the harbour side, and the Ulladulla Silica and Firebrick Company on the western side. Across the road were the ER&S company houses, twenty-four in Darcy Road and ten around the corner in Military Road. Their orderly placement in neat rows contrasted to the rest of the town which had developed unplanned, bar the whims of real estate agents and land surveyors. Covering the higher ground and the area around the main street, Wentworth Street, was a ramshackle collection of weatherboard houses and stores. Near the public school were houses constructed by ER&S and MM for senior staff and their families, located in a street tellingly named Private Lane. Locals had other names: 'Pommy Lane' in view of number of senior staff at the local works who were from England, or 'Rotten Row' an expression of class feeling from residents who found the pretension of Private Lane too much to bear.

The town's boundaries were defined by five subdivisions of the Wentworth estate and one Government subdivision, all made between 1909 and 1919. The older parts of Port Kembla—Military Road, Wentworth, Kembla, Allan, and O'Donnell Streets—were densely settled, while the fringes of the town, consisting of the most recent fifth subdivision (the Avenues, Bland and Horne Streets), formed a scattered, variously developed edge of town. Nevertheless, it would have been clear to our travellers where Port Kembla

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65 See Photograph of Port Kembla, Corner of Darcy and Military Roads. 1916, Small Pictures File, ML.

66 See Interview with Edith Neaves, 12; Transcript of Interview with Colin Warrington, (interviewed by Denise Preston, 1983?), Wollongong TAFE, 4 and Mitchell, op.cit., 107.

67 See Port Kembla Subdivision Plans, ML.
finished for there was a definite sense of the boundaries of the town and its separateness from other places. By 1921 the town's population had grown to 1622 people, living in 318 dwellings.\textsuperscript{68}

As Port Kembla gained a defined shape, living space for Kooris became more restricted. Gone were the scattered camps of 1900. In fact, our travellers may have missed the Kooris completely, for they were now located exclusively on the fringes of town. In 1920 Kooris lived on Hill 60 and near Coomaditchie Lagoon. In 1915 the APB estimated that there were 60 Kooris at Port Kembla including twenty-two men, thirteen women and twenty-five children.\textsuperscript{69} By 1920 the police census counted 39 Kooris at Port Kembla.\textsuperscript{70} This was possibly an underestimation, although the influenza pandemic of 1919 had severely affected the Koori population.\textsuperscript{71}

The water supply problems of 1900 had been alleviated, but still the Water Board did not supply all houses in Port Kembla. Houses in Wentworth Street and Military Road were connected, but the Board found it hard to keep pace with residential development. O'Donnell Street and Bass Street opened up by the third subdivision in 1916, were not connected until 1920.\textsuperscript{72}

Likewise, only 101 premises in the town had access to electric power. Approximately 50 per cent of these were ER&S staff houses, 25 per cent were workers from ER&S, and the remaining 25 per cent were local shopkeepers.

\textsuperscript{68}Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1921, vol.2, 71. 
\textsuperscript{69}APB, Report for 1915, Appendix B, 11. In 1916 the Aborigines' Protection Board was reorganised and placed under the administration of the Chief Secretary's Department. Annual Reports become less detailed or were sometimes not printed. 
\textsuperscript{70}Illawarra Mercury, 13 February 1925. The police census was regularly taken in February, a month when some Kooris were doing seasonal work on the far South Coast. 
\textsuperscript{71}Chapter Four discusses the veracity of different estimates of the Koori population in greater depth. 
\textsuperscript{72}See Illawarra Mercury, 22 January 1920 and 15 August 1920 and Port Kembla Subdivision Plans, ML.
and public buildings.\textsuperscript{73} Power was provided by a private company, the Port Kembla Investment and Amusement Company, which purchased electricity from the ER&S at 2½d. per consumer per week and sold it at 6d., a quick and simple profit.

There were few street lights in Port Kembla. ER&S provided seven street lights by verbal agreement with the Council for £48 per year, but these were located near ER&S's own houses, and at the entrance to the works. There would have been some light emanating from the business premises of Port Kembla, but in surrounding streets darkness prevailed.\textsuperscript{74}

Years of unplanned growth and ineffectual Councils ensured that the public face of Port Kembla was not pleasant. Conditions at the two Hotels in Port Kembla, the Great Eastern and the Port Kembla Hotel, were typical of these public health problems. Should the men among our travellers have acquired a thirst, they would have found the bar of the Great Eastern Hotel, in the words of the Licensing Sub-Inspector, Sergeant Noble, 'filthy' or, according to a newspaper man from Bega, Walter Smith, 'rather a rough shop.'\textsuperscript{75} Both the Great Eastern and the Port Kembla Hotel discharged effluent on a block of land in Military Road, opposite Allan Street. A Board of Health Inspector reported in 1919:

\begin{quote}
The surface of the [affected] ground of about 100ft by 30ft was saturated with the effluent. It was
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{73}Report together with minutes of evidence, appendices and plans relating to the proposed Transmission line for the supply of electric current from Port Kembla power station to Bowral, Mittagong and Moss Vale, with a branch line to Picton', Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works in \textit{NSWPP}, 1927, vol.3, 905 (hereafter \textit{PSCPW}, 1927, Transmission line from Port Kembla).

\textsuperscript{74}In contrast Wollongong had gas lighting since 1880. See Wollongong Gaslight Co. Ltd, Deposit Number 41, Noel Butlin Archives, Canberra.

\textsuperscript{75}\textit{South Coast Times}, 28 January 1916.
discoloured, slimy and smelt offensive, and as the ground was water logged, the offensive matter flowed into the street water table.\textsuperscript{76}

The hotels were busiest every fortnight on 'pay Thursday' and after work on Saturdays when men would gather before the day's cricket or football match. The hotels represented a male space and all of the customers and those boarding in the hotels were men.

Meanwhile our women travellers, effectively barred from the hotels, may have noticed that the shops were, by contrast, spaces frequented by women, as both customers in the daily task of shopping, and as workers in the family-run stores of the town. The commercial centre of Port Kembla was a busy area and very much the focus of local life. At the northern end of Wentworth Street, J.G. Fairley's (and their slogan the 'Universal Providers'), announced the beginning of commercial Port Kembla. There were two distinct shopping areas, one extending south from Fairley's to the Great Eastern Hotel, and the other at the southern end of Wentworth Street, where the road rose up an incline. In between was a Post Office (further south than its current position at the corner of Jubilee and Wentworth Streets), the Bank of New South Wales, and a few vacant lots with cows and horses staring through rickety fences. A small 'green' at the corner of Allan and Wentworth Streets (the present site of the Westpac bank) was the venue for Sunday afternoon recitals by the town band.\textsuperscript{77} Some shops showed a surprising degree of diversity in the services they provided. Upon entering A. Hymes & Co our travellers could have bought

\textsuperscript{76} Report of Inspector Wenholm to Chief Inspector, 'Septic tanks at Port Kembla and Great Eastern Hotels, Port Kembla', 19 August 1919 in Board of Health: Health Inspection Branch, Sanitary Inspection Files, 'Central Illawarra and Port Kembla', 1918—1930, 8/1359, NSWSA.

\textsuperscript{77} Illawarra Mercury, 25 June 1920.
a house, land, insurance or used furniture.\textsuperscript{78} Mrs Sarah Middleton's newsagency sold newspapers, drapery, clothing, fancy goods and stationery. She counted confectionery and soft drinks as 'a speciality' and also ran a lending library.\textsuperscript{79}

Port Kembla in 1920 was more spatially defined than 1900. The town had gained a shape and a centre and possessed distinct boundaries. Its isolation had decreased as roads and railways opened up access to the surrounding towns of Wollongong, Dapto and Unanderra. The town also began to display some of the drawbacks of unplanned urban growth and industrialisation. Port Kembla was still located in a beautiful natural setting, but this environment was increasingly under assault by industrial and urban change. The travellers in 1940 were to find few remnants of Port Kembla's natural heritage.

The 1940 Tour

Illawarra's population had increased to 50,000 by 1940, with considerable growth in the Municipalities of Wollongong and the Northern Illawarra.\textsuperscript{80} Although Wollongong and northern towns like Bulli and Thirroul experienced some industrial growth, industrialisation was still centred on Port Kembla. The size and scale of the Port Kembla's industries, however, had wideranging regional affects. The whole region had undergone considerable centralisation and integration. The links between the Illawarra region and Port

\textsuperscript{78}See \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 21 May 1920 for their advertisement. In September that year the business was taken over by ER&S accountant H.R. Lee and it became the Port Kembla General Agency.

\textsuperscript{79}See \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 27 April 1920 for an advertisement. In the 1920s lending libraries were commonly situated in newsagencies.

\textsuperscript{80}In the Wollongong Municipality the population rose from 6708 in 1921 to 18,116 in 1947. In the Northern Illawarra the population grew from 6088 in 1921 to 11,810 in 1947. See \textit{Census of the Commonwealth of Australia}, 1921, vol.2, 4—9 and 1947, vol. 1, 26—27.
Kembla were strengthened and the boundaries between the locality and the surrounding region were becoming blurred.

In 1940 our travellers would have motored along the Port Kembla/Wollongong road and negotiated its unsealed surface, the unmarked train crossings and, in peak times, scores of men on bicycles riding to work from their Wollongong homes. As in 1920 industry dominated the town, its factories and buildings surrounding it to the north and east. Industry's influence wasn't restricted to visual pollution. In 1920 Port Kembla's major pollution problems had been caused by an amalgam of industrial, commercial and residential pollution. By 1940 industry was the centre of the problem. Our travellers could not have failed to be overcome by dust or fumes or acrid smells in their tour of the major works at Port Kembla.

Considerable industrial development had occurred in the intervening twenty years. Australian Fertilizers had opened in June 1921, producing superphosphate for the State's wheat farmers. In the process of roasting the ore, sulphuric acid and various fluxes were produced which ER&S utilised in their refinement processes. ER&S were joint shareholders in the company, and as with MM, maintained close links with its staff and operations. During the early 1940s Australian Fertilizers emitted alarming levels of hydrogen fluoride due to the high fluoride levels in the phosphate ore. The plant was also a major contributor to dust pollution at Port Kembla.

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81 The road was called the Wollongong Road up to Tom Thumb's Bridge and the Port Kembla Road from there to Port Kembla, so it was often referred to as the Wollongong/Port Kembla Road. For a report on the conditions of the road see Illawarra Mercury, 6 April 1939.
82 Fluxes are materials used to remove undesirable substances like sand, ash or dirt from molten mixtures.
The most important addition to Port Kembla's industrial landscape was Hoskins Iron and Steel Company Ltd. The Hoskins family entered the iron and steel industry in early 1908 when they purchased William Sandford's works at Lithgow.\textsuperscript{84} Always conscious of the drawbacks of Lithgow, they had planned to move to Port Kembla since at least 1916, when they purchased a coal mine and coke ovens at Wongawilli near Dapto. In 1920 they purchased 154 hectares of land from the Wentworth estate.\textsuperscript{85} This land was situated to the north-west of Port Kembla almost half-way to Wollongong, a location which marked a break with previous industrial expansion which had closely hugged the town. After prolonged negotiations with the State Government, the Hoskins Iron and Steel Company Ltd began construction work on their new Steelworks in January 1927 and the blast furnace was commissioned in August 1928. The expansion to Port Kembla required considerable capital and Hoskins had been seeking partners for the formation of a new company since 1924. The result was the formation in May 1928 of a new company, Australian Iron and Steel Pty Ltd (AI&S), with Hoskins in partnership with three British companies: the steelmakers Baldwins, the engineering firm Dorman and Long and the shipping company Howard Smith.

A drop in steel prices and demand at the onset of the depression financially weakened AI&S throughout the early 1930s. Recent research has suggested that AI&S intended to keep both plants at Port Kembla and Lithgow


\textsuperscript{85}Minutes of Directors' Meeting, 1 October 1920, Hoskins Iron & Steel Pty Ltd, Minute Book Number 1, 1920—1925 in Hoskins Family Papers, MSS 4361, Box 7, ML. The name change from G. & C. Hoskins Ltd to Hoskins Iron and Steel Company Ltd occurred in 1920 when the two brothers George and Charles Hoskins split their partnership, with George concentrating on the Sydney pipe-making business and Charles on the steel industry. Naim and Serle, \textit{op.cit.}, 372.
open—contrary to the common interpretation that Hoskins had decided to abandon Lithgow—and that only pressure from the Company's bankers, Commercial Banking Corporation, forced the closure of Lithgow.\footnote{See Firth, \textit{op.cit.}, 326—27 and unpublished research by Greg Patmore, Department of Industrial Relations, University of Sydney. This interpretation is supported by Charles Hoskins in evidence given by him to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works in 1923. See Evidence of Charles Henry Hoskins, 'Report together with minutes of evidence on the proposed railway from Moss Vale to Port Kembla', Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works in NSWPP, vol. 3, 1923, 14—16. (hereafter \textit{PSCPW, 1923}, Railway from Moss Vale to Port Kembla). For the argument that Hoskins wished to abandon Lithgow see Helen Hughes, \textit{The Australian Iron and Steel Industry, 1848—1962}, 107—108 and Forster, \textit{Industrial Development in Australia, 1920—1930}, 139—140. This interpretation is mainly based on the recollections of Cecil Harold Hoskins, son of Charles Henry Hoskins and general manager of AI&S from 1928 to 1950. See Hoskins, \textit{op.cit.}, 89.} Whatever AI&S's intentions for Lithgow, the depression starved the company of capital to invest in new machinery at Port Kembla, and severely disrupted the proper establishment of the new works. Consequently, pig iron produced at Port Kembla had to be railed to Lithgow for rolling, until final closure of the Lithgow works in late 1931. Financially weakened by the depression, AI&S still recorded profits, but was in no situation to defend itself against the Broken Hill Proprietary Limited (BHP) takeover in 1935.\footnote{For details of the merger see Firth, \textit{op.cit.}, 332—357. Firth's account of the merger is a valuable analysis of the responses of industrial capitalism to an economic crisis, and a useful corrective to the less analytical explanations which focus on the 'inevitability' of BHP assuming control.}

By 1940 AI&S had established two blast furnaces, an open hearth furnace, a cokeworks and processing mills.\footnote{Secondary Industry in the Illawarra Region' [1955], \textit{Illawarra Regional Development Committee, Correspondence and Reports, 1945—1962}, B1/2/1, WUA.} Other industries such as John Lysaghts (Australia) Pty Ltd, Commonwealth Oil Refineries Ltd (COR) and Commonwealth Rolling Mills Pty Ltd (CRM) were established by 1940, all subsidiaries of, or joint ventures with BHP. With the economic power of BHP...
behind it, Al&S could dominate industrial development at Port Kembla. A
turning point was the sale of large amounts of crown land to BHP in 1936.
Control of this land meant that Al&S was a major influence on which
companies were established at Port Kembla.\footnote{Firth, \textit{op.
\textit{cit.}}, 178. John Lysaghts produced rolled sheets and galvanised iron and opened in
1937. COR, which also began production in 1937, was a petrol blending facility which utilised
by-products from the BHP coke ovens. CRM officially opened in 1939 and was a division of
Lysaghts and an American company American Rolling Mill Company (Australia) Pty Ltd. The
company manufactured finished sheet iron for cars, white goods and steel furniture. See
'Secondary Industry in the Illawarra Region' [1955], \textit{Illawarra Regional Development
Committee, Correspondence and Reports, 1945—1962}, B1/2/1, WUA.}

In 1940 war-time demand meant that Al&S and ER&S were setting
record levels of production, and consequently polluting more than ever.
Steelmaking at Al&S produced particles of iron, nickel and manganese as
waste. The cokeovens gave off acid gases and sulphur dioxide. ER&S was
estimated to be emitting twenty-seven tons of sulphur dioxide a day in the
early 1950s. A bag house was installed in 1946, but before then the sulphur
dioxide plume contained dangerous amounts of lead and arsenic
compounds.\footnote{Ann R.M. Young, 'Problems in the Urban Environment: Pollution in the
Wollongong-Shellharbour area', \textit{Wollongong Studies in Geography}, no.15, Department of
Geography, University of Wollongong, 1984 and Sullivan, \textit{op.
\textit{cit.}}, 47.}

We can only speculate how these pollutants affected the quality of life at
Port Kembla. Respiratory ailments were common and those with asthma and
sensitive skin suffered.\footnote{A. Bell, \textit{Air Pollution from Metallurgical Industry: The
Effects on the Health of Residents of East Port Kembla}, Division of Occupational Health, New South Wales Department of Health,
1961. Bell tested 471 residents from Port Kembla and found 6.7 per cent had chronic bronchitis
of a mild type caused by the presence of sulphur dioxide. Twice the number of people who had
identifiable health problems 'believed' they suffered in some way.} My grandfather, Hugh Halcrow, worked at ER&S in
the Blue stone mill in the late 1930s. Despite wearing thick flannel shirts, the
potent mix of sweat and bluestone gave him irritating red rashes. The smell of sulphur dioxide sent those with vegetable gardens out watering so that their plants were not burnt.\textsuperscript{92} Houses had to be regularly painted and clean washing was often soiled. Lead pollution can delay the intellectual and physical development of children, and it is a disturbing fact that a major source of this pollutant at Port Kembla, the ER&S stack, was a stone’s throw from Port Kembla Primary School. Measurements of pollutants are unavailable for 1940, but they were no doubt very high. Ann R.M. Young claimed that ‘prior to 1979 lead levels [at Port Kembla] were not markedly different from those in the CBD [central business district] of Sydney.’\textsuperscript{93} More generally, in 1960 ten grams of suspended matter per square metre per month was blanketing the Port Kembla and Wollongong area.\textsuperscript{94}

The lakes and waterways too were suffering from industrial pollution. From 1937 CRM discharged pollutants into Salty Creek and Tom Thumb’s Lagoon. Walter Bailey, a timber cutter and later waterside worker remembers vividly the effects of CRM on Tom Thumb’s Lagoon:

When CRM started that seemed to be the start of it.
When we began to see fish, cungi and crabs dying.
We were told that this was the sulphuric or pickle acid. This acid also killed all the fish in the little creek behind CRM.\textsuperscript{95}

\textsuperscript{92}Interview with Heather Eklund, 5.
\textsuperscript{93}Young, \textit{op.cit.}, 2.
\textsuperscript{94}\textit{Atlas of New South Wales}, Central Mapping Authority, Department of Lands, New South Wales, 1987, 114.
\textsuperscript{95}William Bailey, (Interviewed by Glenn Mitchell, 14 October 1976), WPL. See also \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 3 March 1939
CRM also discharged into the harbour. Frank Gamble fished off the eastern breakwater throughout the 1930s:

We could catch as many [fish] as we wanted. Then CRM would discharge their acid into the harbour. You could see it coming across to where you were fishing. It didn't do much to increase the catch.\(^{96}\)

What our travellers found by way of pollution depended on the weather the day of their visit and their exact location in Port Kembla. Waterside workers, steelworkers and those who lived in Wollongong Road and O'Neil Street were subjected to dust pollution from coal loading and emissions from AI&S.\(^{97}\) The dust was worse the stronger the wind, especially during winter southerlys. At the southern end of the town, ER&S workers and residents in nearby Military Road, Wentworth Street and the Avenues were affected by north-easterly winds, most common in summer. Recent monitoring of lead levels has shown the area adjacent to the ER&S stack (including the Port Kembla Primary School) had consistently higher readings than Warrawong, only two kilometres away, so most of the pollutants dropped quickly in the vicinity of the stack.\(^{98}\) Whatever the influence of the weather, pollution was a significant factor in the lives of all people at Port Kembla.

\(^{96}\)Frank Gamble in Davis, *op.cit.*, 13.

\(^{97}\)Young notes that AI&S emissions tended to drop relatively quickly, hence their confined effect. Young, *op.cit.*, 2.

\(^{98}\)This stack was replaced in the early 1960s by the highest stack in the southern hemisphere. The Company believed that desperate action was needed to stave off constant criticism about levels of pollutants. See Mitchell, *op.cit.*, Chapter 4. For the effects of prevailing winds on pollution levels at Port Kembla see P.T. Crisp, O.W. Archibold and E.A. Crisp, 'The use of wind direction data to predict pollution dispersal around the Port Kembla industrial area, New South Wales', *Australian Geographical Studies*, vol.22, no.2, October 1984, 243—260.
With a population of about 5000, our travellers would have found residential Port Kembla possessed, what Vance Palmer called the characteristic 'fugitive look' of Australian settlements.\textsuperscript{99} A Council Report from 1943 stated that there were 380 'sub-normal' homes in the Shire, 250 of which were shacks and tents.\textsuperscript{100} Most noticeable of these 'sub normal' homes was the Temporary Settlement in Wattle Street, Warrawong, a suburb two kilometres away from Port Kembla. Housing had became a major issue in State politics by the end of 1930s.\textsuperscript{101} The construction of a 'Temporary Settlement' in 1938 resulted from considerable political pressure and a recognition of the severity of the housing problem at Port Kembla. The Department of Works and Local Government spent £24,000 building 150 four, three and one room houses. The 'Single Men's Quarters' were 1.5 metres by 1.8 metres with weatherboard and canvas walls. The internal walls stopped short of the ceiling and there was no space for food storage.\textsuperscript{102} The single men refused to move in (staying in their camps at Flinders Street) until

\textsuperscript{99}Vance Palmer, 'Battle' Meanjin Papers, no.8, 1942, 5—6. The population figure is from South Coast Times, 12 January 1940.

\textsuperscript{100}Shire of Central Illawarra, Housing Report, 1943, C3/1, WPL. In 1934 the Central Illawarra Municipality became a Shire with its boundaries unchanged.

\textsuperscript{101}The establishment of the Housing Improvement Board and the construction of public housing at Erskineville attracted considerable public and press attention. Housing conditions at Port Kembla came under scrutiny by metropolitan newspapers. The Sydney Morning Herald (25 November 1937, 12 and 17 January 1938, 8) and the Daily Telegraph (31 October 1937, 19 and 11 November 1937, 11) published exposes on Flinders Street at Port Kembla, and this public attention, together with pressure from the Council and local politicians, forced the State Government to act.

\textsuperscript{102}Shire Clerk's Report, 24 April 1939 in CIC Minutes, C1/14, WPL. Later the gap to the ceiling was covered with chicken wire.
changes were made and the whole settlement earned the bitter unofficial title 'Spoonerville', named after the Minister in charge, E.S. Spooner.\textsuperscript{103}

There were other camps besides Spoonerville around the fringes of town. The 'Official Camp' (as it was named in 1932) for the unemployed near Coomaditchie Lagoon consisted of huts and shacks controlled by the Council. A stand pipe serviced the area with water and there were 'conveniences' with bag and linen walls which were emptied by the sanitary service. A Mr Khan, who had previously tried to set up shop in Flinders Street, operated a store at the camp. The camp was good enough for people to live in, but not good enough for shops according to the Council's Health Inspector. His comments reveal something about the camp's environment:

The shop was found to be conducted with all due regard to cleanliness. The surrounding environment, however, is one in which food for human consumption should not be permitted to be stored or offered for sale.\textsuperscript{104}

Bessie Lockwood came from Cessnock in 1937 and lived in a tent in the camp:

\textsuperscript{103}Spooner was Minister for Local Government and Secretary for Public Works from 1935 to 1939 in the United Australia Party/Country Party State Government led by Premier B.S. Bavin. He was elected the State Member for Ryde in 1932 and was the United Australia Party's deputy leader in parliament. He resigned from the Ministry in 1939 and moved to Federal politics, becoming Minister Responsible for War Organisation in the Federal Government under Prime Minister R.G. Menzies from 1939 to 1941. See John Ritchie (ed) Australian Dictionary of National Biography, 1891—1939, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1990, 37—38.

\textsuperscript{104}Health Inspector's Report, 27 February 1940 in CIC Minutes, C1/14, WPL.
You had to carry your water around in a kerosene tin. You cooked outside on an open grate. You boiled your clothes in a kerosene tin. We had a tent that was very holed and very thin. You could see the stars at night, and the rain came in.¹⁰⁵

An inspection of the more settled residential parts of Port Kembla wouldn't have necessarily provided a respite for our travellers. They may have also stumbled across the filthy drains in Foster Street, or the 'offensive street water tables' in Cowper Street and Fifth Avenue caused by the 'flat clayey nature of these localities.'¹⁰⁶ These problems were caused by a lack of kerbing and guttering and inadequate drainage, though Council had made some progress in cleaning up the public space of Port Kembla. The older more populated areas like Wentworth Street, Military Road, Allan and Church Streets were all kerbed and guttered by 1940, rest rooms were built in Allan Street in 1939, and nearly five hectares of parkland were dedicated in Robertson Street in the same year.¹⁰⁷ The most impressive addition to the services of Port Kembla was the Olympic Pool, opened in 1938. It proved very popular with locals, with 6519 people attending in the first two weeks of January 1940. A night time Carnival on a Sunday in January attracted 506 people.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵Bessie Lockwood in Davis, _op.cit._, 97.
¹⁰⁶For details see Health Inspector's Report, 27 February 1939 and 18 November 1940 in CIC Minutes, C1/14, WPL. A drain running from Fourth to Fifth Avenue was believed to be the source of several cases of infectious diseases throughout the 1930s. See _Illawarra Mercury_, 4 August 1933.
¹⁰⁷Shire President's Report for 1939 (Douglas McAuliffe) in CIC Minutes, C1/14, WPL.
¹⁰⁸Bath Manager's Report, 30 January 1940 in CIC Minutes, C1/14, WPL.
Our travellers would have found the commercial heart of Port Kembla, Wentworth Street, a busy and vibrant area. *Wise’s Commercial Directory* listed twenty-six stores in Port Kembla that sold foodstuffs including bakers, butchers, grocers, smallgoods, fruit markets and milk bars. In addition there were numerous professional services such as dentists, doctors (in Fitzwilliam Street, just off Wentworth Street), solicitors and estate agents. Clothing retail and repair was the next most common store which included tailors, dressmakers, boot repairers and a shoe store.\textsuperscript{109} They would have also seen that the storekeepers lived where they worked. Residences were often built above or behind shops.\textsuperscript{110} Of the 110 storekeepers in Port Kembla in 1940, 34 lived in Wentworth Street.\textsuperscript{111}

This concentration of people and businesses meant that it was a crowded and busy place, and such conditions caused some sanitary problems. Behind the clean shop fronts and scrubbed counters, the rear of many shops contained open drains, rubbish bins and jerry-built sheds.\textsuperscript{112} One property owned by Mr Taylor and leased to Mr H. Brown was found ‘to be improperly drained and in a state of disrepair.’\textsuperscript{113} Brown kept four horses in a small yard which was ‘covered with a coating of horse manure and offensive odours were causing a nuisance.’\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{109} *Wise’s Commercial Directory*, 1940, ML.
\textsuperscript{110} For example Rees’ Bakery (Interview with Bob Rees, 2) and Philpot’s General Store (Transcript of Interview with John Philpot, (Interviewed by Denise Preston, 1983?). Wollongong TAFE, 5.)
\textsuperscript{111} Calculated from the Joint Commonwealth/State Electoral Roll, State Electorate of Illawarra, 1940, ML.
\textsuperscript{112} Electrical Engineer’s Special Report, 20 May 1940 in CIC Minutes, C1/15, WPL. See also Health Inspectors Report, (27 March 1939 in CIC Minutes, C1/15, WPL) which notes that ‘drastic measures’ were necessary to ‘clean up and remove dilapidated sheds etc’ in Wentworth Street.
\textsuperscript{113} Health Inspectors Report, 22 May 1939 in CIC Minutes, C1/15, WPL.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
By 1940 the areas of Port Kembla that were considered desirable had changed. New land on the hill overlooking the port was subdivided from the mid-1930s. Bland, Robertson and Donaldson Street experienced an influx of staff and senior management from the local industries. These new areas of affluence joined the older ER&S and MM housing around Private Lane. This spatial rearrangement of areas of privilege would eventually culminate in the staff moving out of Port Kembla altogether to the affluent suburbs of Mt Keira, Mangerton and West Wollongong after the Second World War.

Coomaditchie and Hill 60 continued to be the main areas of Koori occupation. Eleven Koori families lived at the 'Official Camp' near Coomaditchie. The Koori section was to the west of Coomaditchie Lagoon and was known as Frogs Hollow. Places like Coomaditchie were not under direct control of the Aborigines' Protection Board, but were monitored by police, who 'visit[ed] and report[ed] upon them regularly.' Hill 60 offered some protection from white contact, being further from the town and in an area whites generally avoided. The Council Health Inspector visited in March 1939 and reported that there were no sanitary problems. In late 1939 Hill 60 was taken over by the Department of Defence and Kooris were forced to

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115 Interview with Ethel Combes, 11 and Interview with Ces Catterel, 10. Both mention Bland Street as the 'best address' in Port Kembla.
116 O'Toole, op. cit., 87.
117 'Frogs Hollow' was a name commonly given to Aboriginal camps on the fringes of towns during the depression. There was a 'Frogs Hollow' at La Perouse (See La Perouse the people, the place and the sea: A collection of writings by the Aboriginal Community, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1988, 7) and at Narranderra (See Peter Read, A Hundred Years War: The Wiradjuri People and the State, Australian National University Press, Sydney, 1988, 71).
119 William Bailey, (Interviewed by Glenn Mitchell, 14 October 1976 ), WPL. See also O'Toole, op. cit., 91.
120 Health Inspector's Report 13 March 1939 in CIC Minutes, C1/14, WPL.
move, some going to Coomaditchie, others to Nowra and Jervis Bay and a few to La Perouse.

War had not left Port Kembla untouched. Almost 200 militia men had moved into huts between the beach and MM, and had fortified this area with barbed wire, trenches and two Six Inch guns.\footnote{Letter from J.P. Caddy (assistant manager, MM) to Colin Fraser (chairman of the Board of Directors, MM), 6 September 1939 in 'MM Pty Ltd', BHAS Collection, 1/165, Melbourne University Archives (MUA).} Construction work to fortify Hill 60 proceeded throughout 1940 after the Kooris were removed. One of our travellers might have ventured to the Whiteway theatre in Wentworth Street to attend a 'Win the War' rally. On stage could be seen a number of respectably-dressed gentlemen and two in military uniform. The gentlemen were Councillors from the Central Illawarra Shire Council, Robert Shipp, Jack Mathews, G.N. Lewis and Shire President, L. Maynes, E.F. Blake, president of the Returned Soldiers League, Captain Hallet, Area officer of the National Emergency Service, Sidney Hoskins from AI&S and J.P. Caddy from MM. At the podium M.F. Bruxner, Deputy Premier and Minister for Transport, told a crowd of 200:

Dark stormy days are ahead of us but with that great courage that we always display I feel sure we will come out on the right side ... The British people had their heads in the scrum to use a football phrase. But they would get the ball and carry it on to victory.\footnote{\textit{South Coast Times}, 28 June 1940.}

These rallies ended in patriotic singing and sometimes with men pledging to join up. Afterwards the official party adjourned to 'The Black Cat', Port
Kembla's popular new milk bar, for supper. The people of Port Kembla had responded to the patriotic call and in the first year of war had contributed £20,000 to comfort funds, war bonds and Red Cross collections.123

For the white inhabitants the future of Port Kembla in 1900 seemed promising. The State Government was to spend £200,000 on the new harbour, the Cokeworks was expanding, and a new school was being sought. It was a year of optimism as people looked to a possible iron works and predicted a population centre of tens of thousands. But the town was barely established. It was so marginal as to be wrongly placed on maps and not mentioned in T.A. Coghan's tome on New South Wales. For Kooris 1900 had different meanings. As Port Kembla grew they were slowly, yet inexorably, forced out of their traditional camp sites and foraging areas. The process of industrialisation which effectively began in earnest that year sped up the forces that were separating Kooris from their land and cutting off their access to abundant food supplies in the area. Eventually industrialisation destroyed the environment that supported that natural fecundity.

Port Kembla in 1920 was more accessible and spatially more defined than in 1900. The town was also more self-consciously an industrial one, with a fading rural past. A view of Port Kembla was no longer a selling point for the homes of the Wollongong middle class. The dominance of the factories, the sulphur dioxide emissions from ER&S and intensive land clearing had established the town's 'industrial' image, yet this image was moderated by surrounding lagoons and beaches and there were still ample reminders of its dairying background.

By 1940 Port Kembla had assumed a wider significance as the State's second steelworks and third largest port. BHP, the largest company in Australia, dominated the town like ER&S had done in an earlier period. Port

123 Illawarra Mercury, 26 July 1940.
Kembla had become the epitome of a town created by industrial capitalism, but in many ways its distinctiveness and its boundaries had been obscured by the scale of the new industries. Industrialisation not only changed the physical appearance of Port Kembla, it also had major effects on its social structure, and that is the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter 2: Industry, commerce and the formal economy

In 1900 George Neaves, a dairy farmer at Port Kembla, worked a small nine-hectare farm with his family, and occasionally supplemented the household's income by working for one of his better-off neighbours. In 1940 Morgan Simon had been married one year and earnt a weekly wage at Metal Manufactures Ltd (MM) as a leading hand. He had no other income, nor did his wife do any paid work.¹ Industrialisation, which transformed the rural economy that George Neaves worked in and dominated the industrial economy in which Morgan Simon laboured, had two decisive effects on society at Port Kembla. The first was the creation of a formal economy based on industrial waged work, and the division of the labour market into three classes: working class, petite bourgeois and middle class. New industrial workplaces, where working conditions were poor and industrial conflict common, became key sites for the development of class identity and class politics at Port Kembla. The second effect of industrialisation was to facilitate town growth and help establish a town-centred labour market by the 1920s, important foundations for local identity and the politics of locality. In the 1930s the scale of industrial development overwhelmed this local labour market and led to a more regionalised formal economy, a change which ultimately heralded a political shift of emphasis from locality to region. These two contradictory effects of industrialisation form the key themes in the following narrative.

Labour historians have often relied on Census figures to outline the shape of the class structure, however, since there are no figures available which cover

¹See Interview with Edith Neaves [granddaughter of George Neaves] and Interview with Morgan Simon.
Port Kembla exclusively, this approach is not suitable in this case. One way around this problem is to utilise the occupational data from electoral rolls. While, as I have already noted, occupation is only one measure of class, by collating this information from selected electoral rolls from 1900 to 1940 the economic dimensions of Port Kembla class structure can be outlined.

First, however, the implications of relying on electoral rolls for estimations of Port Kembla's paid workforce needs to be considered. Over the forty years from 1900 to 1940 only 3 to 4 percent of all enrolled women recorded occupations on the electoral rolls other than 'domestic duties'. But this figure needs to be approached with caution. Here, as elsewhere, evidence beyond the gaze of state officials and census takers suggests that some women were active in the formal economy, but still registered their occupations as 'domestic duties'. For example, Alexander Pascoe, a blacksmith at the Public Works Department (PWD) quarry, noted before the Licensing Court in 1914 that, 'his wife kept a boarding house at Port Kembla and has done for about 11 years.' At that time she housed twenty-five boarders who paid 18s. each a week, yet her occupation is recorded on the 1912 Electoral Roll as 'domestic duties'. Similarly, Maria Petersen, who ran a maternity hospital in Wentworth Street during the 1920s, appears on the 1924 Roll with her occupation listed as 'domestic duties'.

Itinerant male workers were also overlooked by official records. Their constant movement in and out of the town often disqualified them because of the

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2 Illawarra Mercury, 1 May 1914.
3 For Mrs Pascoe's occupation see the State Electoral Roll for Allowrie (Wollongong Division), 1912, ML. Maria Petersen first appears in Health Department records in 1919. See Register of Licensed Private Hospitals, 1910—1928, 5/5857—5863, NSWSA. To officially register as a Private Hospital she needed some formal qualifications. The Private Hospitals Act of 1908 was targeted at women who ran maternity hospitals and lacked such qualifications. The Act came from a recommendation of the Royal Commission into the Decline of the Birth Rate in 1903 and represented an attempt to control the activities of midwives and further regulate women's reproduction. See Judith Allen, Sex and Secrets: Crimes Involving Australian Women since 1880, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1990, 72.
six-month residential clause for voter enrolment. Similarly, paid workers under twenty-one were excluded from this picture of the formal economy given by the electoral rolls. These drawbacks will be addressed by utilising other types of evidence and outlining an 'informal economy' where much of the productive activity of women and children was located—a task left for the next chapter.

While it is clear that the electoral rolls underestimate women and children's participation in the formal economy, industrialising Port Kembla offered few jobs to these workers, in what was an overwhelmingly male-dominated formal economy.

The beginnings of industrialisation at Port Kembla

Industrialisation in Australia was partly financed by the rich lead, copper and zinc mines at Broken Hill, Mount Isa, Mt Lyell and Mt Morgan, and some of the companies that worked these mines directed investment towards Port Kembla from the turn of the century. The Mt Lyell Mining and Railway Company and the Mt Morgan Gold and Copper Mining Company were major investors at Port Kembla until the late 1920s. They were attracted by plans for a Government-built harbour at Port Kembla, the established coal industry in the area, and the proximity to the Sydney market. Smaller mining companies of the Illawarra, the Mt Kembla Coal and Oil Company and the Southern Coal Company, also invested in Port Kembla, mainly through the construction of railways and jetties. The successful passage of the Port Kembla Harbour Act through the New South Wales Legislative Council in

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4 See the New South Wales Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Act, no.61, 1900 for details of the residential clause.

5 This qualified endorsement of electoral rolls as a useful primary source is similar to Alford's approach to the late nineteenth-century colonial census. She argues that the census accurately recorded some women's occupations (such as domestic servants) and was less accurate for others (such as those women who worked on the gold fields). See Katrina Alford, 'Colonial Women's Employment as seen by Nineteenth-Century Statisticians and Twentieth-Century Economic Historians', Labour History, no.51, November 1986, 1—10.
December 1898 focused attention on Port Kembla as a potential industrial site, and guaranteed the expenditure of over £200,000 of public money; a victory secured, as has been noted, by the influence of the southern coal owners and managers, and their parliamentary allies.⁶

The State Government was the major player in Port Kembla’s early development, and its activities initiated the economic transformation of Port Kembla by attracting private investment to the port and new types of industrial workers and managers. The character of this growing industrial area was initially fluid and indistinct, as men moved in and out of Port Kembla according to the fluctuating demand for labour. Consequently, the labour market that developed from 1900 to 1907 was everchanging and open to outside influence, particularly from the surrounding towns of the Illawarra region.

Starting in 1900, the PWD opened a quarry, built a railway between the quarry and the site of the eastern breakwater and began reclamation work on swampy land around the harbour. The quarry was exhausted by 1906, and a new site was developed at Reid’s Hill, which was used until 1928. Another quarry at Gillian’s Hill, two kilometres west of Port Kembla, was then opened. Work on the eastern breakwater continued intermittently until 1937. Storm damage and settling of some of the stone meant that maintenance was a continuous process.⁷

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⁶See Evidence of Charles Brynes (manager of Mt Pleasant Coal Company), 71; Henry McCabe (manager of Mt Keira mine), 100—103 and Walter Evans (shipping manager), 3 in PSCP, 1897, Deepwater harbour at Port Kembla and Firth, op.cit., 160—164.

⁷See E.S. Spooner, The History and Development of Port Kembla, Department of Works and Local Government, New South Wales, 1938, 3 and PWD Annual Reports, 1900—1940, NSWV&P (1900—1903) and NSWPP (1904—1940).
The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works had recommended the construction of a northern breakwater in 1912. The northern breakwater was part of the original PWD proposal for Port Kembla in 1897, but was not included in the Act of 1898 because of the excessive cost. The northern breakwater was completed in 1925. As a consequence of these extensive public works, the PWD was an important employer throughout the 1900s and 1910s, initiating major projects such as the construction of the low-level jetty (1911), the northern breakwater (1912), the Port Kembla Power House (1914) and new coal loading facilities (1915).

Along with the harbour works, the Mt Lyell Mining and Railway Company (a copper mining and smelting firm based at Mt Lyell in Tasmania) established a cokeworks at Port Kembla in 1899. The company secured an agreement with the Mt Kembla Coal and Oil Company for the supply of coal and the use of jetty facilities at Port Kembla. Fifty ovens, along with coal crushing equipment, were built on leased land near the Mt Kembla jetty and coal wash plant. The plant was operating by November 1899 and in 1900 twelve more ovens were added. That year the Cokeworks produced more than the company required and coke was sold to 'outside sources.'

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9 Spooner, op.cit., 3—5.
11 Ibid., 27—28 and Illawarra Mercury, 29 June 1899.
12 See General Manager’s Report, March 1900, 24 and Directors’ Report, September 1901, 8, Mt Lyell Mining and Railway Company Ltd, Half Yearly Reports and Balance Sheets, VSL. See also Illawarra Mercury, 29 June 1899.
Despite extensive State Government activity and the establishment of the Cokeworks, the labour market developing around Port Kembla was characterised by uncertainty. Harbour maintenance and quarry work employed 80 to 100 men, and this workforce was supplemented by itinerant workers in times of peak demand. However, work at the PWD was highly susceptible to the climate of New South Wales politics. During 1903 and 1904 the alleged excessive expenditure on public works undertaken by the State Government under Premier John See, and the Minister for Public Works, E.W. O’Sullivan, was a major issue in State politics, and this ultimately led to cutbacks in the workforce at Port Kembla. In May 1903, 32 men were dismissed from the workforce of 100.\textsuperscript{13} Another thirty men were discharged in August 1903.\textsuperscript{14} The election of the Liberal-Reform State Government in August 1904, with C.A. Lee as Minister for Public Works, lead to a more cautious approach to expenditure and lower employment levels.\textsuperscript{15}

The Mt Lyell Cokeworks also endured setbacks in the 1900s, which threw the future of the plant into doubt. The Mt Kembla mine disaster of July 1902, in which 96 miners were killed, closed the mine and forced the Cokeworks to find other sources of coal. Also, continued water shortages at Port Kembla placed great strain on equipment, especially when salt water from Salty Creek had to be used instead of fresh water.\textsuperscript{16} These setbacks occurred in the context of

\textsuperscript{13} illawarra Mercury, 16 May 1903.


\textsuperscript{15} On state politics and public works in this period see Peter Sheldon, ‘Public vs private employers in New South Wales public works, 1890—1910’, Australian Economic History Review, vol.XXXIII, no.1, March 1993, 49—72.

\textsuperscript{16} Lack of water was a problem at the Cokeworks for the next eight years until the construction of a water mains to Port Kembla. A public meeting in 1906 heard that Cokeworks machinery was being destroyed by the use of salt water. See illawarra Mercury, 8 May 1906. On the Mt Kembla disaster see Stuart Piggin and Henry Lee, The Mt Kembla Disaster, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1992.
decreasing demand for coke from Mt Lyell in Tasmania, where new smelting techniques adopted in late 1902 reduced coke consumption from 13,880 tons in 1902 to 5715 tons in 1903.17

The uncertain future of local industries meant that the development of Port Kembla was limited. Between 1900 and 1907 Port Kembla was a town where paid work came and went, where labour flowed in and out according to the rhythms of production. Consequently, few workers settled locally and those from nearby regional towns were well placed to fill jobs not taken by itinerants. Many Wollongong waterfront workers, for example, found work at Port Kembla as the harbour at Wollongong declined in importance and the Port Kembla coal trade boomed. In 1891, 87,821 tons of coal were shipped through Port Kembla. By 1895 this figure had risen to 211,772 tons.18 By 1908, 90 per cent of the 50 to 60 coal trimmers employed at the harbour were from Wollongong according to the evidence of one Wollongong-based coal trimmer, Robert Dodd, at a Licensing Court Inquiry.19 Among the first workers employed by the Mt Lyell Cokeworks in 1899 were a number of Wollongong men. Soon after opening, the company was compelled to repair the footbridge across Tom Thumb's Lagoon so that its Wollongong-based workers could travel to work.20

Men like John Cronan were typical of workers from regional towns who found employment at Port Kembla. Cronan was foreman at the PWD quarry from 1900 to 1908, and reportedly had a reputation as 'a true disciplinarian.'21 A man in his forties, he lived in Corrimal, a mining town fifteen kilometres north of Port

17Blainey, The Psaks of Lysli, 152.
19Illawarra Mercury, 27 October 1908.
20Illawarra Mercury, 7 October 1899.
21Illawarra Mercury, 30 June 1900.
Kembla, with his wife and ten children until his death in a quarry accident.²² Many of the labourers in the quarry were also from nearby towns. Patrick Mulligan was a labourer for the PWD and travelled to work daily from his Dapto home, thirteen kilometres away. He too died in an accident in 1909.²³

The regional influence on the Port Kembla labour market was strengthened in 1907 when the Dapto-based smelter, Australian Smelting Corporation Ltd (ASC), purchased approximately twenty-six hectares of land at Port Kembla from the State Government, and began relocating their works to the port.²⁴ The smelter was originally established at Dapto in 1895 for the smelting of lead, silver, gold and copper by the Smelting Company of Australia Ltd. After various changes in management and ownership, the works abruptly closed in March 1905. The Dapto company's failure related to its poor access to a seaport²⁵, an expensive

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²²Report of the Coronet's Inquest in Illawarra Mercury, 8 September 1908. Cronan was killed by a 'huge mass' of stone which broke away from the quarry face while he was inspecting it.

²³Illawarra Mercury, 26 February 1909.

²⁴P.W.D Annual Report for the year ended 30 June 1907, 56; Illawarra Mercury, 2 April 1907 and J.P. O'Malley, The Old Dapto Smelting Works (second edition), Illawarra Historical Society, Wollongong, 1968. O'Malley incorrectly states that ASC was supported by Sydney-based financiers. ASC was, in fact, associated with prominent Australian industrialists such as W.L. Ballieu and L.C. Robinson, and London-based financiers and company directors such as F. Govett and H.C. Hover, who ultimately formed the Collins House Group. See Blainey, The Rush That Never Ended, 277—278 and Firth, op.cit., 64.

²⁵The Illawarra Harbour and Land Corporation planned a privately-built harbour at Lake Illawarra in the early 1890s which never eventuated. There is some debate as to whether the Corporation was seriously planning construction or whether talk of a harbour was a way of boosting land values in the area. Mitchell argues that the Corporation was a legitimate attempt to build a harbour at Lake Illawarra, and Government selection of Port Kembla harbour for development represented state intervention to decide where industrialisation would proceed in the Illawarra. Firth, however, persuasively argues that the Illawarra Harbour and Land Corporation was more about land speculation, and the Corporation never seriously intended to build a harbour in the Lake, and, moreover, it wasn't the State Government as much as the southern coal proprietors who were influential in selecting Port Kembla for harbour development. See Mitchell, op.cit., 26—34 and Firth, op.cit., 158—160. The recollections of T.G. Rieck ('As I look Back', Unpublished memoirs of T.G Rieck, ND, circa 1942), also suggest that the Illawarra Harbour and Land Corporation was more interested in land speculation than harbour construction.
sulphuric acid plant constructed in 1903 (which the South Coast Times called a 'veritable white elephant'), and increasing competition from German firms.  

In 1907 a re-capitalised company with a new Board of Directors began moving the Dapto works to their new Port Kembla site. Many of the Dapto employees transferred with the works, and itinerant labourers were also attracted to the area, so that by March 1907 ASC employed 150 men and had thirty drays engaged in construction work. 'Hundreds of people are camped here' reported the Mercury, and later that month noted that, 'the place was a hive of activity and new arrivals are daily reported.' However, a lack of capital and a drop in world base metal prices led to a sudden halt in October 1907, and ASC went into liquidation in January 1908. As late as November 1908 there was still hope of re-forming the company, and its agents searched Queensland mines looking for suitable ores.

The failure of ASC had a severe impact on the labour market. Scores of men were left waiting for work as rumours and reports suggested that ASC would re-form or find the necessary capital. But the men waited in vain and production never began. The only visible reminders of ASC's attempt to locate to Port Kembla was a caretaker's hut, the foundations of a furnace and a cleared and levelled factory site.

From 1900 to 1907, then, the beginnings of industrialisation provided paid work for increasing numbers of mostly unskilled male labourers. The fluctuating and unpredictable demand for industrial workers, however, meant that the labour market was dominated by nonlocals—itinerant workers, or men from nearby towns. It would take the arrival of a new large employer at Port Kembla to help

26 See South Coast Times, 5 September 1903 for that paper's opinion of the sulphuric acid plant, and South Coast Times, 4 March 1905 for the report of increasing German competition.

27 Illawarra Mercury, 8 March and 22 March 1907.

28 Illawarra Mercury, 1 March 1907 and O'Malley, op.cit., 6.

29 Australian Mining Standard, 11 November 1908, 524.
build a local economy, break down the regional basis of the labour market and provide the economic context for the development of the town.

Consolidation of the local labour market

The unemployment and dislocation caused by the sudden closure of ASC in 1907 was alleviated by the establishment of a new copper smelter at Port Kembla, Electrolytic Refining and Smelting Company of Australia Ltd (ER&S). This company's eventual success and durability solidified the emerging patterns of an industrial class structure at Port Kembla, and initiated the expansion and consolidation of a town-centred labour market.

In its first few years, however, ER&S came close to failure. The Port Kembla site was formally announced in January 1908, and production began the following year. By mid-1909 the Directors were considering closure 'till copper market recovery', but prospects for the company brightened in 1910 when a large contract to refine blister copper from the Mt Lyell Mining and Railway Company was secured. This helped ER&S through the early years, and led to the first small profit of £757 in 1912.30

The establishment of ER&S consolidated earlier tentative trends in the move from a rural to an industrial economy. In 1900 there were thirteen labourers (some of them rural labourers), nine farmers, three engineers, two fisherman and one carpenter on the State Electoral Roll at Port Kembla.31 By 1907 the number of labourers had increased to 84 and skilled industrial workers including four engine drivers, three gangers and two engineers also appeared. Itinerant labourers who

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30 Minutes of Directors' Meetings, ER&S Records, 14 May 1909. For the report on the Mt Lyell contract see Minutes of Directors' Meetings, ER&S Records, 5 September 1910 and Australian Mining Standard, 24 August 1910, 195—196. The profit figure for 1912 is from Directors' Sixth Annual Report for the Year ended 31 October 1912, ER&S Records, 31 October 1912.

31 State Electoral Roll for Illawarra (Wollongong Division), 1899—1900, ML.
worked at ASC and camped near the works, would have swelled the numbers of industrial workers even more.

The scale of ER&S and its provision of fairly regular paid work attracted workers to settle locally, and the outlines of the local class structure became clearer. Once construction work at ER&S started in 1908, 250 men were employed, and when the smelter was officially opened in February 1909, 300 were engaged. From 1908 the future of Port Kembla was increasingly linked to the economic fortunes of ER&S, and the make-up of Port Kembla's paid workforce was increasingly dominated by the industrial working class. By 1912 the working class made up 90 per cent of all paid workers living in Port Kembla (461 altogether), with ER&S workers forming 65 per cent of the town's workforce.

ER&S improved its economic position from 1912, but there was a major hurdle for the company to overcome before its future was assured—the economic effects of the First World War. Among other things, the War led to a major re-organisation of the Australian copper market. German firms, who had dominated the market, lost this position through a political campaign carried out in state and federal parliaments to eject 'enemy' firms. The Commonwealth Trading with the Enemy Act, passed in November 1914, required companies to register their contracts with German firms with the Comptroller General. In 1915 both the Commonwealth and New South Wales State Governments introduced legislation cancelling contracts with German companies.

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33 Calculated from the State Electoral Roll for Allowrie (Wollongong Division), 1912, ML.
35 Lockwood, War on the Waterfront: Menzies, Japan and the Pig Iron Dispute, 49—54.
36 The legislation was called the Enemy Contract Annulment Act (1915) in both the Commonwealth and State legislatures. See CPD, 1914—17, vol.76, 2955—2963 and NSWP, 1915—16, vol.59, 1170—1172 for the debates on their introduction.
This legislation and its economic consequences threatened ER&S's major customer and sole overseas agent, the large German cartel Aron Hirsch und Sohn. Rumours that ER&S was to close circulated immediately after the declaration of war, and had to be officially denied in the local press. In mid-August 1914 ER&S informed companies who had had their contracts suspended by the outbreak of war 'that the refinery is prepared to treat their material on a total charge basis.' This suggests that while the legal sanction of contracts was withdrawn, delivery of refined copper was still planned.

From the beginning of 1915 increasing political pressure forced ER&S to distance itself from its German contacts. In January the Superintendent reported that three Germans employed at ER&S had been 'paid off.' In July 1915 Attorney-General William Morris Hughes threatened to declare ER&S an enemy company. Consequently, in August changes were made to the company's Articles of Association to allow for the removal of a parcel of shares held by the estate of the late Siegfried Hirsch, a former principal of Aron Hirsch und Sohn.

Once this issue had been dealt with ER&S benefited enormously from the War. War-time demand for copper and the beginning of Imperial Preference signalled a period of prosperity and expansion. A profit of £10,742 was recorded for the period October 1914 to October 1915, a dividend was paid to shareholders and additions to the factory costing £45,000 were planned. This success was a turning point for Port Kembla. After 1914, with ER&S booming, the industrial future of Port Kembla was assured, and the initial period of uncertainty had ended. While occasional downturns produced some unemployment or

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37 South Coast Times, 7 August 1914, editorial.
38 Minutes of Directors' Meetings, ER&S Records, 17 August 1914.
39 Minutes of Directors' Meetings, ER&S Records, 31 August: 1915. ER&S workers had refused to work with these men since December the previous year. See South Coast Times, 25 December 1914.
40 Minutes of Directors' Meetings, ER&S Records, 31 August 1915.
41 Directors' Report for the Year ended 31 October 1915, ER&S Records, 29 December 1915.
underemployment, the Directors of the company never considered complete closure again until the downturn of the late 1920s. The viability of ER&S became the foundation for the growth of the town, and the basis for the establishment of new industries and the development of a local labour market.

In 1916 ER&S's position was consolidated with the formation of a new industry, to be situated at Port Kembla, that would be a major consumer of the company's refined copper, Metal Manufactures Ltd. The formation of MM was the result of the movement of Anglo-Australian capital into the gap left by ousted German firms. With ER&S's major German customer lost, the Collins House Group, with the encouragement of the Commonwealth Government, moved to secure a domestic market for refined copper. MM was a vital part of this plan. Together, ER&S and MM formed the major industries at Port Kembla until the late 1920s, and dominated the local labour market.

MM had three distinct parts: the Wire Factory, the Telephone Cable Factory (or the 'TCF' as it was more commonly known) and the Tube Factory. The Wire Factory began operations in 1919 and was the most productive part of MM, prior to 1939 producing 60 to 80 per cent of the company's total output. The Tube Factory began operations in 1921, initially employing about 90 men. This factory produced copper tubes and piping for boilers, locomotives and other general purposes. The TCF was constructed in 1922 and commenced operations in 1923, producing cotton and paper-covered conductors, mostly for the expanding telephone, tram and household electrical market.

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42 Richardson, 'The Origins and Development of the Collins House Group, 1915—1951', 16—17 and Cablegram from W.M. Hughes (Prime Minister [then in Paris]) to W.A. Watt (Acting Prime Minister), 12 April 1919 in Prime Minister's Department—Metals, Brass and Copper Works, Port Kembla, Item no. 1919/2410, CRS A2. The cablegram read in part: 'Re Brasse & Copper works, Port Kembla, as you know, these up-to-date works were created as a result of very strong pressure by [the] Commonwealth Government.'

43 MM Gazette (Coming of Age Number), June 1939, 14—16.
The establishment of MM also underlined the developing industrial character of Port Kembla, and further centred the labour market on the town. The workforce at MM soon outnumbered ER&S. By 1924, 815 were employed by MM and 350 by ER&S, with another smaller firm, Australian Fertilizers Ltd employing between 60 and 100 men.\textsuperscript{44} Australian Fertilizers opened in June 1921 producing superphosphate for the State's wheat farmers. Maximum production was 27,200 tons of fertilizer per year, peaking just before the autumn ploughing and sowing season.\textsuperscript{45} The expansion of the number of industrial jobs available at Port Kembla encouraged local settlement and town development, vital preconditions for the growth of local loyalty, and ultimately vital for the development of the politics of locality.

Conditions in the new industrial workplaces also fostered the growth of unions at Port Kembla, and helped forge an industrial class consciousness vital for class politics. At the Reid's Hill quarry in the late 1900s, where average wages were between 8s. and 9s. a day, brittle stone made working conditions difficult and dangerous. Steam-powered drills were used to bore deep holes into the rock face into which explosive charges were placed. Large rocks would collapse with the explosion or remain precariously balanced on the rock face. These pieces had to be broken into thirty ton blocks and loaded onto railway trucks to be sent off to the breakwater for tipping.\textsuperscript{46} After a series of accidents in 1908 and 1909, some fatal, quarrymen at Port Kembla, under the leadership of officials from the

\textsuperscript{44}Forster, 'Industrial Development in Australia, 1920—1930', 266.

\textsuperscript{45}Evidence of R.J. Craig, (manager, Australian Fertilizers) in PSCPW, 1923, Railway from Moss Vale to Port Kembla, 14—18.

\textsuperscript{46}This description is based on Coroner's reports of fatal accidents at the quarry. See Illawarra Mercury, 30 June 1908; 8 September 1908 and 26 February 1909.
United Labourers' Protective Society, stopped work and sought a 1s. per day wage increase because of the dangerous conditions.47

ER&S workers too suffered hot, dusty and dangerous working conditions, especially at the company's furnaces where molten copper was moved around during various stages of the refining process.48 Once through the furnaces, copper ingots were transferred to the tankhouse, where highly-refined copper was produced. The tankhouse contained none of the extreme heat of the furnaces, but had its own nasty features.49 The tanks contained an electrically-charged solution of hydrogen sulphide and copper sulphide at a temperature of 74 degrees celsius. Every twenty-four hours plates were removed from the tank and stripped with a chisel.50 At both the PWD quarry and at ER&S, workers became more organised and militant from 1909 not only because of the similar developments in the nation-wide labour movement during this period, but also because of the local experiences of paid work.

Other aspects of the industrial workplace were also formative in the political consciousness of local workers. While the long-term future of Port Kembla's

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47 Illawarra Mercury, 2 March 1909. Similar patterns of union mobilisation among construction workers occurred throughout New South Wales in this period. Sheldon argues that for Government labourers 'the work was heavy, often dirty and dangerous and the discipline cruel. One result of these factors was a continuing tradition of militancy and solidarity among construction labourers.' See Peter Sheldon, 'System and Strategy: The Changing Shape Of Unionism Among NSW Construction Workers', Labour History, no.65, November 1993, 118.

48 Joseph Warrington was fatally burned by molten copper. Warrington was operating an overhead crane when a pot of molten copper exploded below him (See Illawarra Mercury, 11 June 1915). Thomas Wellings was killed when the head of a hammer being used by a workmate flew off and hit him in the head (See reports of the Coroner's Inquest in South Coast Times, 16 April 1915). Frank Le Gros was run over by an electric trolley (See reports of the Coroner's Inquest in Illawarra Mercury, 3 March 1920).

49 A cathode and an anode of copper were placed in a lead-lined tank and immersed in an electrically-charged solution. Pure copper migrated from the anode to cathode—the impurities (including gold and silver) fell to the bottom of the tank as sediment.

50 See also Pan-Pacific Science Congress, Australia, 1923, Guide Book to the Excursion to the Illawarra District, Government printer, Sydney, 1923, 27—28.
industries seemed secure by the 1920s, intermittent employment remained an important feature of the labour market for the working class. Irregular work patterns were most pronounced on the waterfront. Work there could be stopped by industrial action, bad weather conditions or a shortage of adequate loading and unloading facilities. More commonly, slack periods followed by back-breaking twenty-four hour shifts were caused by the unpredictable nature of the shipping industry, combined with the oppressive working conditions. Long shifts took a tremendous physical toll on workers and the situation was not alleviated until industrial action in the late 1930s, and then only partially.

Some industries were less vulnerable than others to stoppages. In 1911 Edwin Tuxworth, manager of the Mt Lyell Cokeworks, noted the effect of shipping delays:

It does not stop the cokeworkers. There is always room for storage of coke. Occasionally we have been inconvenienced if there is a long stoppage of shipping ... otherwise we have frequently had enough coal to tide us over.

Other industries at Port Kembla were more susceptible to stoppages of the industries that supplied or transported raw materials. During the General Strike of 1917, for example, ER&S wrote to customers informing them that the company

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51 See evidence of George Sloan (president, South Coast branch of the Waterside Workers' Association) in 'Report together with Minutes of evidence relating to the proposed Duplication of the Coaling Plant at No.1 jetty, Port Kembla', Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, NSWPP, vol. 3, 1927, 3 (hereafter PSCPW, 1923, Duplication of Coaling Plant).

52 Interview with William Bailey, (Interviewed by Glenn Mitchell, 14 October 1976), WPL.

53 Evidence of Edwin Tuxworth (manager, Mt Lyell Cokeworks), PSCPW, 1912, Northern Breakwater at Port Kembla, 20.
was 'unable to take delivery of any ore or copper bearing material until further notice.'54 Finally, if nothing else stopped work at Port Kembla, then the weather could. In July 1910 a fierce storm swept away 150 metres of the northern breakwater and those working tipping stone were idle for a week awaiting repairs.55 In February 1918, all 'outside employees' of the PWD were off work because of heavy rain.56

The experience of intermittent work engendered varying political responses. Intermittent employment was one of the forces behind the strategy of lobbying the State Government to improve the town's infrastructure. Throughout the 1920s the local branch of the Australian Workers' Union (AWU), for example, called on the Government to improve the port and construct better jetties, loading facilities and railway linkages.57 Such claims must be seen in light of the frustration and economic hardship that workers experienced during stoppages at work, but calls for Government intervention and Government solutions were demands that the AWU shared with other non-working class organisations like the Port Kembla Traders' Association and the Port Kembla Chamber of Commerce—ultimately common political ground upon which to base the politics of locality.

Other groups of workers developed quite different responses to irregular work. The waterside workers, plagued by the most oppressive working conditions and irregular work patterns at Port Kembla, eventually developed a strong union organisation by the mid-1930s. Increasing militancy and strike action targeted at local stevedoring companies constituted their major political response. The

54 Minutes of Directors' Meetings, ER&S Records, 6 September 1917.
55 Illawarra Mercury, 26 July 1912.
56 South Coast Times, 1 February 1918.
57 See evidence of James Perry (president, Port Kembla branch AWU) in PSCPW, 1923, Railway from Mose Vale to Port Kembla, 17 and Report of a meeting of the AWU which called on the State Government to provide more employment at Port Kembla harbour in Illawarra Mercury, 9 July 1926.
branch regularly elected communist leaders from 1937 and was at the leading edge of class politics at Port Kembla.

In contrast labourers with the PWD developed collectivist traditions to deal with irregular employment. If half the workforce was retrenched, for example, a 'five days on/five days off' system was introduced. Such a roster was adopted by workers in 1903 after a severe storm had ripped 30 metres of rail line from the eastern breakwater, effectively stopping quarry work until repairs were completed.\textsuperscript{58} A similar roster was introduced by PWD workers as a result of Government cost cutting in 1929 and 1930.\textsuperscript{59} Such experiences of union organisation, collective solidarity and action were important forces behind the development of working-class identity.

By the beginning of the 1920s the industrial working class overwhelmingly dominated the paid workforce at Port Kembla. There were 484 unskilled workers living at Port Kembla, mostly labourers, firemen, greasers and fitter's labourers at ER&S and MM, and they represented 69 per cent of the town's paid workforce. Labourers made up the vast majority of the unskilled working class, numbering 361, or 75 per cent of all unskilled workers.\textsuperscript{60}

Industrialisation brought new skilled positions to the workforce, but still the numbers of skilled workers were small at 56, or 8 per cent of the paid workforce in 1924. Many of these jobs required precise judgement and dexterity, often in the face of harsh working conditions.\textsuperscript{61} The ladier in the anode furnace at ER&S, positioned only six metres from the spout of the furnace, had to judge amounts of

\textsuperscript{58}Illawarra Mercury, 30 June 1903.

\textsuperscript{59}William Davies (State Member for Wollongong), NSWPD, 1929—30, vol.121, 2893.

\textsuperscript{60}Calculated from the State Electoral Roll for Wollondilly, 1924, ML.

\textsuperscript{61}"Skill" is a problematic concept and recent research has shown it represents a measure of political power as much as any objective assessment of the abilities of a worker. For a discussion see Raeleen Frances, The Politics of Work: Gender and Labour in Victoria, 1880-1939, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, 3—5.
molten copper in the furnace and the moulds and 'act as a reservoir between the
furnace and the moulds, thus permitting the flow of metal from the furnace to be
continuous and to avoid overflow.'

Similarly, in the cathode furnace pouring
was an 'operation that requires great skill in manipulation.'

In May 1920 ladler's
earned 14s. a day, as compared to 10s.6d. per day for labourers.

Control of
machinery such as ladles, lugging machines and cranes, as well as the
supervision of other workers, also meant higher wages for some workers.

The middle class

The unskilled and skilled working class together numerically dominated the
formal economy of Port Kembla, but they had decreased from 90 per cent of the
paid workforce living in the town in 1912 to 77 per cent in 1924. This change was
the result of the slow yet constant growth of middle-class and petite-bourgeois
occupations at Port Kembla. The development of these two classes provided the
two other principal members of the local class structure.

Despite Firth's characterisation of Port Kembla in the 1920s as 'a working
class enclave', the industries of Port Kembla required a number of supervisory,
technical and management positions in the production process. Many of these
men—clerks, foremen, accountants, engineers and metallurgists—settled locally

62 E.A. White, 'Electrolytic Refining and Smelting at Port Kembla, New South Wales', *Australian Institute
of Mining Engineers Transactions*, vol.15, pt 1, 1911, 243.
63 Ibid., 244.
64 New South Wales Board of Trade, *Inquiry into the Living Wage—South Coast*, 1920, 130 and 137,
2/5780, NSWSA. (hereafter NSW Board of Trade). The New South Wales Board of Trade was established
in 1918 by an amendment to the Industrial Arbitration Act of 1912. The Board consisted of a president,
vice-president and representatives of the employers and employees. It conducted enquiries into the cost
of living and declared a living wage for female and male workers. The Board was replaced by the Industrial
65 See ER&S Award published in the *Illawarra Mercury*, 9 January 1912.
66 Firth, *op.cit.*, 18.
and were the basis of a local middle class. The main source of this middle class growth were the 'staff' at ER&S. At the beginning of the 1920s they numbered 90 and were divided into 'junior staff', who were employed on weekly contracts, and 'senior staff', who were employed on monthly contracts. Staff at MM in the early 1920s numbered 50, many of whom were migrants from MM's English partner. Their task was to train workers in techniques new to the nascent Australian electrical manufacturing industry. In 1928 at ER&S junior clerks and junior assayers, and the nightwatchmen, earned slightly over £4 a week. Salaries rose from here through foreman, inspectors and engineers (£5 to £7) to the company accountant at £9 a week. The chief engineer, works superintendent and general manager were employed on yearly contracts paying from £700 to £1500 (£13 to £29 per week).

In contrast to the experiences of the local working class, the defining feature of the paid work of middle-class men was their immunity from unemployment or underemployment, and this underlined the class differences in working lives, and formed a significant division in local society. When work slowed at ER&S staff took holidays they had accrued, while workers survived as best they could by picking up odd jobs, fishing and tending vegetable gardens, or relying on credit at local stores. Quiet periods were also used by staff for the maintenance or upgrade of machinery. At the Mt Lyell Cokeworks the New South Wales coal strike of 1910 to 1911 was used as an opportunity to replace the

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67 Employees seen as being part of the 'staff' included those in management positions and the more technically-qualified workers. While staff members also included a few working-class occupations such as nightwatchmen, cleaners and typists, it was essentially a middle-class category.


69 ER&S Staff as at 20 June 1928, BHAS Collection, 1/84/4, Melbourne University Archives (MUA).

70 Port Kembla report by E.A. White, BHAS Collection, 1/84/4, MUA. Details of the workers' responses to intermittent employment are in Chapter Three.
ovens with a more efficient battery.71 At MM the TCF was shut down in September 1926 owing to the delay in orders from the Post Master General's Office, and did not re-open until January 1927. As was typical of Port Kembla's industries, staff at the TCF processed the few small orders, and worked on improvements to machinery.72 These very different conditions of work indicate that the class structure, as revealed by the electoral rolls, is not just a statistical sleight of hand, but indicative of major differences in the working lives of different classes.

Many of the approximately 150 MM and ER&S staff lived in Port Kembla. The 1924 Electoral Roll records 90 middle-class occupations at Port Kembla, or 14 per cent of the paid workforce. Poor roads in and out of the town, and company housing for staff, were effective incentives for staff to live locally. But compared to some other towns, the middle class at Port Kembla were a small minority. According to the 1921 Census, at Wollongong 25 per cent of the workforce of 2622 were part of the 'professional', 'commercial', or 'independent' categories—a reasonable approximation of the local middle class. Similarly, the figure for the Sydney metropolitan area was 20 per cent.73

Some of the few places in the Illawarra region which had a smaller percentage of the middle class in the paid workforce were the mining towns of the Northern Illawarra municipality—Bellambi, Bargo, Mt Pleasant and Mt Keira. There only 11 per cent of the paid workforce of 2180 were in professional, commercial or independent occupations in 1921.74 The image of a 'working class enclave' is a characterisation best suited to these mining communities. Although the Central Illawarra, of which Port Kembla was a large part, did have a

71 Australian Mining Standard, 16 November 1910, 510. A coal pressing and charging machine was also installed.
72 Report and Statements of Account for the year ending 25 May 1927, Metal Manufactures Pty Ltd, D21/11/1—3, WUA.
73 Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1921, vol.1, 666.
74 ibid., 662–666.
comparatively small middle class, they were nonetheless a significant and observable social group. Their presence at Port Kembla highlights the need to consider the local dynamic of class politics, for the middle class were important actors on the local political stage. They implemented and interpreted company policies, and busied themselves in political matters outside the industrial arena.

With the significant presence at Port Kembla of both the middle class and working class by the 1920s, the labour market became more town-centred. The establishment and success of ER&S and MM at Port Kembla were crucial factors in undermining the regional basis of the labour market. Both companies needed a stable supply of workers, conversant with industrial production. Many positions required knowledge of modern machinery and skills in operating cranes, electric trolleys and mechanised furnace equipment. Despite irregular employment, jobs wouldn't disappear as was the case with Government work, which tended to rely on periodic public works. Consequently, many ER&S and MM employees settled locally and were the basis of the town's early population growth. By 1920, 500 of the 800 workers at ER&S and MM lived in Port Kembla. A significant local population also meant that the town had a greater capacity to deal with any further labour demand. Local workers were well placed to fill any daily gaps in the Port Kembla workforce.

The town-centred labour market was further reinforced by the industrial strategies pursued by ER&S. In a paternalism common to the smelting industry, ER&S attempted to turn Port Kembla into a 'company town.' The company built houses for staff and workers, set up a co-operative store in 1916 and sponsored a

75NSW Board of Trade, 314.
76By 'company town' I am referring to localities where one industry economically, socially and politically dominates. A good example would be Whyalla, especially before the Second World War. See Roy Kriegler, Working for the Company: Work and Control in the Whyalla Shipyard, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1980, 5—10.
range of local initiatives such as a Recreation Club and a Provident Fund.\textsuperscript{77} This strategy was partly a response to the need to make Port Kembla more attractive to skilled labour, but it also related to the company's bid to control the social and political development of the town. The provision of local infrastructure and the company's focus on local services further established the town as the centre of the labour market.

The attempt to create a company town had ramifications beyond the creation of a more localised labour market. At ER&S especially, the company became the centre of the staff's social, as well as working lives. A staff Recreation Club was set up in Military Road where young engineers and metallurgists could play billiards or use the company's library. A staff tennis club was built near the works and became known as 'Terascoa' (which stood for The ER&S Company of Australia).\textsuperscript{78} Senior members of staff also became active in the politics of Port Kembla. Control of the labour market spilled over into a considerable influence on local society itself, as the staff from ER&S became prominent in the social and political life of the town in the 1910s and early 1920s.\textsuperscript{79}

The paternalism of ER&S facilitated contact between the staff and the local working class. Through the provision of company housing, a company store and company-initiated sporting and social organisations workers were considered not just as part of the labour process, but in their communal and family context. Although there was a hidden industrial and political agenda behind this engagement (which workers sometimes reacted against), industrial paternalism was one of the important forces that built cross-class links. Such links were the foundations for the creation of a classless local identity.

\textsuperscript{77}Minutes of Directors' Meetings, ER&S Records, 17 January 1913 (company housing) and 11 November 1918 (Employees Co-operative Scheme); \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 26 January 1918 (Recreation Club) and \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 2 January 1919 (Provident Fund).

\textsuperscript{78}See Minutes of Directors' Meeting, ER&S Records, 20 February 1914 and 27 March 1914.

\textsuperscript{79}The details and political ramifications of this paternalism are dealt with in Chapter Six.
The petite bourgeoisie

By 1920, then, the local middle class were a small but significant part of the class structure, but industrial development also facilitated commercial growth at Port Kembla, and this attracted a petite bourgeoisie to the town. By 1917 there were seventeen storekeepers living and working in the town, or 4 per cent of the paid workforce. By 1924 this figure had grown to 61, or 9 per cent of the paid workforce. The petite bourgeoisie had a key role in the creation of a local commercial centre that was both a site for cross-class interaction at Port Kembla, and a symbol of local unity.

In 1906 the Middleton Brothers, John and Harry, opened the first general store and newsagency at Port Kembla, on the western side of the newly-constructed Military Road. Middleton's was a small family-based store, typical of the early stores at Port Kembla. Harry died in 1908, and Sarah Middleton, his widow, and John Middleton took over operations. Sarah Middleton handled the postmaster's duties and their only employee was a boy who delivered telegrams. Their business expanded along with the town and in 1913 they opened 'the most up to date of any building in Port Kembla' with 'large ventilated rooms' and ceilings 'nicely finished off with artistic designs in cement.'

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80 The term 'paid workforce' does not quite capture the situation of the petite bourgeoisie who are more accurately described as 'self-employed'.

81 State Electoral Roll, District of Wollongong, 1906, ML and Letter from J.J. Middleton to Post Master General, 30 August 1908 in Port Kembla Post Office Files.

82 The Coroner’s inquest into Harry Middleton’s death is reported in Illawarra Mercury, 11 February 1908. The Coroner found that while delivering papers to seamen on one of Port Kembla’s jetties, he fell and was knocked unconscious by one of the jetty supports, subsequently drowning. Running the Post Office earned the Middleton’s £23 per annum plus telephone costs in 1909. See Letter from J.J. Middleton to Deputy Post Master General, 28 December 1908 in Post Master General, Port Kembla Post Office Files, SP32, Item No. 32, AA (hereafter Port Kembla Post Office Files).

83 Illawarra Mercury, 19 September 1913.
J.T. Philpot's, a medium-sized general store in Wentworth Street, opened in 1921. John Philpot (junior) started work in the shop aged fifteen in 1927. He remembers work as 'strained, but not hard.'\(^{84}\) Deliveries were done twice a week by motor car, and the family lived in rooms above the shop until 1950. Since there was no separation of work and home long hours were worked: 'Well, we lived in the shop, we'd work while there was work to be done.'\(^{85}\) As with Middleton's, Philpot's relied on mostly family labour.

It was not long, however, before wealthier storekeepers, many of them from surrounding towns, became aware of Port Kembla's commercial opportunities. From the 1920s stores requiring more capital and often more workers joined the family-based businesses in Wentworth Street. In the 1910s Robert Shipp, a Keiraville-based storekeeper, owned and operated one store in Port Kembla and one in Keiraville. He moved to Port Kembla to live in 1920 and by this time employed four people in his Wentworth Street store. That year he also purchased the Empire Theatre in Wentworth Street (renaming it the Amuso Theatre), and in 1923 bought land in Port Kembla for speculative purposes. Shipp clearly had more capital available to him than smaller storekeepers like the Middletons and Philpots.

Hotels, another area of potential commercial investment in the expanding town, also became larger and more capital intensive. The McCaffery brothers, experienced hoteliers from Kiama, opened a large two-storey hotel in Wentworth Street costing £4000 in June 1912.\(^{86}\) Charles McCaffery, who managed the hotel,

\(^{84}\) Transcript of Interview with John Philpot, (Interviewed by Wayne Davis, 1983?), Wollongong TAFE, 3.

\(^{85}\) bid. and obituary of J.T. Philpot in South Coast Times, 15 November 1940.

\(^{86}\) They had been in the hotel business since 1890 and had previously held licenses at the Royal and the Brighton Hotel in Kiama. Their application for a liquor license was refused by the Licensing Court in 1908, but they were successful upon re-application in 1911. Illawarra Mercury, 2 May, 5 May, 16 May and 19 May 1911. Further information on the McCaffery family was supplied by Ray Thorburn from the Kiama Family History centre.
was forced to leave in 1913 because of illness. The hotel was purchased by the Port Kembla Land and Building Company, a public company with £10,000 of share capital. The company employed E. Jeffrey's, a hotelier formerly of Manilla, and from its salubrious beginnings, it soon became a working-class hotel and boarding house run by resident managers.

The change in ownership of the hotel was an early indicator of the increasing size and capitalisation of commercial operations at Port Kembla. But whether businesses were family-run or larger operations, the workplaces of the petite bourgeoisie were sites of economic and social interaction between all classes at Port Kembla. Economic relationships between the petite bourgeoisie and the working class were particularly close. Storekeeper's incomes were closely linked to working-class employment. Edith Neaves' father worked as a furnacemen at ER&S in the 1920s: 'If he came off work sick [it was] too bad, we would have to rely on the trader people to stand by us.' Credit offered the working class some breathing space in the scramble to survive on meagre wages, and for the petite bourgeoisie it secured the loyalty and trade of customers that would pay off when conditions were better. Such economic links with other classes at Port Kembla highlight the petite bourgeoisie's important role in creating the economic context for the emergence of town identity and the development of cross-class political alliances.

The small businesses in the town were also a common site for women's paid work. In 1924 twenty-two women, or 3 per cent of the paid workforce, recorded occupations other than 'domestic duties' on the Electoral Roll, with thirteen of these women in petite-bourgeois occupations like boarding house keeper, shopkeeper and tailoress. The town's boarding houses were mostly run

87 McCaffery Family', Francis McCaffery Papers, D92/2/40, WUA.
88 South Coast Times, 9 January 1914.
90 State Electoral Roll, Electorate of Wollondilly, 1924, ML.
by women. The first boarding house was established by Sarah Watson in 1903. This large two-storey building was located on the corner of Darcy and Military Roads and catered for sixty men. Watson employed her three daughters and her granddaughter, Sarah Drury, in what was very much a family business. Drury worked at the boarding house between 1923 and 1925 making beds and serving tables in the kitchen for 10s. a week.\textsuperscript{91} The 1924 Electoral Roll recorded six official boarding houses in Port Kembla, concentrated in Wentworth Street and Military Road.\textsuperscript{92} In running boarding houses women brought apparently 'private sphere' skills of cooking, cleaning and household management into the formal economy.

Among enrolled working-class women only seven listed occupations on the 1924 Electoral Roll; three housemaids, two typists, one shop-assistant and one waitress. There is one workplace excluded from these figures which highlights the limitations of the electoral rolls as evidence of labour market activity. The TCF at MM was one of the few areas of industrial work open to women at Port Kembla. The 60 to 100 women employed at the TCF (the number varied according to available orders) worked from 7.30 a.m to 4.00 p.m overseeing the operations of twelve to sixteen cotton braiding machines.\textsuperscript{93} The first award rate was set by the New South Wales Board of Trade in April 1923 at £2, which was (as was typical for such rulings), half the adult male basic wage.\textsuperscript{94} By 1933, depression conditions had reduced the adult female rate to £1.17s.\textsuperscript{95}

\textsuperscript{91}Interview with Sarah Drury, 2.
\textsuperscript{92}State Electoral Roll, Electorate of Wollondilly, 1924, ML.
\textsuperscript{93}After pressure from the AWU the number of machines were reduced to twelve per worker in 1924. See AWU Minute Book, 15 April 1924.
\textsuperscript{95}Reports and Statements of accounts for the year ended 31 March 1933, Metal Manufactures Pty Ltd, D21/11/2, WUA.
TCF workers were excluded from electoral rolls because they were not old enough to vote, being usually between sixteen and twenty years of age. These women worked in that period of their lives between leaving school and getting married. After working in her grandmother's boarding house Sarah Drury worked at the TCF from 1925 until her marriage in 1927. Edith Neaves 'loved' her job at MM and stayed two years until her marriage in 1929. The idea of continuing work after marriage was never considered, as Neaves recalled,

Oh no, no I left. When you were married you had to leave.
You don't work after when you were married. That's silly.
[laughter] No you get married to be a housewife and look after your husband.  

Middle-class women also had limited access to the formal economy, although the local school presented some opportunities. Agnes McCaulry became a pupil teacher at Port Kembla Primary School in March 1905. The headmaster, Thomas Collins, wrote an assessment of her performance that provides some idea of what was expected of young women students. Question two of the assessment related to 'Conduct out of School'. Collins wrote:

Her character out of school is of the highest moral worth; her choice of associates wise and well-considered and her leisure time at Port Kembla has been principally spent in the interests of education and morality.

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96 Interview with Sarah Drury, 2—3.
97 Interview with Edith Neaves, 7. See also Jean Payne in Preston, op.cit., 39. On the appeal of factory work to women in the early twentieth century see Beverly Kingston, My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann: Woman and Work in Australia, Nelson, Melbourne, 1975, 58—60.
Question three dealt with 'Conduct in School' and included four sub-headings:

**PUNCTUALITY:** Strictly punctual in attendance and at work

**DILIGENCE:** Attentive, willing and earnest

**OBEDIENCE:** Most obedient in all branches of duty

**ATTENTION:** Scrupulously attentive.\(^{98}\)

An image of a hard working, ambitious young woman emerges from this report, but the extent to which her private life was up for assessment is also graphically demonstrated. Collins was assessing her moral worth as much as her value as a teacher, and this moral scrutiny was often a key element in responses to women's paid employment.

While teaching offered some opportunities, working conditions could also be very poor. Sanitary arrangements at the Port Kembla Primary School were less than adequate. In 1908 the Mayor of Central Illawarra Municipality wrote to the Department of Public Instruction complaining of the school cesspits and the smell that emanated from them.\(^{99}\) Overcrowding was also a problem. The Port Kembla Progress Association complained in August 1913 that because of a lack of space 'a number of them [children] receive their instruction on the open verandah, exposed to the heavy wind and dust.'\(^{100}\) That year 137 children were enrolled with three teachers in charge: the headmaster, Thomas Collins and two female assistant teachers.

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\(^{98}\)Thomas Collins, Pupil Teacher Report, Memo to Chief Inspector, [ND], Port Kembla School Files.

\(^{99}\)Letter from Joseph Robinson (Mayor, Central Illawarra) to Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, 12 September 1908, Port Kembla School Files.

\(^{100}\)Letter from Port Kembla Progress Association to Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, 21 August 1913, Port Kembla School Files.
The opening of the new school in Military Road in 1916 relieved the overcrowding, but even so, the formal economy presented other difficulties for women workers. The school employed three assistant women teachers: Miss Flynn, who boarded at Wollongong; Miss Bovard who lived with her parents at Port Kembla and Mrs Bourke, whose husband worked at Port Kembla where they resided. If women couldn't find accommodation at Port Kembla, they were forced to board at Wollongong because, as the inspector noted: "The boarding houses at Port Kembla are for men only, and a woman cannot obtain suitable accommodation, so must live in Wollongong."¹⁰¹ Such male-orientated services made the formal economy even less accessible to women.

Like working-class women, the paid work of middle-class women often ended upon marriage. In early 1919 Mrs Bourke wrote to the Department of Public Instruction applying for a permanent position. The appointment was recommended by both the headmaster and the senior inspector to alleviate overcrowding, but the Department replied that it was practice 'not to appoint married women to permanent positions.'¹⁰² The Department continued to police the gendered boundaries of the formal economy, regardless of the advice from local officials and the extensive overcrowding at the school.¹⁰³

Despite the numbers of women in paid work not always recorded by official records, the formal economy remained overwhelmingly male-dominated. Women workers at the TCF or in the town's stores may have added to women's share of 3 to 4 per cent of the formal economy (as recorded by the electoral rolls), but certainly to no more than 10 per cent of the total workforce. This male

¹⁰¹Memo from Inspector to Chief Inspector, 24 August 1918 in Port Kembla School Files.
¹⁰²Department of Public Instruction to Mrs T. Bourke, 5 September 1919 in Port Kembla School Files.
¹⁰³For an outline of the ideological and administrative battle to assign women, especially married women, a dependent position through re-organisation and 'reform' of the State's public service see Desley Deacon, Managing Gender: The State, the New Middle Class and Women Workers, 1830—1930, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1990, especially Chapter 8.
domination set the formal economy at Port Kembla apart from many other towns. According to the 1933 Census, 21 per cent of the Wollongong Municipality's workforce of 5113 were women, including 324 employed in domestic service, 194 in public administration and professions, 161 in commerce and finance and 75 in industrial occupations. The figure for the whole of New South Wales was similar at almost 20 per cent.\textsuperscript{104} Even allowing for electoral roll and census figures that are not entirely comparable, and collected in different ways, the differences are still significant.

The effect of this gender-segmented formal economy was to expose men and women to separate workplaces and different influences on their identities and politics. While working-class and middle-class men were concentrated in industrial workplaces with harsh working conditions, noticeable class divisions and occasional class conflict, the few areas of the formal economy occupied by women were workplaces less infused with class difference and class conflict. Indeed, workplaces like the town's stores, where women found some paid work, actively encouraged cross-class interaction. The social and political implications of these gendered experiences will be explored in later chapters, but suffice to say at this point that the masculinised and male-dominated industries of Port Kembla became the typical sites of class politics, while the town centre, with less clear-cut gendered meanings and more women present as both workers and customers, became a crucial symbol and rallying point for the politics of locality.

\textbf{Downturn and depression}

From the early 1920s ER&S and MM thrived in the general economic upturn caused by increasing migration, a degree of protection afforded by the

\textsuperscript{104} Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1933, Censuses Bulletin no.9, 9. It should be noted that these figures also probably underestimate women's participation in the formal economy.
Tariff Board, and expanding Commonwealth and State public works.\textsuperscript{105} Boom conditions at ER&S and MM peaked in 1925 when ER&S employed 450 and MM 787.\textsuperscript{106} After 1925, however, both industries began shedding jobs, and this downturn had major implications for the labour market and the town. Despite the downturn at Port Kembla itinerant workers began to have a decisive influence on the local labour market, undermining its localised nature and re-establishing strong regional links. This challenge to the boundaries of the locality was compounded by the overwhelming scale of industrial development at Port Kembla, which began to have increasing regional implications.

Before proceeding with this argument, it is necessary to review the economic developments in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and note the impact of the new arrival on the industrial front, the Hoskins Iron and Steel Company Ltd. The impending move of the company to Port Kembla created great excitement in the Illawarra. The \textit{Illawarra Mercury} began 1927 with this editorial:

\begin{quote}
The prospects for 1927, so far as this district is concerned, are very bright. It is pleasing to note that its attractions as a tourist resort are now fully established ... In addition, we have the assurance that Hoskins' big works are definitely established ... [This] will mean work for the unemployed, and added prosperity for the district.\textsuperscript{107}
\end{quote}

Despite the projected size of the promised Steelworks, and the hopes for the tourist industry, this optimism was unfounded. Job opportunities at Port Kembla


\textsuperscript{106}Richardson, \textit{The Bitter Years}, 44 and Forster, 'Industrial Development in Australia, 1920—1930', 226.

\textsuperscript{107}\textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 7 January 1927, editorial.
were, in fact, already contracting. In September 1925 the Mt Lyell Cokeworks closed putting 60 men out of work.108 In 1928, 52 men were dismissed from the Government Power House at Port Kembla.109

For the town's larger industries the picture was no brighter. By the late 1920s ER&S was no longer the premier industry in Port Kembla and the 'largest copper smelter in the British empire', but a 'ghost refinery', starved of both orders and raw material.110 Copper prices, never buoyant after the war, dropped further after 1925. Mt Morgan went into liquidation in late 1927 cutting off one of ER&S's largest suppliers of blister copper.111 The Queensland mine's shares in ER&S were purchased by Broken Hill Associated Smelters in 1928, a major company of the Collins House Group.112 The new owners of ER&S believed the company's

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108 See South Coast Times, 11 September 1925 and Annual Report for the Year ended 30 September 1925, Mt Lyell Mining and Railway Company, VSL. The report notes that the Cokeworks was shut down because of 'increases in the cost of coal and in wages coupled with a decline in output, [which] made our operations in this direction unprofitable.' Generally, Mt Lyell was suffering from a drastic reduction in world copper prices and selling the Port Kembla plant, along with shedding one thousand jobs in Tasmania, was part of a cost cutting scheme instituted in response to these conditions. See Blainey, The Rush that Never Ended, 256–258.

109 William Davies (State Member for Wollongong) in NSWP. 1928, vol.113, 995. One of those was Mrs M. Ryan's father. See Mrs M. Ryan in Davis, op.cit., 77.

110 Blainey, The Peaks of Lyell, 216.

111 J.W. Long, The Early History of the Mt Morgan, Dawson and Callide Valleys, [Mt Morgan?], 1962. The company was refloated in July 1929 and continued in a small way, sometimes supplying copper ore to ER&S throughout the 1930s. Adequate supplies of copper ore was an on-going problem for ER&S in the 1930s. In 1935 the General Superintendent reported that ore supplies were 'almost negligible' and operations were 'confined almost entirely to gold bearing materials.' See General Superintendent's Annual Report for the Year ended 29 October 1935, BHAS Collection, 1/100/2/9/1, MUA. The problem was alleviated in 1937 when ER&S secured an important contract to refine all of Mt Lyell's cathode copper and also won a tender for the treatment of ore from the new Cobar mine. General Superintendent's Report for the year ended 2 November 1937, BHAS Collection, 1/100/2/9/2, MUA.

future was a bleak one, more a matter of survival than expansion.\textsuperscript{113} In 1928 the Mt Lyell Company in Tasmania built its own smelting works partly cutting off another major source of ore for the Port Kembla smelter.\textsuperscript{114} The ER&S workforce, numbering 450 in 1925, dropped to 150 by 1929, and remained at that level throughout the depression.\textsuperscript{115}

MM fared rather better than ER&S through the late 1920s and the 1930s, but the company was not immune to the effects of the depression. After record levels of production and employment in 1925, the situation had deteriorated by 1929 and a "[r]eduction of hands in certain sections [was] unavoidable."\textsuperscript{116} In 1930 the Rod and Wire Factory and the TCF closed and orders for the Tube Factory declined. The worst year for MM was 1932, as it was for the manufacturing industry generally throughout New South Wales. The highest number of workers employed at MM that year was 200, as compared to 787 in 1925.\textsuperscript{117} Post Master General orders, which virtually kept the TCF running, were only 7 per cent of the pre-depression levels. Only the Tube Factory remained in continuous (albeit limited) production.

Throughout the region the economic situation was no better. Unemployment in the Illawarra coal mines was chronic in the 1920s, and by July 1930, 1300 miners (or one in every three) were unemployed. Many of these men, and itinerant labourers from outside the region, looked to Port Kembla for some hope of work regardless of the poor prospects there because of the interest, excitement and hope generated by the Hoskins venture and the State

\textsuperscript{113}Directors' Report to the Shareholders in ER&S Records, [ND: early 1928].
\textsuperscript{114}The Mt Lyell Smelter turned blister copper into cathode copper (that is 99.5 per cent pure), which still had to be sent to Port Kembla if further refining was required.
\textsuperscript{115}Letter from J.P. Caddy to Colin Fraser, 4 January 1932. 'MM Pty Ltd 1928—1932', Sir Colin Fraser Papers—BHAS Collection, 1/127/27, MUA.
\textsuperscript{116}Reports and Statement of Account for Year ended 31 March 1930, Metal Manufactures Pty Ltd, D21/11/2, WUA.
\textsuperscript{117}Forster, 'Industrial Development in Australia, 1920—1930', 226.
Government's plans for a cross-country railway from Port Kembla to Moss Vale.\textsuperscript{118} As early as 1926 the Government Labour Agent in Wollongong, W.J. Cochrane, warned that 'it was practically useless for unemployed from other centres to seek work on these works', but nevertheless the stream of men into the district continued.\textsuperscript{119} In June 1927 over one half of the 521 men registered at the Wollongong Labour Exchange were from outside the Illawarra, and only 106 could be placed in employment.\textsuperscript{120}

Hoskins Iron and Steel Company Ltd began construction work at Port Kembla in early 1927.\textsuperscript{121} The following year Australian Iron and Steel Pty Ltd (AI&S) was formed and a new type of employer had arrived at Port Kembla. The AI&S Blast Furnace, completed in August 1928, was not that different from furnaces at ER&S and MM, but it represented industrial production on a scale that was new to Port Kembla. AI&S also brought new management practices and a new generation of technology. Cecil Hoskins, Managing Director, noted that 'efficiency and economy of operation were one of the prime objects sought and the programme included the installation of the best labour saving machinery and equipment obtainable.'\textsuperscript{122} The Blast Furnace at Lithgow constructed in 1907 by William Sandford's Ltd was operated by 100 men, while the new Port Kembla furnace required only thirty.\textsuperscript{123}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[118]\textsuperscript{118} Richardson, \textit{The Bitter Years}, 31. For the situation in the 1920s see William Davies' (State Member for Wollongong) comments during an adjournment debate on unemployment in the Illawarra coal mines in\textit{NSWPD}, 1924, vol.96, 409–416.
\item[119]\textsuperscript{119} Illawarra Mercury, 27 August 1926.
\item[120]\textsuperscript{120} Illawarra Mercury, 17 June 1927.
\item[121]\textsuperscript{121} Minutes of Directors' Meetings, Hoskins Iron and Steel Company Ltd, 10 February 1927, BHPA/S24/1. The Hoskins family had made their fortune in the metalworking trade in Sydney in the late nineteenth century and moved into iron and steelmaking at Lithgow in 1908. See Biography of Charles Henry Hoskins (1851—1926) in Nairn and Serle \textit{op.cit.}, 371—373 and Cecil Hoskins, \textit{op.cit.}, especially Chapter 4.
\item[122]\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Ibid.}, 93.
\item[123]\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Ibid.}, 97.
\end{footnotes}
But 'efficiency and economy of operation' only went so far at AI&S. The company developed a reputation for inefficiency, disorganisation and heavy handedness in industrial relations. On one occasion bags of concrete were left uncovered in a rainstorm and the concrete set, having to be torn out of the ground.\textsuperscript{124} Much of the initial construction work of the Blast Furnace and rolling mills was carried out by horse and cart, with only one steam-powered crane available. M. Finch started work in August 1933 as a mill hand at the 10 Inch Mill at AI&S. Finch, like many other steelworkers, had transferred from Lithgow where he performed the same job.\textsuperscript{125} He recalled the hard physical labour required, despite the technical sophistication of some of the equipment:

We used to work at a furnace which was about six feet by ten feet that they used to put the billets into. They had four furnaces in the mill. You had to pull the door open with a pair of tongs, grab hold of the billet and pull it out ... We had to drag it about forty feet to the mill to be rolled. Everything was done manually. They even moved the billets on wheelbarrows.\textsuperscript{126}

While the Blast Furnace was the latest American design, the rolling mills transferred from Lithgow were of British origin, and advice was sought from British specialists. In contrast, the Broken Hill Proprietary Company Ltd (BHP) at Newcastle relied on more sophisticated American specialists.\textsuperscript{127} Despite the fact that AI&S had 'one of largest blast furnaces in the empire' which could produce 730 tons of pig iron per day, the steelmaking furnaces were not properly suited to

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{124} Hughes, \textit{The Australian Iron and Steel Industry}, 107.
\textsuperscript{125} On Lithgow workers at Port Kembla see \textit{BHP Review}, June 1937.
\textsuperscript{126} M. Finch in Davis, \textit{op.cit.}, 86.
\textsuperscript{127} Hughes, \textit{The Australian Iron and Steel Industry}, 107.
\end{flushleft}
Photograph 5: Steel furnace foundations at AI&S, 14 May 1929.

Photograph 6: The site of the Hoskins Steelworks with the Wollongong/Port Kembla railway line in the foreground.
the mills that were eventually constructed to work the iron.\textsuperscript{128} These mills were all steam driven (often production had to be stopped to wait for pressure to build in the furnaces), while BHP in Newcastle had electrically-driven mills from 1927.\textsuperscript{129}

The success story of Al&S was, however, the Spun Pipe Plant which turned the copious amounts of Port Kembla iron into pipes from August 1929 until its closure in 1963.\textsuperscript{130} The large demand for iron pipes was in part due to the State Government relief work programme which used considerable amounts of this material. On the eve of the depression the Spun Pipe Plant was one of the few successful and profitable parts of the Steelworks, as Al&S was more commonly known.

Despite the gap between the rhetoric of Al&S management practices and the reality of disorganisation at the workplace, the company's approach was a decisive change from the paternalism of ER&S. Al&S had no interest in where and how workers lived. They viewed their workforce instead as labour power mobilised for the company ends, and in conditions where there was an already-established industrial workforce with such an oversupply of labour, Al&S had no reason to be concerned about strategies for attracting labour or ensuring company loyalty—during the depression the reality that there were hundreds of men ready to fill the shoes of any recalcitrant worker was effective enough discipline.\textsuperscript{131} The breakdown of links between industry and local society helped clear the way for the regionalisation of the labour market, and the decline of industrial paternalism removed an important force behind the mobilisation of local identity.

The effects on the labour market of the economic slump, and Al&S's half-finished integrated Steelworks, were catastrophic. The establishment of Al&S

\textsuperscript{128}Cochrane, 'Australian Iron and Steel Company Port Kembla, 1935—1939', 63.
\textsuperscript{129}Forster, \textit{Industrial Development in Australia, 1920—1930}, 143.
\textsuperscript{130}Minutes of Al&S Directors' Meetings, 23 August 1929, BHPA/S24/1.
\textsuperscript{131}Murray and White, \textit{op.cit}. 70.
attracted nation-wide attention and the new works for many unemployed men represented a chance (perhaps a last chance) to find employment. In 1928 the organiser for the newly-formed Illawarra Trades and Labour Council, Steve Best, reported that 'men continue to pour in from other districts.'\textsuperscript{132} Ces Catterel, who lived on the main road from Wollongong to Port Kembla in the 1920s and early 1930s, recalled seeing numerous men arriving in the town alone and on foot during the depression.\textsuperscript{133} Although itinerant male workers had long been a presence in Port Kembla, the depression brought them in like never before.\textsuperscript{134} Their presence in the town, and their hessian bag and kerosene tin shacks on its outskirts, were a common sight from 1930.

This influx of outside labour led to a major rearrangement of the town-centred labour market. Itinerant male workers, sometimes with their families, lived in two main unemployed camps on the margins of the town: the 'Official Camp' (as it became known from 1932) near Coomaditchie Lagoon, and the Flinders Street camp near Al&S. Other areas where the unemployed lived included a small camp near the mouth of Tom Thumb's Lagoon, shacks behind Fisherman's Beach and Perkin's Beach, and the town's hotels or boarding houses, where a few of the better-off stayed. Altogether, the \textit{Illawarra Mercury} noted that there were over one thousand men camped around the Port Kembla area in early 1932.\textsuperscript{135} Movement in and out of the town was constant. In January 1932 the \textit{South Coast Times} reported that as many as 50 men per week were arriving at Port Kembla.\textsuperscript{136}


\textsuperscript{133}Interview with Ces Catterel, 9.

\textsuperscript{134}As early as 1903 the \textit{Illawarra Mercury} noted the increase of the 'tramp pest' at Port Kembla. 'These wayfarers', complained the \textit{Mercury}, 'are not particular about where they perch for the night and so cause anxiety to many citizens.' \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 14 March 1903.

\textsuperscript{135}\textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 5 February 1932.

\textsuperscript{136}\textit{South Coast Times}, 29 January 1932.
The influx of itinerants during the depression reflected a broadening of the boundaries of the labour market at Port Kembla. Workers from throughout the Illawarra region were also asserting their presence at Port Kembla. By counting occupations on the electoral roll that can be definitely traced to Port Kembla (such as 'steelworker' or 'smelter') some indication of the extent of this regionalisation of the labour market can be gauged. By 1933 there were 41 'steelworkers' living in Wollongong, 34 in Corrimal and twenty-five living as far way as Dapto and Bulli. This regionalisation was part of a broader structural and political challenge to the locality upon which later chapters will expand. The decline in the close correlation between the boundaries of the labour market and the town was the economic foundation of this challenge.

The presence of itinerants in such large numbers at Port Kembla also highlighted divisions in the local social structure between locals and non-locals. This was an important context for the immediate revival of the politics of locality at the onset of the depression, yet a more powerful effect of the depression was to underline class differences and precipitate class conflict. The politics of the local working class, embittered by the oppression and unemployment of the depression, eventually shifted to the left, just as the politics of the local middle class shifted to the right in search of ways to deal with what they understood to be a crisis where private property and private affluence were threatened.

Intermittent employment had declined at Port Kembla during the early 1920s, but from 1925 irregular work returned as ER&S and MM began suffering from the economic downturn. By the time the depression had arrived, as Richardson notes, for many workers it was like 'a depression within a depression', exacerbating conditions that were already common in the late 1920s. For many

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137 Calculated from the Joint Commonwealth/State Electoral Roll, State Electorate of Illawarra, 1933, ML.
workers at Port Kembla, especially the unskilled, intermittent no longer accurately described what were long stretches of unemployment. Worsening periods of underemployment and finally unemployment were experiences that eventually informed more militant and radical union organisation at Port Kembla from the mid-1930s.

Although there are no specific unemployment figures for Port Kembla, the 1933 Census indicates that 767 men in the Central Illawarra, or 24 per cent of the Municipality's male breadwinners were unemployed on the day of the Census. This was higher than the rate for Wollongong (22 per cent), but well below that for Bulli (35 per cent) and the Northern Illawarra (38 per cent). This reveals the more severe situation on the northern coalfields, although the figure for the Central Illawarra is misleadingly low. Many of the 767 unemployed were concentrated in or around Port Kembla itself, and those in the town's unemployed camps with no permanent addresses may have been overlooked by the Census.\textsuperscript{139} Using Census information on income takes into account staggered employment and underemployment, and over the yearly period before the census 1777 men, or 37 per cent of male breadwinners in the Central Illawarra earned less than £103.\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{139}Different methods of measuring unemployment are discussed in Ray Broomhill, \textit{Unemployed Workers: A Social History of the Great Depression in Adelaide}, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1978, 11—19. Broomhill's work, and the work of other historians on unemployment during the depression has been analysed by David Potts. Potts has considered the reliability of different sources for unemployment rates and argues that rather than the commonly adopted 30 per cent or more, the unemployment rate for 1933 is closer to 22 per cent. See David Potts, 'A Reassessment of the Extent of Unemployment in Australia During the Great Depression', \textit{Australian Historical Studies}, vol.24, no.97, October 1991, 376—397. Despite this revision, as Potts himself notes, some regions or localities still had unemployment rates significantly higher than average figures.

\textsuperscript{140}These figures are taken from the \textit{Census of the Commonwealth of Australia}, 1933, vol.1, 137—142. In the Newcastle area (consisting of the Municipalities of Adamstown, Carrington, Hamilton, Lambton, New Lambton, Merewether, Newcastle, Stockton, Wallsend, Waratah, Wickham) 29 per cent of male and female breadwinners were registered as unemployed, while 36 per cent earned less than £52 in the previous
These unemployment and underemployment figures reflected the depressed state of the Port Kembla manufacturing industries. The temporary interruptions to production in the 1920s became lengthy closures during the depression. In April 1930 the AI&S Blast Furnace was shut down because of a lack of orders, and 1600 men were subsequently laid off.¹⁴¹ In June 1930 Colin Fraser, managing director of ER&S, noted that the supply of ore for ER&S from Queensland (Mt Morgan and Cloncurry), 'had practically ceased and we are thrown back on scrap copper to paddle along in a small way.'¹⁴² Most of the furnaces at ER&S operated in rotation and men were employed only when orders were received and 'let go' once they were filled.¹⁴³ The TCF at MM was closed down in December 1930 affecting 100 women employees.¹⁴⁴ Throughout 1931 the TCF 'only operated intermittently for short periods', and it did not resume continuous operations until late 1933.¹⁴⁵

Public works, the traditional State Government response to unemployment, was also cut back at the beginning of depression. In June 1932, however, the State Government moved to place some men on food relief into an emergency work relief programme, popularly known as 'work for the dole.'¹⁴⁶ The Central Illawarra Council adopted the scheme in May 1933, and 581 men were employed

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¹⁴¹ *New South Wales Industrial Gazette*, vol.XXVIII, April 1930, 893.
¹⁴² Letter from Colin Fraser to W.S. Robinson, 26 June 1930, 'ER&S—Miscellaneous', Sir Colin Fraser Papers, BHAS Collection, 1/84/5, MUA.
¹⁴³ Letter from E.A. White to Colin Fraser, 20 June 1928, 'Port Kembla Report 1928', BHAS Collection, 1/84/4, MUA.
¹⁴⁴ General Manager's report for the year ending 31 March 1931, Metal Manufactures Pty Ltd, D21/11/1, WUA.
¹⁴⁵ General Manager's report for the year ending 31 March 1932 and General Manager's report for the year ending 31 March 1934, Metal Manufactures Pty Ltd, D21/11/1. WUA.
in the Municipality, 307 of them from the Port Kembla area. Council received a
grant of £5000 and resolved to contribute £600 to £900 to purchase materials.
Jobs included cleaning out water tables, bridge repairs, road maintenance, tree
planting and footpath construction. Single men were paid 9s.4d for six hours work
a week, and married men were paid on a scale depending on the number of
children, starting at 15s.7d for ten hours work a week for men with one child.\textsuperscript{147}
Relief work successfully absorbed some of the long-term unemployed. By the end
of 1935 there were 341 men in the Central Illawarra employed in emergency
relief.\textsuperscript{148} Such work helped sustain some workers during the worst of the
depression, and from 1936 ordinary relief work projects paying award wages
were re-established.

Some men, usually those with industrial experience and skills, found work
at the local industries, which began re-employing in 1933. Yet continuous paid
work was still uncommon. For example, between May 1934 and May 1935, 69
men, mostly labourers and wharf labourers, were employed in the permanent
construction gang at AI&S. Despite being paid similar hourly rates, their average
weekly earnings varied from £2.18s to £5.5s. and yearly earnings ranged from
£92.6s. to £273.17s. Even for a group of workers who were apparently
'permanent employees', wages could vary considerably due to sickness, wet
weather, overtime or temporary stand downs.\textsuperscript{149}

Mirroring the increasing size of industry, stores at Port Kembla in the 1930s
were growing larger and employing more waged workers. Fairley's, Port

\textsuperscript{147}CIC Minute Book, 5 May 1933, C1/9, WPL.
\textsuperscript{148}New South Wales Industrial Gazette, vol.XLVIII, December 1935, 1601—1602.
\textsuperscript{149}Statement showing the details of employees who were engaged on construction at the works of
Australian Iron & Steel Ltd (labouring gang only) during the twelve months ended 31st May, 1935', AI&S,
Port Kembla Industrial Department—Correspondence File, Industrial Relations, BHPA/2/131/3. The
pence on both figures have been excluded. The basic wage during that time was £3.7s.6d., except for the
last six weeks when it was raised to £3.8s.6d.
Increased land values in Wentworth Street also meant that entry into small business ownership was more costly. Only those with capital, high-salaried at

The nature of some petite-bourgeois occupations during the depression is confirmed by the turnover of Commercial Houses in Wembla. Had the depression not been so severe, female workers, who were often the sole earner of the family, would not have needed to work in the formal economy. Often these women

Photograph 7: Council employees concreting Wentworth Street, circa 1937.

Photograph 8: The staff of J. G. Fairley’s in 1937 outside the store in Wentworth Street.
Kembla's largest store in the 1930s, employed ten staff by the end of the decade. Increased land values in Wentworth Street also meant that entry into small business ownership was more difficult. Only those with capital, high turnover and high profit margins could afford these prices. Cecil Messiter opened his men's clothing store in late 1937 after purchasing the land in June 1937. He grossed £114 a week with a profit of £34 before overheads.\textsuperscript{150}

The depression, together with the increasing size and capitalisation of stores, had a particular impact on smaller storekeepers. In 1922 Jean Payne's grandmother had opened a mixed business in Wentworth Street selling drinks, cakes, fruit and vegetables and serving counter meals, but, as Payne recalls: 'Then my Gran started to fail and the depression hit us very hard. It hit the town very hard; my grandmother went bankrupt and lost everything.'\textsuperscript{151} The divisions in the class structure were reinforced and the possibility of class mobility reduced as it became harder to set up a small store and 'go into business'. The precarious nature of some petite-bourgeois occupations during the depression is confirmed by the turnover of licensees at Port Kembla's hotels. Between 1929 and 1932 the Commercial Hotel (formerly the Grand) had six different licensees. The Port Kembla Hotel had five different licensees from 1931 to 1935.\textsuperscript{152}

The decline of the family store adversely affected women's participation in the formal economy. By 1940 only 6 per cent of petite-bourgeois occupations were held by women, as compared to 21 per cent in 1924. Such work was either gendered male, with women replaced by male shop assistants, or deskilled to female working-class occupations such as 'cashier' or 'shop assistant'.\textsuperscript{153}

\textsuperscript{150}South Coast Times, 4 October 1940.

\textsuperscript{151}Jean Payne in Preston, \textit{op.cit.}, 38.

\textsuperscript{152}Card Indexes to Publicans' Licences, 3/7886, NSWSA.

\textsuperscript{153}See, for example, Interview with Colin Warrington, (Interviewed by Denise Preston, 1983?), Wollongong TAFE. Warrington started work at Buckland's Hardware Store at the age of fifteen in 1933. His hours were 9.00 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. five days a week, and 9.00 a.m. till Midday on Saturdays, earning
many ways what was occurring in the town's stores reflected the changes in Port Kembla's industries, with increasing size and capitalisation of business, the growth of wage labour, and the increasing male domination of the formal economy.

Despite the improvement in employment prospects by the mid-1930s, the labour market still attracted scores of men seeking work, and for some the crisis hardly abated with the beginning of the 'economic recovery'.\(^{154}\) Even by October 1937 there were still 566 people in the Official Camp near Coomaditchie, the vast majority unemployed.\(^{155}\) With such an oversupply of labour, local industries were in a strong position to dictate working conditions and resist union demands for wage increases, but this recalcitrance, along with better employment prospects in the late 1930s, pushed the labour movement towards a wide-ranging industrial mobilisation.

**Regionalisation and wage labour**

Industrial growth and expansion at Port Kembla in the late 1930s reinforced the regional basis of the labour market. Despite some lingering unemployment and underemployment, the experience of wage labour became increasingly common as major companies began employing again. Both ER&S and MM recovered to pre-depression production levels by the late 1930s. The

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10s.9d. a week. He worked behind the sales counter 'learning the trade'. After a disagreement with the manager in 1937 he worked at ER&S for twelve months, but following a change in management at Bucklands, he was asked to return. He stayed for eighteen months and then joined the second AIF in November 1939.

\(^{154}\) The notion of an economic recovery beginning in 1934 should be treated with caution. There was a discernible improvement in orders and company profits in 1934, and a gradual increase in those employed, but many at Port Kembla were still unemployed at the beginning of war in 1939, and some suggest that the depression didn't finish until 1939. See, for example, Transcript of Interview with Len Ewart, (Interviewed by Wayne Davis, 1983?), Wollongong TAFE, 4.

\(^{155}\) Health Inspector's Report, CIC Minute Book, 11 October 1937, C1/12, WPL.
ER&S workforce increased to 343 by November 1940. At MM the recovery was quicker. By 1935 the workforce there was back to 520, and by the end of the 1930s it had increased to 1000.

These industries, however, were no longer at the centre of Port Kembla's industrial employment. At AI&S recovery and expansion occurred at a far greater pace than at ER&S and MM, and after the BHP takeover of AI&S in 1935, large amounts of capital were spent upgrading and enlarging the plant. A second Blast Furnace was completed in May 1937. In 1938 some of the larger mills were upgraded, the original Blast Furnace was reconditioned and new coke ovens were built. Moreover, AI&S attracted a number of subsidiaries or joint ventures such as John Lysaghts Pty Ltd and Commonwealth Rolling Mills Pty Ltd (CRM), further consolidating its position as the centre of industrial development at Port Kembla. In the late 1930s the focus of industrial development had moved from ER&S and MM, to AI&S and its subsidiaries. By 1940 Lysaghts and CRM alone employed over 1000 workers.

With a growing industrial labour market, the working class at Port Kembla increased numerically and as a percentage of the total paid workforce. In 1930 the working class numbered 795 on the joint State/Commonwealth Electoral Roll, or 67 per cent of the paid workforce. By 1940 this figure had increased to 1970

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156 General Superintendent's Report for the year ended 1 November 1938, BHAS Collection, 1/100/2/9/3, MUA and 'Select Committee Upon the Employment of Youth in Industry—Progress Report, South Coast' in NSWPP, vol.4, 1940, 457—771, Appendix 16 (hereafter 'Select Committee on Youth in Industry, 1940').
157 For the 1935 workforce figure and economic conditions generally at MM in the 1930s see Reports and Statements of Account for Years ended 31 March 1931, 31 March 1932, 31 March, 1933, 31 March 1934 and 31 March 1935, Metal Manufactures Pty Ltd, D21/11/2, WUA and MM Gazette, 14—22. For the 1939 figure see Sydney Morning Herald, 19 January 1940, 11 and 17 December 1940, 7.
158 The employment figures at the end of 1940 were CRM (586), John Lysaghts (685). See 'Select Committee on Youth in Industry, 1940', Appendix 16.
159 Joint Commonwealth/State Electoral Roll, State Electorate of Illawarra, 1930, ML. After 1927 the State and Commonwealth Governments combined their electoral rolls.
or 73 per cent of the paid workforce. This figure is likely an underestimation for it excludes a number of working-class men camped around the town, or moving in and out in search of work, who were often not recorded by electoral rolls. The skilled working-class too had increased numerically from 168 in 1930 to 297 in 1940, but relative to the population growth in the town their share of the paid workforce had decreased from 14 per cent to 11 per cent.\textsuperscript{160} During the large-scale industrial expansion at AI&S it was primarily an unskilled workforce that was needed. While there were many new skilled positions available at the Steelworks, these were partially offset by the decline in workforce numbers at ER&S, which formerly had employed a number of skilled workers. Changes in the production process at AI&S also eradicated some skilled positions.

A major change to the paid work of working-class men in this decade was the growth of regular wage labour. The working day was increasingly marked by clocking on and off, the regulation of time via the factory whistle, and the control of work by company foremen. At ER&S in the late 1930s, as orders flowed in and reliable supplies of copper ore were secured, dramatic movements in workforce numbers became less common. Information on the daily movement in the workforce shows that the vast majority of ER&S workers maintained their jobs throughout the week, and this was indicative of month to month employment numbers as well. In the first week of November 1937, for example, the size of the workforce hovered at around 340 to 380 throughout the week with smaller numbers on Saturday (300) and Sunday (85).\textsuperscript{161}

At AI&S there was a growing permanent workforce from the mid-1930s who, like the workers at ER&S, could expect regular work. AI&S management had recognised that many workers developed useful skills during their stints on

\textsuperscript{160}Calculated from the Joint Commonwealth/State Electoral Roll, State Electorate of Illawarra, 1930 and 1940, ML.

\textsuperscript{161}ER&S Port Kembla Letters Inwards September—December, 1937, Unprocessed ER&S records, Group 5, Number 2, BHAS Collection, MUA.
construction gangs, and made an effort to keep more of these men.\textsuperscript{162} Large retrenchments did not disappear—when the construction of Number Two Blast Furnace was finished in May 1937, 600 men were laid off, and throughout the works construction projects or production itself was continually stopping and starting—but by 1938 AI&S employed almost 3000 men who could reasonably expect paid work every week.\textsuperscript{163} In fact, many of these men endured long hours of enforced overtime, the subject of considerable industrial action in the late 1930s. Unions were incensed that AI&S worked men overtime when there were still large numbers of unemployed in the region.\textsuperscript{164}

New forms of company surveillance were the down-side to more regular work. Erratic and uncertain periods of paid work meant uneven and insufficient wages, but it did free workers from the discipline and monotony of the workplace. In 1936 AI&S established an 'Industrial Department' in an effort to manage the workforce more effectively. This Department maintained extensive personal information on workers, closely scrutinised union affairs and made a concerted effort to encourage workers to seek redress for any grievances through the Department individually, rather than via their union.\textsuperscript{165}

At the same time, more regular employment was one of the springboards for the reconstruction of the union movement. Regular employees were easier to organise and their pay packets replenished union coffers, making funds available to organise and support workers during industrial action. Moreover, in conditions of close control and scrutiny of their work, local workers reacted with increasing

\textsuperscript{162} See, for example, 'List of Open Hearth Second and Third Hands, 6 November 1939', Port Kembla Industrial Department—Correspondence Files, FIA, BHPA/W2/71/4. These labourers, usually with at least five years experience with the company, were the type of workers preferred for promotion to second and third hands.

\textsuperscript{163} Cochrane, 'Australian Iron and Steel, Port Kembla, 1935—1939', 62—68.

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 63 and 74.

\textsuperscript{165} See Port Kembla Industrial Department—General Correspondence File, BHPA/W2/78/1—5.
militancy and engaged in industrial strategies to increase their own 'job control' over the workplace. A more permanent and increasingly unionised workforce, embittered by the depression and experiencing new invasive management strategies was a volatile mix that culminated in widespread industrial class conflict from the mid-1930s.  

Where ER&S and MM once pursued industrial strategies that attempted to blur the boundaries between staff and workers under the guise of a town-centred paternalism, in the late 1930s AI&S worked to maintain these divisions in the labour market, and introduced some aspects of scientific management to the workplace. The question of the role and impact of scientific management on the Australian manufacturing industry is beyond the scope of this thesis, but the new AI&S strategies did have implications for the local middle class, who were now more commonly seen as representatives of a company, rather than members of local society. The AI&S approach focused exclusively on the worker in the context of the workplace, thus severing the links forged by industrial paternalism between locality and industry.  

AI&S encouraged divisions in local society by reinforcing difference in the workplace through the creation of a dual labour market. Close attention was paid to staff wages at AI&S, ensuring that they were higher than the wages of labourers working with them, and prospective staff had to officially resign from

166 The details of this mobilisation are covered in Chapter Seven.  
167 From the mid-1930s AI&S did introduce new supervisory mechanisms typical of scientific management practices like the Industrial Department and a bonus payment scheme. There is no evidence, however, of a wholesale adoption of the approach by management. Their management practices arose as much out of the daily operation of the works and interactions with unions as any imported management ideology. The AI&S experience supports Wright's argument about the limited and specific impact of Taylorism on the Australian manufacturing industry before the Second World War. See Chris Wright, 'Taylorism Reconsidered: The impact of scientific management', Labour History, no.64, May 1993, 34—49.
their unions before their new status could be confirmed. The practice of using staff to cover for day labour during industrial action reinforced divisions in the workforce and often soured industrial relations. The bricklayers' strike from July to August 1934, for example, was precipitated by a wage decrease under a new Industrial Commission award, but the use of staff labour to replace the men hardened the strikers' resolve and led to the involvement of other unions at the Steelworks.

AI&S pursued a policy of widening staff membership, known as the 'staff principle of operation', to create a core of reliable non-unionised workers. In certain strategic parts of the works it was important to have staff labour to cover during industrial action. At the AI&S Power House, stoppages could affect the whole works and the head of the Industrial Department, V.R. Petney, closely monitored the situation so 'that in the event of an emergency sufficient staff men are available.' During the late 1930s, however, the policy was met with increasing resistance from unions who saw it as a way to undermine union numbers and the effectiveness of strikes. Petney recognised this and recommended that new staff appointments be suspended in December 1938 'because of industrial matters.' Even so, this policy, along with the continued

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168 Memo from Production Superintendent to Cecil Harold Hoskins (general manager), 19 September 1940 in Staff—19 February 1940 to 17 August 1940, BHPAW2/111/4 and see generally Staff—12 March 1937 to 17 August 1940, BHPAW2/111/1—4. The Industrial Officer regularly advised prospective staff members how to legally resign from their union. No exceptions to this rule were tolerated. On dual labour markets and the labour process see Richard C. Edwards, *Contested Terrain: The Transformation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, Basic Books, New York, 1979.

169 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 July 1934, 12; 22 August 1934, 14 and 24 August 1934, 16. See also Sheridan, 'A Case Study in Complexity: The Origins of the 1946 Steel Strike in New South Wales', 90.

170 Managing Director's Business Sheets, 27 May 1937, BHP/A19/15.

171 Memo from V.R. Petney (industrial officer) to Cecil Harold Hoskins (general manager), 10 December 1938 in Staff, 12 March 1937—22 December 1937, BHP/W2/111/1.

expansion of the works, meant that by 1941 there were 363 staff at AI&S. Such an approach reinforced class divisions in the formal economy and, at times, exacerbated tensions between management and unions.

By 1940 the scale of industrial development had expanded well beyond the confines of the town. In that year the Sydney Morning Herald estimated that 5000 workers commuted to Port Kembla daily by train, car or bus. By 1947 one in seven male jobs in the paid workforce were in steel or related industries in the Illawarra region. The industrial labour market was now more regional than local.

This was also the case for the local middle class and petite bourgeoisie. By the late 1930s Wollongong had re-established itself as the commercial and suburban centre of the Illawarra. Improvements in roads and the increasing availability of motor cars for the better-off made commuting to Port Kembla a more viable option. The growth of suburbs surrounding Port Kembla also had an influence in widening the spatial boundaries of the labour market. While there were 137 storekeepers on the 1940 Electoral Roll for Port Kembla, twenty-seven of them were from the nearby suburbs of Warrawong, Cringila, Windang and Lake Heights. This reduces the petite bourgeois share of the paid workforce by only 1 per cent but it is indicative of the regionalisation of commercial activity. Suburban growth had spilled over into surrounding areas and presented new opportunities similar to those that Port Kembla had offered in the 1910s and 1920s.

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173 Australian Iron & Steel Limited, Port Kembla—Segregation of Labour, 19 December 1941, Port Kembla Industrial Department—Correspondence Files, BHPA/W2/49/3. The category of 'operating staff' had been abolished by that time.


176 Calculated from the Joint Commonwealth/State Electorate Roll, State Electorate of Illawarra, 1940, ML.
The middle class too were moving into these new suburbs around Port Kembla. On the 1940 Electoral Roll they numbered 298, of which 47 were from Warrawong, Windang, Cringila and Lake Heights. This reduced the size of the middle class actually living at Port Kembla in 1940 to 251.\textsuperscript{177} The scale of industrial and commercial development could not be contained within the locality. The formal economy moved through a cycle of being tied to the regional in the 1900s, becoming more localised in the 1920s, and finally regionalising again in the 1930s.

Industrialisation dramatically changed Port Kembla's social structure. The division of the industrial workforce between staff and labour, reflected and reinforced the class divisions in local society between working class and middle class, and formed the key context for the development of class identity and class conflict. But industrialisation had contradictory effects on local society. Economic development also created a commercial centre that became the key site for the politics of locality, and the town-centred labour market of the 1920s formed the economic basis for the construction and strength of local identity. These different consequences of industrialisation created a shifting and complex set of influences on the experiences and allegiances of local residents which eventually flowed through, as later chapters will demonstrate, into the political and cultural spheres of local society. But there were other long-term economic forces undermining the locality such as developments in Port Kembla's informal economy, and that is the subject of the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{177}ibid.
Chapter 3: Beyond wage labour

In the 1910s, when paid work at Port Kembla harbour was scarce, some waterside workers fished from the jetties, while others headed off to Lake Illawarra or Coomaditchie to catch fish or prawns. The natural resources of Port Kembla, especially those given up by the sea, helped local workers deal with intermittent work, but by the late 1930s this rich environment was compromised, in places completely destroyed, by industrialisation, and more regular wage labour reduced the time and energy workers had for these pursuits. In such conditions the industrial struggles over the male-dominated workplace gained a desperate edge for alternative methods of survival were now less viable.

This chapter outlines these alternative methods of survival characteristic of the informal economy at Port Kembla, not only the fishing and prawning carried out by men, but the range of productive activities undertaken by women and children such as tending vegetables gardens, collecting mushrooms and blackberries. These activities created close economic relationships to the locality, but industrialisation challenged these wage labour alternatives, making the paid work of men more central to a family's survival and reducing the scope and importance of local links. The contraction of links to the locality, the depletion of Port Kembla's natural resources and the increasing dependence on male wages for survival all had a crucial impact on the working-class mobilisation of the late 1930s.

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1Evidence of James Sloan (stevedore, Port Kembla) and Patrick Mulhall (silver mill assistant, ER&S) in PSCPW, 1912, Northern Breakwater at Port Kembla, 22–23 and 26–27.
Rural life and the informal economy

In the 1900s the informal economy was a central part of production and an important means of survival at Port Kembla. According to the 1903 Electoral Roll there were sixteen farmers at Port Kembla. A few of these such as the O'Donnells and the Barretts ran large dairies on land that they owned, but the majority were leaseholders on eight to twelve hectare sections of the Wentworth estate. These small farmers relied on home-based production rather than wage labour for survival. Women had central roles as milkers and butter makers, and children were also important since there was little surplus or profit to employ outside labour. In 1948, Arthur Cousins, an early regional historian, described life on a dairy farm in the Illawarra:

The man, his wife, and his children from about eight years old, generally assisted in the milking. This meant very long hours for school children, as well as for the others. Besides milking, pigs and calves had to be fed, land to be cultivated and fodder grown, cattle had to be feed, weeds to be destroyed.

In these households links with the formal economy were minimal. Men sometimes took paid work outside the farm, working for a better-off neighbour clearing paddocks or erecting fences, but family members usually worked together in the

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3 See M. Hutton, 'Reading the Rural Landscape in the Central Illawarra', MA thesis, University of Sydney, 1987, 49—54 and 97.
production of milk and other home-made products, and the maintenance of the farm.\textsuperscript{5}

Other workers at Port Kembla such as waterside workers and labourers were more reliant on wage labour than dairy farmers, but they often had more than one source of income. John Patterson, a labourer for the Southern Coal Company, also ran the unofficial post official from his home from 1900 to 1907, earning £52 a year for providing this service.\textsuperscript{6} Peter Rieck, a labourer for the Mt Kembla Coal and Oil Company, shared the mail contract with local dairy farmer, Michael O'Donnell, worth a total of £62 a year in the early 1900s.\textsuperscript{7} As noted above, local waterside workers were also well-placed to supplement their wages through fishing from the harbour or nearby beaches.\textsuperscript{8}

The income earned by children was also important. The establishment and enforcement of universal education had taken some children away from household work, but this did not stop them working before and after school or missing school altogether to carry out essential work for the family. Large families, in fact, were often the basis of successful home-based production.\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{5} For example, George Neaves, a leasehold dairy farmer at Port Kembla, contracted to clear paddocks at Spring hill for 5s. an acre. See Illawarra Mercury, 11 February 1899. In 1902 Frank O'Donnell had two young males and a female servant in his employ. He also sometimes employed other local men, such as George Almaide. See South Coast Times, 7 February 1903.

\textsuperscript{6} Letter from Inspector Burton to Secretary, Post Master General's Office, 19 July 1907 in Port Kembla Post Office Files.

\textsuperscript{7} See Illawarra Mercury, 29 October 1904.

\textsuperscript{8} Interview with Joe Hill and Steve Wade, (Interviewed by Glenn Mitchell, 7 October 1976), WPL. Hill and Wade arrived at Port Kembla in 1913 or 1914 and lived near Hill 60. They both survived working as fisherman or as waterside workers in the 1910s and 1920s.

\textsuperscript{9} This chapter only touches on the history of the family at Port Kembla. While my focus is on other aspects of Port Kembla's history, such a project is also handicapped by the lack of a general social history of the family in Australia. Apart from work by Patricia Grimshaw in the early 1980s (Patricia Grimshaw, 'Women and the Family in Australian History' in Elizabeth Windshuttle, Women, Class and History: Feminist Perspectives on Australian History, 1788—1978, Fontana/Collins, Melbourne, 1980, 37—52), most research has focused on state intervention or ideological constructions of family, rather than the lived
number of people per occupied dwelling in the Central Illawarra was 5.08 in 1901, and 4.79 in 1911. At Port Kembla families as large as seven, eight or more were common early in the century. Bob Rees, born in 1904, had six brothers and two sisters. Ursula Lindsay, born in 1907, grew up in a family of nine children. This active and rural-based informal economy, well-supplied with labour by large families, was an important context for the large-scale industrialisation that would follow.

**Industrialisation and the informal economy**

In the 1910s and 1920s the informal economy at Port Kembla was still a major component of a household's survival. Rural traditions were maintained, and keeping cows, chickens and geese, or tending vegetable gardens were common practices. However, the increasingly industrialised society, and the growth of male wage labour, was not without its effects on the informal economy.

The male domination of the industrialised formal economy, outlined in the previous chapter, meant that the informal economy was of special importance to women. Taking in lodgers was an important source of income, especially since the periodic demand for male labour at Port Kembla's industries created a large floating population of men looking for accommodation. In 1912 Anne Chesher had at least two full-time boarders living in her front room. Gordon Rodwell's widowed mother had two boarders in the early 1920s, distant male relatives who

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11 Interview with Bob Rees, 1.

12 Interview with Ursula Lindsay, 2.

13 *Illawarra Mercury*, 1 March 1912.
worked at Electrolytic Refining and Smelting Company of Australia Ltd (ER&S) and whose board helped the family survive without a 'male breadwinner'.

This kind of women's work was closely linked to the conditions of the male labour market. In 1907, when the labour market at Port Kembla was swamped by Australian Smelting Corporation Ltd (ASC) labourers, the _Mercury_ reported that '[a]lmost every second house at the Port has been converted into a Restaurant. Mrs Jackson daily feeds about 70, Mrs Pascoe over 50 and others from 2 or 3 to a dozen.' In late 1912, a generally poor period for Port Kembla's industries, Elizabeth Johnson had three lodgers. Only three months earlier she had fourteen, but 'they left because they were out of work.'

Other diverse home-based activities such as cooking, jam-making and sewing were also common, but are too numerous to deal with extensively. When Albert Rieck married in 1920 his wife resigned from her job as a tailorress in Wollongong, but she purchased a sewing machine and continued work at home. As Rieck recalls, 'She bought a sewing machine, and she used to do all her own [clothes], and all the kid's clothes.' In the 1920s Avis Bright's mother had fruit trees in her backyard from which she made jam. The frequency of these activities is impossible to gauge, but they were important for a family's survival, as they helped balance tight budgets and stretch scarce resources.

Women's work also extended away from the household to include irregular forays into the labour market. This work was characterised by the lack of defined rules or procedures of work, and the expectation that such labour market

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15 Illawarra Mercury, 8 March 1907.

16 Illawarra Mercury, 19 November 1912.

17 Interview with Albert Rieck, 8.

18 Interview with Avis Bright, (interviewed by Narelle Crux, 14 October 1982), D153/8, WUA.
participation was only temporary. Gordon Rodwell's mother took casual jobs such as cleaning, washing and ironing, which supplemented her income from two boarders.\(^{19}\) Some local petite-bourgeois and middle-class women employed domestic help. In 1913 Mrs H.R. Lee advertised for a 'competent general servant' paying 15s. a week, and in 1915 Sarah Middleton advertised for an 'experienced girl for household duties', but if the small number of advertisements is any guide, then numbers of domestic servants were very small.\(^{20}\)

In the 1910s and 1920s men had their own niches in the informal economy, primarily outdoor activities such as fishing, prawning, shooting, and blackberry picking. The irregularity of waged work meant that there was time available, but these extra resources were sometimes necessary to cover for insufficient wages. Working as a waterside worker from 1926, William Bailey experienced considerable breaks between employment. During this time he would fish in the harbour, gather mushrooms west of Port Kembla (in an area that became Cringila) or go shooting for quail near Lake Illawarra.\(^{21}\) Fishing trips to Lake Illawarra, Coomaditchie or the beaches around Port Kembla were common, and men also rowed to Big Island, hoping to benefit from the island's resources of fish, birds and bird's eggs. The shoals and reefs around the island were also prolific, if very dangerous, fishing spots.\(^{22}\) The demand for row boats in the 1920s supported a small business in Port Kembla harbour hiring out boats.\(^{23}\)

\(^{19}\) Interview with Gordon Rodwell, 3.

\(^{20}\) *Illawarra Mercury*, 29 November 1911 and *South Coast Times*, 12 March 1915.

\(^{21}\) Interview with William Bailey, (Interviewed by Glenn Mitchell, 14 October 1976), WPL.

\(^{22}\) For a report of the drowning in this area of Modesta Cappalleto, an Italian fisherman, see *Illawarra Mercury*, 21 January 1927.

\(^{23}\) Frank Gamble in Davis, *op.cit.*, 15 and Interview with William Bailey, (Interviewed by Glenn Mitchell, 14 October 1976), WPL. The charge was 4s. to 5s. for the day.
David Potts has argued that these responses to underemployment or unemployment represent a 'positive culture of poverty'. Focusing on oral evidence from the 1930s depression in Victoria, Potts suggests that unemployment encouraged people to seek new opportunities:

In sum, the interviewees described ways in which they got by materially, enough not to undermine their chances of enjoying life in other ways. And along the way, in actively getting by, they claimed rewards in self-expression and self-esteem.

The informal economy helped some men at Port Kembla struggle through periods of unemployment, but Potts has an overly-optimistic view of the informal economy. Not all men had the opportunities to survive long periods without paid work, especially itinerant labourers, who sometimes lacked the knowledge of local

25 Ibid., 7. For a critique of Potts see Joanne Scott and Kay Saunders, 'Happy Days are Here Again?: A Reply to David Potts', Journal of Australian Studies, no.36, March 1993, 10—22. Scott and Saunders compare Potts' view of the depression in Victoria with evidence from Queensland, emphasising his selective and limited approach to the material. One criticism they do not make forcefully enough is Potts' oversight of the issues of memory and oral history. For Potts, his oral history unproblematically reveals a new interpretation of the depression, but this empiricist approach has been the subject of wide-ranging criticism since Patrick O'Farrell's 1979 article in Quadrant. See Patrick O'Farrell, 'Oral History: Fact and Fiction', Quadrant, November 1979, 15—22. For a more up-to-date appraisal see John Murphy, 'The Voice of Memory: History, Autobiography and Oral Memory', Australian Historical Studies, vol.22, no.87, October 1986, 157—175. Debates about oral history have dealt with the cultural and psychological factors which can influence the form of oral narratives, and ways of using or 'reading' oral history as a valuable historical source. Also, Potts doesn't incorporate other sources in his argument, potentially reifying problems which exist in his oral sources. It could be argued that his article reveals more about the internalisation of the dominant cultures' ideas about the depression, and people's desires not to see themselves as victims, rather than a valid interpretation of the lived experience of the depression.
resources and the skills to exploit them. For these men often the only means of survival was gambling or theft. In February 1928 William Hamilton, who was camped at Port Kembla and had not worked for the last six months, lived off a £174 win at the races, and also frequented two-up games at Corrimal.\textsuperscript{26} That same year Lionel Horton, an itinerant labourer camped at Port Kembla, was charged with stealing from Frost Brothers, a general store in Wentworth Street. He told the Wollongong Police Court:

[We] camped in the bush at Port Kembla. We were having a rough spin. My Uncle was giving us a few shillings but it wasn't enough to keep us in food, so we all decided the only way to get some money was to break into some place.\textsuperscript{27}

Even for men with the skills and resources to exploit the informal economy, its resources were seasonal, its harvest unpredictable. Fishing and prawning were primarily summer activities, and there was also competition from professional white fisherman at Lake Illawarra and Koori fisherman at Port Kembla.

In the 1910s and 1920s children collected bottles, firewood, loose coal from beside railway lines, picked blackberries or helped out in the family business. Many, such as Gordon Rodwell and Sarah Drury, left school at the minimum legal age of fourteen to find jobs. For girls, especially the eldest in large families, the demands of housework led to their early departure from school.

\textsuperscript{26}\textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 3 February 1928. Hamilton was charged with vagrancy. The presiding Judge at his Wollongong Court appearance let him off with a warning, telling him to 'cease frequenting these gambling places and get work.'

\textsuperscript{27}\textit{South Coast Times}, 3 February 1928.
Ursula Lindsay left school on her fourteenth birthday in 1921 to 'help out with the family' of nine children.²⁸

Children still at school were also required to undertake chores or part-time work. Ethel Combes and her older brother helped their widowed mother before and after school at her cleaning job in the ER&S staff offices.²⁹ In the mid-1920s they also trapped rabbits and birds and collected mushrooms in the bush at Lake Illawarra (near what later became Warrawong). The rabbits were skinned and sold for 1s.6d. a pair, while the fish and mushrooms were used by the household: 'Anything we made like that we always gave to mum, but it was only fun to us.'³⁰ This kind of work was often understood by children to be leisure, especially in the case of fishing, which was a popular childhood pastime, but there was also an illegal side to their activities. Theft on a small scale was carried out by local children. During the 1920s the best gardens in Port Kembla were constantly raided by young thieves, as Colin Warrington remembers:

During the appropriate period we would jump over other people's fences at night and pinch food from them—grapes and what have you ... we would have to go and find food just to keep the family going.³¹

There were plenty of vegetable gardens to target. In the 1920s vegetable gardens were a major component of household production and labour, and they

²⁸Interview with Ursula Lindsay, 4.
²⁹Interview with Ethel Combes, 3—4.
³⁰Interview with Ethel Combes, 3.
³¹Colin Warrington in Davis, op.cit., 27. See also Interview with Ces Bright, (Interviewed by Narelle Crux, 14 October 1982), D153/11, WUA: 'I used to do a bit of fruit pinching and I got caught in the Sunday School teachers' yard.' In the 1920s James Perry reportedly had 'a fine crop' of gooseberries, but 'boys raid the plot at every opportunity.' South Coast Times, 21 March 1924.
filled the backyards and spare blocks of the town. As Ethel Combes recalled, 'everybody had their gardens those days.' The minimum block size at Port Kembla of 43 metres by twelve metres ensured that most households had the necessary space. Both the Simon’s and the Drury’s had vegetable gardens on the spare block next door during the 1920s. Suburbanisation also offered more space for lemon, apple, and apricot trees and choko vines; cows, chickens and ducks were also a common sight in the backyards and spare blocks of the town. The association of vegetable gardens with the provision of food meant that women had considerable claim to their upkeep. Sarah Drury’s grandmother and mother both tended large vegetable gardens. While women cultivated and harvested gardens, men sometimes carried more out 'physical' labour such as weeding and digging. These patterns of home-based production represented the skills and practices of a rural economy transplanted into an urban context.

Large areas of vacant land surrounding Port Kembla also provided space for cows, or were useful foraging areas for mushrooms and blackberries. More importantly, there were a number of resource-rich areas around Port Kembla—beaches and headlands, Lake Illawarra, Tom Thumb’s Lagoon, Coomaditchie Lagoon and scattered patches of vacant crown land—which offered fish, prawns, birds, bird’s eggs, mushrooms and blackberries. Port Kembla residents could readily access these kinds of resources, unlike their counterparts in the inner

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32 Interview with Ethel Combes, 11 and Gilding, op.cit., 61.
33 Those living in flats, boarding houses and camps were exceptions. Also, some residents of Military Road and Darcy Road did not have vegetable gardens because of regular flooding in their street washed gardens away. Evidence of James Perry (labourer, ER&S) in NSW Board of Trade, 155—160. For the sizes of blocks of land at Port Kembla see Evidence of W.L. Weber (real estate agent) in NSW Board of Trade, 56.
34 Interview with Morgan Simon, 5 and Interview with Sarah Drury, 4.
35 ibid. See also Interview with Ethel Combes, 10. On the gendered division of labour in vegetable gardens see Interview with Heather Eklund, 3.
suburbs of Sydney or the working-class suburb of Richmond in Melbourne. The barren environs of other industrial towns like Broken Hill or Mt Isa also precluded such possibilities. The rich coastal environment at Port Kembla created an amalgam of industrial and rural methods of survival.

The economic importance of the informal economy was not lost on either the local unions or companies. In 1920 at the New South Wales Board of Trade case to determine the living wage on the South Coast, ER&S pointed to the prevalence of vegetable gardens and lodgers as an argument for lowering the basic wage. The Australian Workers’ Union (AWU) and the Federated Engine Drivers’ and Firemans’ Association (FEDFA) resisted strongly moves to have the informal economy form part of the basic wage determination and attacked the company’s evidence claiming it had been given mostly by male clerks:

whose living in the first place is substantially different to the average manual worker and who in the second place are not able to speak of home expenditure as well as their womenfolk.

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36 Robin Walker’s article on life in the industrial suburbs of Sydney in 1913 makes no mention of activities such as growing vegetables, rabbiting or even fishing to supplement working-class incomes. See Robin Walker, ‘Aspects of Working-Class Life in Industrial Suburbs, 1913’, Labour History, no. 58, May 1990, 36–47. For Richmond see McCalman, op. cit., 120–129.
37 Port Kembla is similar to towns like Wonthaggi and Newcastle in this respect. These industrial towns also had easy access to relatively resource-rich natural environments. Cochrane notes that at Wonthaggi ‘idle time facilitated a growing dependence of local game and fish from the nearby coast.’ Peter Cochrane, ‘The Wonthaggi Coal Strike, 1934’, Labour History, no. 27, 1974, 14. At Newcastle Merritt notes how unemployed ironworkers during the depression built shacks on the banks of the Hunter River and fished and caught rabbits. See John Merritt, ‘The Federated Ironworkers’ Association in the Depression’, Labour History, no. 21, 1971, 52. Lake Macquarie, south of Newcastle, was another prolific fishing and prawning area for the regional working class.
38 NSW Board of Trade, 70–76 and 144. On lodgers see ibid. 110–116.
39 Concluding address by Mr Croft (advocate for the AWU and other unions), NSW Board of Trade, 372.
The company was unsuccessful in this case, but attempts to appropriate the informal economy and the depth of resistance to such moves indicates its importance to the working class.

It was the household that negotiated the particular conditions of the informal and formal economies, but different members of a household didn't always have equal claim to resources.\textsuperscript{40} Eleanor Allan, a music teacher, told the Board of Trade in 1920 that her husband, a ladler at ER&S, received a wage bonus, 'but it is no good to me. It is his property; I do not know what he does with it.' Her own income as a teacher went into 'a common fund for housekeeping and trying to get a home together.'\textsuperscript{41} In other households husbands gave their pay packets to their wives, who were responsible for expenditure and budgeting. Edith Neaves recalled that her father gave his pay packet to her mother, but not before he tried to obscure the exact amount:

Of course he'd get hold of the end of the envelope and he'd do this sometimes [rubbing the envelope] so she couldn't see what was on it.

Q: He tried to keep a little for himself?
Yes a little bit for his grog. [laughter]\textsuperscript{42}

In contrast, Morgan Simon remembered that his father was in control of budgeting, although it was still a consultative process:

\textsuperscript{40}As Lydia Morris, op.cit., 17 and 21 argues, the household cannot be treated as a 'consensually operating unit ... In fact, both power within the household and material resources may be differentially distributed.'

\textsuperscript{41}NSW Board of Trade, 131.

\textsuperscript{42}Interview with Edith Neaves, 6.
I think dad was the one that handled the purse strings. He brought his pay home and they'd [mother and father] sit down together and they'd budget things out and that was the way that he did it.\textsuperscript{43}

A range of negotiations over money and resources occurred within Port Kembla households, but generally the extensive informal economy gave women and children some independence from male wages, while men could also deal more effectively with lengthy interruptions to waged work.

The town and its surrounds was more than just a context for paid work, family and social life. The rich environmental context came to be appreciated for the resources it offered and the quality of life it ensured. The decline in the informal economy, beginning in the early 1920s, slowly undermined this important local economic relationship.

The decline of the informal economy

In the 1920s and 1930s land and land use came under increasing control and surveillance by state and local government authorities, and this began to restrict opportunities in the informal economy. In 1921 three 'Port Kembla residents' were charged with stealing oysters from the Lagoon: 'Constable McLaughlin noted that there had been several complaints to the Fisheries Department of such action.'\textsuperscript{44} From the 1920s the Council became increasingly concerned about the preservation of the Port Kembla Reserve (situated between Metal Manufactures Ltd (MM) and Hill 60), and prohibited cutting trees in the

\textsuperscript{43}Interview with Morgan Simon, 18.

\textsuperscript{44}See Illawarra Mercury, 5 August 1921. In 1914 the Fisheries Department had taken control of the oysters in Tom Thumb's Lagoon, and those caught 'illegally harvesting' were prosecuted.
area.\textsuperscript{45} In 1928 the Council resolved to fence off the Department of Defence land near the eastern breakwater in an effort to stop its 'unwanted exploitation.'\textsuperscript{46} Government and Council action was motivated by a number of different factors. Crown land around Port Kembla was becoming increasingly valuable to the State Government and a source of potential revenue from new industries, while decisions to set aside and protect reserves were attempts by a rural-dominated Council to control and regulate large-scale urban growth at Port Kembla.\textsuperscript{47}

Such moves came into conflict with the local working class who understood the areas around Port Kembla to be a legitimate public storehouse of valuable resources—an attitude akin to the idea of a 'village common.'\textsuperscript{48} In a letter to the \textit{Illawarra Mercury} in 1921, a correspondent named 'Enthusiast' objected to the restriction of private fishing at Tom Thumb's Lagoon:

\begin{quote}
Hitherto this was a place where a working man and his family could enjoy one of the luxuries provided by nature ... insult has been added to injury by leasing the best oyster beds to a private individual.\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{45}For example in March 1927 Council began charging campers on the reserve 1s. rental and 'caution[ed] them against timber cutting and such or prosecution will follow.' CIC Minute Book, 9 March 1927, C1/6, WPL.

\textsuperscript{46}CIC Minute Book, 18 April 1928, C1/6, WPL.

\textsuperscript{47}The unimproved capital value of land in 'A Riding' in the Central Illawarra Shire (which included Port Kembla and its surrounding suburbs, Windang, Steeltown, Lake Heights, Berkeley and Warrawong) grew from £322,505 in 1934 to £852,030 in 1943. See Shire of Central Illawarra, Information Sheet, July 1944 in CIC Finance Committee Minute Book, C2/2, WPL.

\textsuperscript{48}Rights to commonage had been revoked in New South Wales in 1869, which makes its persistence into the early twentieth century at Port Kembla all the more remarkable.

\textsuperscript{49}Letter from 'Enthusiast' in \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 1 April 1921.
An incident at a Council meeting in 1935 demonstrated different class-based understandings of the environment. Alderman William Gorrell, a dairy farmer from Unanderra, moved that blackberries be declared a noxious weed in the municipality. For farmers, these introduced bushes took over valuable grazing land and injured cattle. Alderman Jack Mathews, a labourer from Port Kembla, disagreed: 'I like blackberries. I'm not going to vote for it.' Other Aldermen were ambivalent and the motion lapsed, but the Council did officially declare blackberries a noxious weed in 1939.

Not only government authorities and councils were tightening control on land. In the 1930s the industries of Port Kembla also stepped up security measures. This was partly in response to the theft of industrial and construction material that littered the works by the unemployed to build temporary homes. In February 1935, during Cyril Rook's court appearance for allegedly stealing copper pipe from Australian Iron and Steel Ltd (AI&S), Sergeant Pye from Port Kembla claimed that 'the AI&S coy [company] was losing property worth thousands of pounds every year.' Those who had gathered bags of coal trackside in the 1910s and 1920s ran the risk of prosecution in the 1930s. The State Government's role in this process was a more rigid policing of industrial property from 1930. This led to numerous charges of stealing coal, corrugated iron, piping and other materials from the local industries coming to court during the early 1930s. There is no direct evidence, but the responses of Government and local companies may have been motivated by the concern to protect industry

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50 South Coast Times, 22 February 1935.
51 Comments of Sergeant Pye reported in South Coast Times, 22 February 1935.
52 Stanley Farrant, a long time resident of Port Kembla was charged with stealing corrugated iron from the Brickworks. His defense was that bad weather had made him steal the iron to cover his fire and tent. See Illawarra Mercury, 15 May 1931. F.E. Pherson was charged with stealing coal at Port Kembla and fined £3. See South Coast Times, 21 April 1933. Ben Owens was charged with the same offence in June 1933. See South Coast Times, 23 June 1933.
and private property in the worsening economic and political crisis which engulfed New South Wales from 1930.\textsuperscript{53}

Regulatory moves regarding land and land use occurred in the context of the increasing environmental destruction of the areas around Port Kembla, outlined in Chapter One. Industrialisation, through land clearance and the pollution of air and water, slowly destroyed the resources that had supported an active informal economy, while at the same time cemented male wage labour as the dominant means of making a living. Urbanisation too, led to a decrease in the vacant land around Port Kembla and also produced environment-destroying pollution.

There were other setbacks for the informal economy. As average family sizes fell, the labour available for household production decreased. Edith Neaves growing up in Port Kembla in the 1910s and early 1920s had two sisters and two brothers, and an ER&S survey of its workers in 1920 found that the average number of children under fourteen per family was two.\textsuperscript{54} At the 1921 Census there were an average of 4.64 people per occupied dwelling in the Central Illawarra, declining further to 4.16 by the 1933 Census.\textsuperscript{55} Birth rates in the municipality fell from 46 children born per 1000 people in 1917 to 34 per 1000 in 1928.\textsuperscript{56} This reflected trends throughout the State as women had fewer children and took more control of their reproductive lives.\textsuperscript{57} By 1934 the birth rate in the Central Illawarra had fallen to eighteen children per 1000 people, slightly above the State average of seventeen.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{53}This feeling of crisis is best evoked and analysed by Andrew Moore in \textit{The Secret Army and the Premier}; especially Chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{54}\textit{NSW Board of Trade}, 160.


\textsuperscript{57}See Allen, \textit{op.cit.}, 67—73 and Gilding, \textit{op.cit.}, Chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{58}\textit{New South Wales Statistical Register}, 1934, 553—562.
Falling family sizes robbed the informal economy of potential labour, and sped its decline. As a consequence the dependence on and knowledge of the local environment also declined, undermining economic links residents traditionally had to their locality. The onset of the depression, however, temporarily revived some of these traditions.

The depression

In the absence of paid work during the depression, men relied heavily on traditional male responses to unemployment—fishing, rabbiting and shooting. Ces Catterel, whose father worked as a tally clerk for the Public Works Department (PWD), recalled the effects of the depression:

> It got to the stage where they had to put half the workers off. So they [the workers] decided they wanted to work week on week off, and that's what they did. Then on the week off they'd go out and either catch rabbits or catch fish and give them to their mates, grow vegies and try and help one another. Everybody got in and helped and it was quite good really.⁵⁹

The mention of vegetable gardens, usually women's work, is significant, for many men moved into tending gardens during long periods of unemployment. My mother, Heather Eklund, recalls leaving for school in the morning in the mid-1930s, and if her father was in the garden then she knew that he had no paid

⁵⁹Interview with Ces Catterel, 4. For details of the PWD retrenchments see William Davies (State Member for Wollongong) in *NSWPD*, 1928, vol.113, 995 (52 men dismissed from Power House) and *NSWPD*, 1930, vol.121, 3369, (Some PWD employees at Port Kembla working one in every four weeks).
work that day.\textsuperscript{60} We can only speculate what kind of domestic tension this renegotiation of roles in the household economy produced.\textsuperscript{61}

Families were often the centre of strategies to deal with poverty caused by the depression. Scarce resources were shared along family and kinship lines. Vegetable gardens became an important area where reciprocal relations of family and neighbourhood support were played out. As Edith Neaves remembers, 'If you had any surplus you'd give it away. You didn't sell things them days—more friendly.'\textsuperscript{62} These cultural strategies were built on a long tradition of activity in the informal economy and were vital to many people's survival through the depression. As Edith Neaves commented, 'Oh yes we had to have our gardens. That kept us going.'\textsuperscript{63} Itinerant workers, who lived on the edges of the town isolated from this form of support, tended to be marginalised from these strategies developed by more established working-class households.

For women at the head of such households the task of turning reduced male wages into a subsistence living was difficult. Ces Catterel remembers the great amount of work that his mother did during the depression:

Yes my mother was wonderful; she coped alright, she used to work pretty hard. We had eight in the family and she was working all the time. She did everything she possibly could for us and of course we appreciated that, more so in later life.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{60}Interview with Heather Eklund, 3–4.
\textsuperscript{61}Stuart Macintyre alludes to this tension in his \textit{The Oxford History of Australia, volume 4: The Succeeding Age, 1901–1942}, 279.
\textsuperscript{62}Interview with Edith Neaves, 9.
\textsuperscript{63}Interview with Edith Neaves, 10.
\textsuperscript{64}Interview with Ces Catterel, 4.
Pressure to survive on impossibly tight budgets took an emotional toll on some women. One of my mother’s enduring images of my grandmother, Eva Halcrow, was that ‘she always seemed to be cooking, with a worried look on her face.’

The burden of managing scarce money and resources also reduced the time and energy women had available for informal economy activities. At the same time, widespread male unemployment meant that men had more time for such activities, and their participation became more common. The depression decreased the range and frequency of married women’s informal economy pursuits, and centred their lives more firmly on home and the domestic sphere.

For single women the depression sometimes had the opposite result, bringing them into paid work. During the depression Jean Payne worked as a cleaner and child minder for a local woman. Her wage of 10s. a week was dependant on finishing certain jobs, rather than hours worked: ‘I would do housework, ironing, preparing vegies for tea. I had to work till I was finished, maybe [till] 2 or 3 or 5 o’clock.’

The labour of children was also mobilised during the depression to support struggling households. All of the children in Ces Catterel’s family had to leave school because of the depression. Ces found work in a garage selling petrol. Ursula Lindsay’s two younger brothers ‘left here and went off to Queensland to get jobs.’ Bill King left school aged fourteen in 1933 and began working on a milk run, earning 7s.6d. a week. Children of the skilled working class were also affected. Len Ewart stayed at school till he was eighteen, including a year’s technical education. But he too was forced to leave in 1932 because of the cost of

65 Interview with Heather Eklund, 4
66 Jean Payne in Preston, op.cit., 38.
67 Interview with Ces Catterel, 5.
68 Interview with Ursula Lindsay, 7.
69 Interview with Bill King, 1.
Photograph 9: Work begins on the foundations of the Hoskins Blast Furnace.

Photograph 10: View of Alan's Creek and Tom Thumb's Lagoon, with the Steelworks in the background. Within ten years this land was drained and filled in, cutting off access to the natural resources such environments offered.
text books and fares to Wollongong, and was subsequently unemployed for four years.\textsuperscript{70}

If a job couldn't be found locally, another option was to send children to board with relatives. Gordon Rodwell found work at MM in 1926 aged sixteen, but he was laid off in 1929. He was then sent to his Uncle's property near Crookwell: 'He sent word "You better send Gordon up to me. That would be one less you've got to look after there." So I went up there for eight months.'\textsuperscript{71} Edith Neaves went to Sydney for two years to live with her grandmother in Arncliffe, a southern suburb of Sydney, because 'you couldn't get work here.'\textsuperscript{72} The resources of the extended family in some cases helped share the burdens of the depression, and the dependence on those beyond the geographical boundaries of the locality brought new outside influences on the informal economy.

For the local middle class the impact of the depression on family life was less significant. Staff at the local works were not retrenched, but carried out maintenance work or processed the few orders that did arrive. Albert Rieck, in charge of the weighbridge at ER&S, recalled that the depression 'didn't hurt us very much. You were knocked a certain amount off your pay [10 per cent]. It did [affect] a lot of people I suppose but it didn't affect us.'\textsuperscript{73} Rieck did recall, however, a reduction in money available for leisure: 'You wouldn't be able to go to places like you used to go. You might have to cut that down.'\textsuperscript{74}

Building on traditions established in the 1910s and 1920s, the local working class relied heavily on the resources of the informal economy during the depression. While many of the depression recollections of coping and 'getting by'  

\textsuperscript{70}See Transcript of Interview with Len Ewart, (Interviewed by Wayne Davis, 1983?), Wollongong TAFE, 1—4.  
\textsuperscript{71}Interview with Gordon Rodwell, 3.  
\textsuperscript{72}Interview with Edith Neaves, 4.  
\textsuperscript{73}Interview with Albert Rieck, 7.  
\textsuperscript{74}Interview with Albert Rieck, 8.
have to be approached with caution because such narratives tend to minimise conflict and hardship, these memories do highlight the reciprocity that developed between working-class households during the depression. These experiences were an influential cultural background to the later political mobilisation of the working class.

The formal economy recovers

The depression only temporarily halted the decline in the informal economy, and from the mid-1930s it suffered further set backs precipitated by economic recovery and continued industrialisation. From late 1933 male employment picked up steadily, though not dramatically. By November 1940 only 556 men in the Illawarra region were registered as unemployed.75 Households became more reliant on male wage labour for survival.

In these conditions women’s work was increasingly centred on the care of house, children and husband, rather than on the production of resources for the household. Household chores, such as washing, took considerable time because of the dirt, soot and dust of industrial work at Port Kembla. Men’s work clothes were scrubbed daily and hung out overnight to dry, while family wash days were usually at the beginning of the week. Consumption was also an integral part of this home-centred work. Before the widespread availability of refrigeration in the 1950s, food had to be bought daily, and a visit to the town’s stores was a daily chore, although home deliveries of items such as milk and bread lessened the burden.76

While the informal economy declined it did not disappear. Fishing remained an important activity for men and there were often other sources of

75New South Wales Industrial Gazette, 30 December 1940, vol.LIX, no.3, 415.
76Interview with Iris Jenks, 10 and Interview with Sarah Druy, 4. Daily visits to the town centre were not always a burden. The regular round of shopping and socialising were also one of the key ways in which links to the locality were maintained by women. This idea is developed in Chapter Five.
occasional income—a win at the races or casual weekend or evening work. Women still took in lodgers or did other odd jobs. After marrying in 1934 Bertha Rodwell lost her job at MM, but occasionally worked at the local hotels as a kitchenhand. As her husband Gordon Rodwell recalled, his wife would work 'whenever she got a chance, she was well known. Somebody would ring her up and she would do odd jobs.' Income from such work often was spent on a special purchase, as Rodwell adds: 'That's when we bought the car, and we borrowed the money off mother to buy the car and we wanted to pay her back quick.'

The decline in the informal economy decreased options for the local working class. Wage labour came to dominate a labour market that was overwhelmingly industrial and gendered male. By 1940 households were largely removed from production and the experience of earning, and the highly localised informal economy had been both restricted in scope and to some extent opened to outside influence. The informal economy activities that survived to the late 1930s became more male preserves, and benefited from fewer natural resources, as industrial and urban pollution took a toll on the formerly-rich natural environment around Port Kembla. Before looking beyond the industrial and economic aspects of an overwhelming Anglo-Celtic Port Kembla, it is necessary to outline the history and experiences of one very different group—local Kooris.

77 Interview with Gordon Rodwell, 16. I have not included a discussion of women's activity in charitable and religious organisations at Port Kembla. Such activity was not 'work' as defined here, since it did not bring income or resources to a household. It did offer, however, less tangible benefits like social status, contacts and friendships through church activities.
Chapter 4: Kooris and Port Kembla

The township of Port Kembla that grew with industrial development was a white construct, and Kooris were largely spectators of industrial growth. In this respect Port Kembla was not unique. Heather Goodall argues that throughout New South Wales at the turn of the century Aboriginal camp communities on the margins of towns 'had a social integrity and dynamic of their own which bore no relationship to the social structures of the white town population.' Industrialising Port Kembla, however, had a major impact on Koori lives, affecting their access to natural resources, occupation of different camp sites and position in the labour market. To understand the relationship between Koori society and the town of Port Kembla from 1900 to 1940 it is important to place the analysis within a broader context, and a discussion of the relevant features of 'traditional' society, the impact of European invasion and estimates of the Koori population are necessary.

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1 This chapter is not a general social history of Kooris at Port Kembla. Such a task would require separate treatment. Nevertheless, the importance of Koori history at this local level is summarised by Ann McGrath, in a review of Read's book on the Wiradjuri: 'Successive white administrations did their best to ensure groups like the Wiradjuri had no history: no sense of community nor pride for what they were. That is why it is imperative that histories of Aboriginal/White relations continue to be written.' Review of Peter Read, A Hundred Year War: The Wiradjuri People and the State by Ann McGrath in Australian Historical Studies, no.92, April 1989, 311—12.

2 Heather Goodall, 'A History of Aboriginal Communities in New South Wales', PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1982, 156. For fringe camps generally see Henry Reynolds, With the White People: The Crucial Role of Aborigines in the Exploration and Settlement of Australia, Penguin, Ringwood, 1990, 131—139. As Reynolds notes Aboriginal people moved closer to white townships due to food shortages in their own country, or sometimes to escape violence on the part of native police or squatters.
Archaeological evidence from the South Coast of New South Wales suggests that Kooris occupied the area at least 25,000 years ago.\(^3\) Following climatic changes the coastal population increased markedly 5,000 years ago, as the stabilisation of sea levels led to the creation of food-rich lagoon areas on the coast and expansion of the coastal population.\(^4\) The overwhelming impression of early European accounts was of an area well populated. There were sightings of numerous people and scattered fires by James Cook and Joseph Banks in 1770, and the explorers Bass and Flinders encountered significant numbers of Kooris at Lake Illawarra and Illowra (Red Point) in 1796. A large number of family groups and clans lived near the fertile areas of Nitoka (Port Kembla), Tuckulung (Tom Thumb's Lagoon) and Coomaditchie Lagoon.\(^5\)

Kooris of the Illawarra were known as the Wodi Wodi people, and they shared a common language, Dharawal, with Kooris north to Botany Bay, south to Jervis Bay and west to Campbelltown and Camden (see Map 3).\(^6\) Living in

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\(^3\)Burrill Lake, south of Ulladulla on the far South Coast has material dating from 25,000 years. Bass Point, ten kilometres south of Port Kembla, has an earliest dating of 17,500 years. See P.J. Hughes, 'Prehistoric Population Change in South Coastal New South Wales' in Sandra Bowdler (ed) *Coastal Archaeology in Eastern Australia*, Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, ANU, Canberra, 1982, 16—28.


\(^5\)Evidence of Koori place-names is fragmentary and not always recorded in ways that indicate correct pronunciations:

- Port Kembla: Nitoka or Nihorka
- Tom Thumb's Lagoon: Tuckulung or Mangau
- Red Point: Illowra.

See Organ, *op.cit.*, Appendix 2 and 3.

\(^6\)See D.K. Eades, *The Dharawal and Dhurga Languages of the New South Wales South Coast*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1976 and Organ, *op.cit.*, XLI—XLIII. Eades argues that the linguistic evidence for 'Wodi Wodi' is slim, however, the Illawarra Kooris now identify themselves as Wodi Wodi. The destructive impact of colonisation on Koori culture was such that it is unclear whether Wodi
bands of between twenty and fifty, men primarily fished and hunted, while women fished, gathered food, cared for children and introduced them to the land. Movement between these bands and other cultural groups for ceremonial or marriage reasons was common. In 1796 Bass and Flinders encountered Kooris near Nitoka who were from the Eora people of Port Jackson. In 1816 two Kooris, Bundle of the Wodi Wodi and Broughton from the Dharuk people (who lived to the north and west of Sydney), guided European settler, Charles Throsby, on an overland route from Liverpool to the Five Islands District and on to Jervis Bay.

Movement was constant, although coastal groups were more sedentary than people living beyond the Illawarra escarpment because the supply of food from the coastal environment (fish, waterfowl and other wildlife), was less seasonal than inland environments. Ilwójra (Red Point) was an ideal spot from which to base an economy on seafood. A good vantage point surrounded by water on three sides, Ilwójra had easy access to four beaches, two lagoons and one large lake. Three nearby off-shore islands (now called Big Island, Martin's Island and Rocky Island; their Koori names are not recorded) were

Wodi was a term used before white contact. Organ notes that Wodi Wodi first appears in written evidence in 1875 as a reference to the language, and since has acquired widespread acceptance as the name of the people. It may more accurately describe the late nineteenth-century situation.

On the role of Aboriginal women in ‘pre-contact’ societies see Nancy M. Williams and Lesley Jolly, ‘From Time Immemorial?: Gender Relations in Aboriginal Societies before “White Contact”’ in Saunders and Evans, op. cit., 9—19.

Organ, op. cit., 94—100 and Liston, op. cit., 24. For the role of Aboriginal people as guides and members of exploration parties see Reynolds, With the White People, 5—30.


Anthropologist R.H. Mathews described the fishing techniques of South Coast Kooris in ‘Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal tribes of NSW and Victoria’, Journal of the Royal Society of NSW, vol.38, 1904, 253—254. He also noted the Dharawal customs for the division of food, totems, the local creatures of the dreaming, rituals for averting thunderstorms and making rain. This is probably the best single non-aboriginal source of local ethnography. See ibid., 258 and 345—364.
Map 3: Boundaries of the Dharawal language group and other nearby languages, according to D. K. Eades' interpretation.
also important parts of the local economy.\textsuperscript{11} The coastal people fished using bone hooks, spears, nets and carrels made of tea tree bush and specially-dug channels.

The relationship to the land was complex and multi-faceted, and an issue that has received considerable attention from anthropologists and historians.\textsuperscript{12} The fragmentary evidence that survives from the Illawarra suggests that family groups had links with particular areas through traditional lands and sacred sites. The Timbery family lived around Tom Thumb's Lagoon and Berkeley, the Hooka family lived near Dapto, and the Bundle family around Wollongong, for example.\textsuperscript{13} They moved over other areas, however, in a complicated mix of land-owning and land-using groups. A band could move into the territory of their neighbours if permission was granted and correct procedures were followed. Illawra (and many other sacred sites) also had strong emotional and spiritual meanings, as places to bury the dead and a sacred place where people originated in the Dreaming—a rich cosmology which embodied relationships between the spirit world and everyday life, between people, land, animals and plants.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11}Archaeological analysis of Bowen Island, 350 metres off the southern headland of Jervis Bay, reveals 'more than just casual exploitation related to specific seasonal resources such as mutton birds.' The island itself was an important base for fishing and hunting. The islands off Nitoka were more barren than Bowen Island, but their role for coastal Kooris was probably much the same. See Anne Blackwell, 'Bowen Island: Further Evidence of Economic Change and Intensification on the South Coast of New South Wales' in Hughes and Lampert, \textit{op.cit.}, 46—51.

\textsuperscript{12}For a survey of this issue see Helen Ross, 'Australian Aboriginal perceptions of dwellings and living environments', PhD thesis, University of London, 1983 (microfilm copy in Fisher library, University of Sydney) and Peterson, \textit{loc.cit.}

\textsuperscript{13}Organ, \textit{op.cit.} XLI.

The European invasion of the Illawarra, which gained momentum in the 1810s with the influx of cedar cutters and the declaration of the first land grants in the area, overturned many of these relationships. This was a common experience in many regions throughout the growing colony of New South Wales, but there were some local differences. In the Illawarra there was no period of warfare between the Colonial Government and Kooris, like that which occurred in the Campbelltown and Hawkesbury areas. In 1816 the Sydney Gazette reported that the 'natives' in the Five Islands District were 'very amicably disposed towards us' and noted their 'general mildness of manners.' Nevertheless, the Colonial administration could not always control the actions of settlers and escaped convicts, and frontier violence of a less organised, but no less brutal kind occurred. In 1818 two local settlers, Cornelius O'Brien from Yallah and Lieutenant Weston from Dapto were investigated by a Sydney Magistrate, D'Arcy Wentworth, following a letter from Charles Throsby alleging unauthorised punitive expeditions against Kooris in the area. Wentworth concluded that O'Brien and Weston acted with 'great indiscretion' but refused to consider charges of murder. Governor Macquarie reacted angrily, writing to Wentworth complaining that he was 'treating this wanton attack on the Natives with so much levity and indifference.'

This set a theme for race relations in the region. Violence on the part of the non-aboriginal inhabitants was tolerated or not reported, and efforts by colonial administrations to protect the 'natives' were generally ill-fated. As early as the 1830s European settlement represented a significant threat to Koori life and culture. By the end of the nineteenth century traditional patterns

16 Sydney Gazette, 28 September 1816 quoted in Mitchell and Sherington, op. cit., 3.
17 The relevant documents are reproduced in Organ, op. cit., 101—104. Macquarie issued a warrant for the man who fired on local Kooris, a convict named Macalaise. His fate is not known.
of land use were in complete disarray. Some Kooris maintained economic relationships with the newcomers (albeit unequal ones) as domestic servants, rural labourers or fishermen, but generally they avoided white contact and tried to carry on their lives in the face of an increasingly interventionist state and a growing European population.

Dispossessed of their land, Kooris had moved to four main areas along the South Coast by 1900. There was a large community at Nowra and nearby Wreck Bay, a La Perouse settlement (established in 1878), and two smaller communities at Port Kembla and Minnamurra. The regional focus of white influence in the nineteenth century sharpened into a more specific control over land and land use for Kooris in the twentieth century. This was indicative of state-wide trends as Government policy became more interventionist from the beginning of the twentieth century, with increasing attempts to control the location and everyday running of Koori settlements.  

Despite the development of more interventionist Government policy through the Aborigines’ Protection Board (APB), established in 1883 to oversee and administer the living conditions of Kooris in the State, small areas of vacant land in the Illawarra provided some respite from Government control and white contact. In the late nineteenth century Port Kembla was one such area, close to Wollongong but not intensively populated or farmed, with large areas of vacant crown land. In fact, it was the rejection of the Government reserve at Berrwarra Point, six kilometres south of Port Kembla, which lead to the increasing importance of Port Kembla for Kooris from 1900.

In 1894 the APB established the Berrwarra Point reserve at the mouth of Lake Illawarra (see Map 4). The Board provided galvanised tin huts, a fishing

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boat, tackle and a boat shed, hoping that local Kooris would move to the reserve and become self-supporting. In 1899 a missionary from the Australian Aborigines' Mission (AAM), John Vidler, took control of the reserve. He had some success, and benefited from the support of the well-known 'King' of the 'Illawarra tribe' Mickey Johnson, who had made a public conversion to Christianity in 1898. Johnson accompanied Vidler on his trips around the Illawarra, undertaken to raise money for a church at Berowra Point, which was built in late 1899. But Berowra Point was not popular, and the number of Kooris on the reserve never exceeded twenty, mostly Johnson and his family members. Vidler suggested to the APB that the reserve should be moved to Port Kembla, arguing that it would be more successful there. The APB disagreed, claiming that fish and fowl were plentiful at Berowra Point and that it wasn't desirable for Kooris to live near Port Kembla because the

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19 APB Reports, 1894—1899.

20 The AAM was a non-denominational missionary society which administered the eight hectare reserve at Lake Illawarra. The society grew out of informal contact with Kooris at La Perouse in the 1890s. It was based on the Christian Endeavour Movement, and was especially strong in the Sydney suburbs of Petersham, Leichhardt and Botany. Their attitudes to the Kooris were informed by humanitarianism; arguing against the eugenicists, for example, who believed that Koori children were mentally inferior to white children, however, there were clear limits to their liberalism. They saw the problems in the Koori population as a result of a combination of 'the vices of whites' and Kooris 'half civilised mode of living'. See New South Wales Aborigines' Advocate, 23 July 1901 and generally 1901 to 1908. There is no record of any formal transfer from the Board to the Mission and it is not recorded whether Vidler lived there or if the Reserve had a resident APB administrator.

21 On Vidler's tour see Illawarra Mercury, 13 July 1899. On Mickey Johnson's conversion see Illawarra Mercury, 31 April 1899 where he is reported to have claimed he had been a Christian since Christmas 1898. Johnson was born on the Clarence River and moved to the Illawarra with a white family, the Westons. He was given a breastplate with the inscription 'King of the Illawarra Tribe' at the Wollongong Show by Archibald Campbell (State Member for Illawarra) in 1896. He died at Minnamurra in 1906 aged 72 and was buried in the North Kiama cemetery. See Illawarra Mercury, 1 February 1896 and Town and Country Journal, 21 November 1906.

22 This estimate of Berowra Point's population is based on references in APB Reports, 1894—1905.
Map 4: Berrwawra Point Aboriginal Reserve at Lake Illawarra, circa May 1900.
APB believed it was likely to become a large population centre. Subsequent events proved Vidler right. AAM's missionary work was more successful at Port Kembla because local Kooris preferred the town over the Lake Illawarra reserve. Despite police visits to Koori camps at Port Kembla and Bombo (just north of Kiama), Kooris could not be persuaded to go to the reserve.

Ill-health forced Vidler to retire in 1900 and he was not replaced due to a lack of funds. The AAM concentrated its efforts on Port Kembla, and missionary work there was taken over by supporters from Wollongong. The move to Port Kembla, however, did not suit all sections of local Koori society. Mickey Johnson and his family remained camped at Lake Illawarra. At a meeting held at Port Kembla in July 1900 Johnson complained that his people had to walk all the way from Lake Illawarra to Port Kembla and the Mission had provided no refreshments. Johnson himself had invested a lot of energy in helping raise funds to build a church at Lake Illawarra, and we can speculate that the unpopular reserve may have reflected badly on his reputation as a regional Koori leader.

But many other Kooris preferred Port Kembla. In 1903 the AAM's journal, the Aborigines' Advocate, reported that no work had been done at Lake Illawarra since 1899. In 1904 the APB visited Lake Illawarra and found it deserted—even Johnson and some of his family had moved to Minnamurra:

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23 Illawarra Mercury, 22 July 1899. The APB always tried to distance Kooris from white townships, resorting to more interventionist tactics after 1903. See James Miller, Koori: A Will to Win, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1988, 92—104.

24 Illawarra Mercury, 14 October 1899.

25 New South Wales Aborigines' Advocate, 23 July 1901.

26 Illawarra Mercury, 3 July 1900.

27 New South Wales Aborigines' Advocate, 23 March 1903.
A number of the houses constructed of galvanised iron were found to be unoccupied and as the aborigines cannot be induced to reside on this reserve, it was decided to make use of this iron (which was in excellent condition) at the Roseberry Park and Wallaga Lake Settlements.²⁸

The Board put a brave face on the failure of the Lake Illawarra reserve by referring to the successful retrieval of scrap, but the true significance of the reserves' failure was that it highlighted the Koori preference for Port Kembla.

Whether Kooris living at Port Kembla maintained traditional associations with the land is impossible to say with any certainty. Koori people throughout the State had shown a strong ability to adapt and survive, and traditional relationships to the land were still relevant in places. Also, while upheaval and displacement may have severed many of the original Koori links to the area, new connections may have grown in their place. As Peter Read found of the Wiradjuri people:

These days the towns as much as the creeks and hills focus Wiradjuri identification, but it is the same country, and the family alignments, bound by kin and marriage ties, form the core of local identity.²⁹

As well as these cultural meanings, Port Kembla had political and economic meanings for Kooris. They rejected Berwarra Point and the APB's control, and Port Kembla represented an area some distance from

²⁸APB, Report for 1904, 4.
²⁹Read, A Hundred Years War, 4.
Government reserves with opportunities for economic self-sufficiency.\textsuperscript{30} The beaches and lagoons surrounding Port Kembla offered considerable possibilities for survival based on fishing, as they had done traditionally; possibilities the growing European population were also discovering. From at least the 1870s the Saddler and Timbery families lived near Tom Thumb's Lagoon, fishing for a living.\textsuperscript{31} Wonwongorang (a hill on Red Point later renamed Hill 60) also provided a retreat from white influence and control. Non-aboriginal professional fisherman such as the Masseys at Berkeley (then appropriately called 'Fishtown') and the Burnses at Lake Illawarra had cornered the trade on the lake, but white competition at Port Kembla consisted of small operators only, many of whom also worked at the local industries.\textsuperscript{32} Fishing represented a means of survival that merged traditional knowledge and skills with the demands of a growing non-aboriginal population as there is some evidence that Kooris sold fish at Wollongong and to local non-aboriginal residents.\textsuperscript{33}

Because of seasonal variations fishing could not provide the sole basis of a viable local economy. Consequently, the numbers of Kooris at Port Kembla fluctuated, many travelling to the South Coast to work in the area's market gardens. The high season for agricultural work was January to April.

\textsuperscript{30}There is no direct evidence of Kooris shunning the Berowra Reserve, but conditions on APB-controlled reserves were harsh and oppressive, and Kooris throughout the State went to considerable lengths to avoid them. See Miller, \textit{op.cit.}, 98—99; Jimmie Baker (as told to Janet Mathews), \textit{The Two Worlds of Jimmie Baker: The Life of an Australian Aboriginal, 1900—1972}, Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1977, 111—113; Read, \textit{A Hundred Years War}, 59 and Goodall, 'A History of Aboriginal Communities in New South Wales', 26.

\textsuperscript{31}Organ, \textit{op.cit.}, 336—337 and 342.


\textsuperscript{33}Interview with Albert Rieck, 6 and Interview with Joe Hill and Steve Wade, (Interviewed by Glenn Mitchell, 7 October 1976), WPL. Rieck recalls his father buying prawns from Kooris in the 1910s. Hill and Wade lived on Hill 60 from 1913 or 1914, working as fishermen, and they remember carts of fish being taken from Fisherman's Beach to Wollongong for sale.
Joan Wakeman, who lived at the Koori settlement on Hill 60 (as Wonwongorong became commonly known after the First World War) as a child, remembers travelling to the South Coast: 'I used to go down and do seasonal work every now and then to earn a few bob.' In 1954 anthropologist James Bell found that during the year most adult male Kooris at Port Kembla had been 'either on farms on the South Coast or in industrial occupations in Port Kembla, Wollongong or Sydney.'

Close links with Kooris at Nowra, Wreck Bay, La Perouse, and the north coast of New South Wales also promoted movement up and down the coast. When Nelly Timbery drowned in Salty Creek in 1901 her mother was reported to be 'on a visit to the Richmond River.' Danny Bell, who spent some time on Hill 60 fishing during the 1920s and 1930s, often moved between there and La Perouse. In fact, a small settlement established at La Perouse during the 1930s depression was named 'Hill 60', probably by people such as Bell who moved between the two areas.

Given these conditions finding an accurate estimate of the Koori population at Port Kembla is difficult, especially since government authorities who collected such records were unaware of the extent of population movement and the reasons for it. These factors commonly led to

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35 James Bell, 'The Economic Life of Mixed Blood Aborigines on the South Coast of New South Wales', Oceania, vol. 26, 1955—56, 183. Kooris at La Perouse shared this close relationship with the South Coast. See La Perouse the people, the place and the sea, 7 and 27.

36 Interview with Dick Henry, 1; Interview with Carol Speechley and La Perouse the place, the people and the sea, 7 and 27.

37 Illawarra Mercury, 29 January 1901.

38 See Court Cases which mention Bell's name in South Coast Times, 7 February 1930 and South Coast Times, 21 March 1930. Interview with Joe Hill and Steve Wade, (Interviewed by Glenn Mitchell, 7 October 1976), WPL. Hill, who lived on Hill 60, remembered Bell as a fisherman there.

39 La Perouse the place, the people and the sea, 7.
underestimations of the local Koori population. The 1901 Census, for example, estimated 39 'Aboriginals' in the whole municipality of Central Illawarra. The APB and AAM, however, were probably more accurate. The APB estimated 71 'Aboriginals' in the 'Wollongong' area and AAM found 76 'Aboriginals' at Port Kembla in 1901.\footnote{Wollongong' in this case probably includes Port Kembla as well. In 1901 Port Kembla was not a well-known place and was often subsumed under the name Wollongong. APB, Report for 1901, 3. For AAM's population estimate see New South Wales Aborigines' Advocate, 23 July 1901.}

There is also oral history evidence concerning the numbers of Kooris at Port Kembla. Joan Wakeman recalled that: 'Port Kembla was one of the main areas the Aboriginals lived, although they used to go up and down the coast.'\footnote{Joan Wakeman in Noogaleek, op.cit., 8—9.} Dick Henry, whose mother lived at Hill 60 in the 1920s and 1930s, said of Port Kembla: 'Yes well it was more of a central place—people would pass through Port Kembla rather than go through the bush. Along the beaches was the easiest way to travel in them days.'\footnote{Interview with Dick Henry, 4.} Joe Hill, a non-aboriginal fishermen who lived on Hill 60 from about 1913 until the depression suggested a population of 'a couple of hundred, but it's hard to estimate because they were scattered around, a few in the scrub, one man here, a family here, you know.'\footnote{Interview with Joe Hill and Steve Wade, (Interviewed by Glenn Mitchell, 7 October 1976), WPL.} Similarly, another non-aboriginal resident, Albert Rieck, recalled:

We had a good few of them here, some were on Hill 60, some were working at the works ... Some [before 1914] lived down below where the Leagues Club is now [at the northern end of Wentworth street]. Then they started shifting around different
places, some of them at Coomaditchie, just in from Coomaditchie there use to be a big black camp.\textsuperscript{44}

The overwhelming weight of these recollections suggests a significant population of Kooris at Port Kembla. Given the variable nature of the population, the dubious status of some of the official figures and the strength of oral evidence a reasonable estimate of the Koori population at Port Kembla in 1900 is 80, rising to about 150 by 1940. Residence at Port Kembla, however, may have been broken by periods away for economic, social or cultural reasons.

In 1900 local Kooris had the option of living at Coomaditchie Lagoon, Hill 60, Salty Creek or Tom Thumb's Lagoon. Their occupation of these areas around Port Kembla, however, never gained legitimacy in the eyes of the government authorities who legally owned and controlled the land, and in the early part of the twentieth century the process of industrialisation and town growth brought about what Heather Goodall has called 'a new dispossession'.\textsuperscript{45}

The first dislocation in the period 1900 to 1940 occurred in 1904. The Public Works Department (PWD) complained to the APB about a number of Kooris living on land resumed for the harbour works in the vicinity of Tom Thumb's Lagoon. The APB investigated and asked the Kooris to relocate to one of the APB's reserves. One family went to Roseberry Park on the far South Coast, but the rest refused to leave. The APB asked the PWD to reconsider, but the Department insisted on their removal, as the APB reported: 'The police were asked to see that as little hardship as possible was allowed to arise

\textsuperscript{44} Interview with Albert Rieck, 5–6.

\textsuperscript{45} Goodall, 'A History of Aboriginal Communities in New South Wales', 71–83.
through the compulsory removal of these people from their camping place. The removal of Kooris from PWD land at Tom Thumb's Lagoon is reflected in the official Aboriginal population figures for Port Kembla which drop from 71 in 1901 to 33 by 1905. AAM, which had maintained contact with Kooris in the area following Vidler's retirement, found only a few families remaining at the port.

It is unclear where these people went—probably to the South Coast or La Perouse—but many eventually returned, so that by 1914 there was another large camp of Kooris on crown land at Salty Creek, not far from Tom Thumb's Lagoon. But the PWD had resumed land in this area early in the year, and again decided to have the camp removed, destroying or relocating the homes. Some Kooris moved to Perkin's Beach, a beach that ran south from Hill 60 to the mouth of Lake Illawarra at Windang, while others headed south to Nowra or north to La Perouse. From a reported 67 in 1914 the population dropped again to 39 by 1919.

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47 APB, Report for 1905, 3-4.
48 New South Wales Aborigines' Advocate, 30 May 1904.
49 Australian Mining Standard, 22 January 1914.
50 Illawarra Mercury, 8 May 1914.
51 APB, Report for 1915, Appendix B, 11. These are the most accurate figures available. In 1916 the APB was re-organised and placed under the administration of the Chief Secretary's Department. Annual Reports became less detailed or were sometimes not printed. The Police Census of 1920, reported some years later, estimated an Aboriginal population of 39 (Illawarra Mercury, 13 February 1925). This was taken in February, however, a month when some Kooris may have been down the South Coast doing seasonal work. Also, the effects of the influenza pandemic cannot be discounted in explaining the discrepancy between the two figures for the disease afflicted local people as it did Kooris throughout the State. See Dolly Henry in Noogaleek, op.cit., 46; Interview with Ursula Lindsay, 4-5 and South Coast Times, 11 July 1919. On the effects in the Brewarrina district Jimmie Barker remembers the influenza pandemic killing many of the 'old people and full bloods' and this 'hastened the loss of Aboriginal beliefs.' See Baker, The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker, 128—129.
Apart from land resumptions caused by Port Kembla's industrialisation, the power of the State Government, through its local representative the police, to arbitrarily remove individual Kooris from the area was another factor which severed links to the locality. In 1912 Annie S. (described as an 'Aboriginal') was charged with 'having no visible means of support'. According to the police she 'was living at Port Kembla and leading a [sic] immoral life.' Sergeant Noble stated before the Court: 'I think it would be a charity to herself if she was sent to Long Bay.' The Court agreed and she was sentenced to three months gaol.\textsuperscript{52}

In the 1900s and 1910s the State Government's control over Koori lives was reinforced, and the legislative apparatus for regulating where Kooris lived refined. The Aborigines' Protection Act of 1909 gave the APB power to remove Koori children over fourteen years old living on reserves from the care of their parents. Amendments to the Act in 1915 enabled the APB to take all Koori children from their families on reserves, and further changes in 1918 extended these powers to Kooris not living on reserves, like those at Port Kembla.\textsuperscript{53} Little evidence of the operation of the Act at Port Kembla has survived except this distressing newspaper report from 1918:

\textit{Last week two black girls had been taken in charge by the police for the purpose of sending them to a home in Cootamundra. They were placed in the yard at the police station awaiting a conveyance to take them to Wollongong. Whilst the back of the police officer was turned they scaled the fence and made off in the direction of the cokeworks.}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{52}Iliawarra Mercury, 22 November 1912.
\item \textsuperscript{53}Miller, \textit{op.cit.}, 138—142 and Read, \textit{A Hundred Years War}, 56—59.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
zpoliceland chase, and after a run of over a mile, the two girls were re-captured and subsequently forwarded to the home.\textsuperscript{54}

From the 1920s town expansion towards Hill 60 put more pressure on Koori living places, and Kooris were under constant threat of eviction. The Port Kembla Golf Club built a nine-hole course on the lower reaches on Hill 60 in 1923. Local non-aboriginal resident, Jean Payne, remembers that:

There were [Koori] camps right at the bottom [of Hill 60] of course, but when the golf course was [built] there they went higher up didn't they, on the hill.\textsuperscript{55}

The Club considered expanding to eighteen holes in 1929. Elements within the Council wanted to evict Kooris from Hill 60 and declare it a public park.\textsuperscript{56} The issue came to the attention of the Association for the Protection of Native Races, a group of city-based white liberal philanthropists, intellectuals and religious leaders who were concerned about the living conditions of Aborigines.\textsuperscript{57} Some of their members visited Hill 60 in late 1929:

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{54} \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 22 February 1918. The only figures available are for the whole of the South Coast, where 35 children were taken away from their families between 1912 and 1928. Goodall, 'A History of Aboriginal Communities in New South Wales', 189.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Interview with Jean Payne, (Interviewed by Denise Preston, 1984?), Wollongong TAFE.
\item \textsuperscript{56} See the Town Clerk's Report which summarised the dispute in CIC Minute Book, 12 December 1929, C1/6, WPL.
\item \textsuperscript{57} In 1938 a member of the Association, Reverend William Morley, appeared before the Select Committee on the Administration of the Aborigines' Protection Board. (See \textit{NSWPP}, vol.7, 1938—1940, 609—732) He stated: ‘[The Association] is non-sectarian and non-political, and it comprises city merchants, citizens, and some ladies distinguished in philanthropic work.’ Its president was A.P. Elkin, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sydney from 1934 to 1956.
\end{itemize}
Mr Cooper, Mr Sullivan and Mr Morley, paid a surprise visit and inspected the homes which they found to be cleanly, and quite suitable to the needs of the people concerned, they were certainly unsightly, were built of galvanised iron, kerosene tins, very cleverly put together, with sometimes an extension of canvas. They were almost entirely hidden by Ti Tree, and the only ground of objection appeared to be their nearness to the Golf Links.  

Alderman Mathews, former president of the local branch of the Australian Workers' Union (AWU) and Labor League, was asked by the Council to investigate. He reported back to Council: 'No one has complained of them and no one asked for their removal. They earn a decent living fishing.' The APB also investigated and found twenty-five Kooris living there, none of whom were dependent on the Board's rations. The APB too believed that the Council was motivated by concern for the adjoining golf course. Plans for an extension to the golf course were shelved and eventually the club moved to Windang. The Council also dropped the idea of a public park on Hill 60. In this case the Koori occupation of Hill 60 was protected with the help of white pressure groups and sympathetic white Aldermen.

Kooris were not completely isolated from the non-aboriginal society and economy, and the growing town offered some benefits. The APB Annual Report for 1904 noted that many of the Kooris at Port Kembla 'were in constant employment in the locality', either as fisherpeople or coal trimmers at the

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58 Annual Report of the Association for the Protection of Native Races, 1930, 7, ML.
59 CIC Minute Book, 13 November 1929, C1/6, WPL.
60 The Board's views and figures are quoted in the Town Clerk's Report in CIC Minute Book, 12 December 1929, C1/6, WPL.
harbour.\textsuperscript{61} The arrival of the railway line in 1916 meant that some of the fish caught in the waters off Port Kembla ended up in the Sydney markets.\textsuperscript{62} Approximately a dozen Koori men (Roy Burns, Jackie Andersen and Stan Speechley among them) worked on the waterfront during the 1920s and 1930s, and some Koori women worked for white women in the town as domestic servants. Rosie Johnson, widow of the late Mickey Johnson, divided her time between Minnamurra and Port Kembla in the 1920s. Whilst at Port Kembla she often worked as a domestic for local white families.\textsuperscript{63} Sarah Drury recalled that a Koori girl worked as a domestic in her grandmother's boarding house in the mid-1920s. She also remembers Kooris bringing around large vats of prawns caught from Lake Illawarra to sell in the town.\textsuperscript{64} Kooris did find employment at Port Kembla, but were clearly on the very fringes of the labour market.

It was fishing that enabled Kooris to establish a settlement on Hill 60 not completely dependent on their marginal position in the township's labour market. Fishing provided a source of food and income, and was an activity that merged traditional knowledge with the realities of survival in the mid-twentieth century. Hill 60 gave an excellent panoramic view of surrounding waters and when a school of fish was spotted people would launch boats from Fisherman's or Perkin's Beach.\textsuperscript{65} Beryl Beller, now a resident of La Perouse, tells of her days on Hill 60 in the 1930s:

\textsuperscript{61}APB, Report for 1904, 5.
\textsuperscript{62}My great Grandfather, William Bright, who ran a small carrying business and a store in Military road, took fish from Fisherman's Beach to the railway station during the 1920s and 1930s.
\textsuperscript{63}Interview with Albert Rieck, 7 and Edith Neaves in Preston, \textit{op.cit.}, 34.
\textsuperscript{64}Interview with Sarah Drury, 9.
\textsuperscript{65}Joan Wakeman in Noogaleek, \textit{op.cit.}, 10; Interview with Joe Hill and Steve Wade, (interviewed by Glenn Mitchell, 7 October 1976), WPL and Interview with Ursula Lindsay, 5. See also Bell, \textit{op.cit.}, 181.
I remember when I was small, going down to the beach and helping my dad and grandfather haul for fish. We would sit on the sandhill which was called the lookout, and watch for fish to swim past, then run down and push the boats into the water. When the nets were back on the beach we would put the fish into wooden boxes. The men then took them and they were sold.  

The Koori experience of Port Kembla, then, was characterised by a number of dispossession and dislocations from camps at the edges of the town. But it is also apparent that distance from white influence was something actively sought by Kooris, and despite the dispossession, camp sites around Port Kembla, especially Hill 60, came to represent important areas for local people. As Joan Wakeman stated: 'Hill 60 was more like Aboriginals wanted to live in those days. Just shacks and freedom and happiness, it was really beautiful.' The area was understood by many local non-aboriginals as 'off limits'. White children, frightened by a sense of difference and prevailing racist ideology, would only tentatively venture onto Hill 60. Even in the late 1930s Hill 60 was very much a Koori space. The appreciation of Hill 60 had resonances with traditional links with the land, and was also modified by the political meaning of the hill as a place of their own, away from white contact, and its economic meaning as a base for a lifestyle centred on fishing. Hill 60 became a locality in itself, separate though linked to non-aboriginal society centred on Port Kembla.

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66 Beryl Beller in La Perouse the place, the people and the sea, 81.
68 A comment made by a number of oral history respondents. See, for example, Interview with Walter Bailey, (Interviewed by Glenn Mitchell, 14 October 1976), WPL. 'Hill 60 was a prohibitive area as far as whites were concerned.'
Despite the relative lack of outside intervention at Hill 60, the increasing regulation of land and its resources by the State Government and local Council had a particular impact on local Kooris, as it did on local whites. In 1914 William Judson, a coal trimmer at Port Kembla (described by police as a 'half caste'), was charged with illegally stealing oysters from Tom Thumb's Lagoon.\textsuperscript{69} The Fisheries Department had taken control of the lagoon that year and began issuing licences for the harvesting of oysters in 1921.\textsuperscript{70} Pollution and land clearance also destroyed resources like the herbal remedies that were gathered by Mrs Timbery from around Tom Thumb's Lagoon.\textsuperscript{71}

In the 1920s Kooris took steps to secure their occupation of Hill 60. Representations were made through the State Fisheries Department to the local Council asking for just under one hectare of land on Hill 60. The issue was debated in Council in 1927:

\begin{quote}
It is understood that they [local Kooris] are perturbed at the apparent insecurity of their present quarters and desire provision to be made for the permanency of the fishing station.\textsuperscript{72}
\end{quote}

Alderman Lee was reported as saying that 'there was no objection to the places, as long as proper provision is made in regard to sanitary conveniences.'\textsuperscript{73} There was no official recognition, however, of the legal status of the Koori occupation of Hill 60.

\textsuperscript{69}Wollongong Gaol Entrance and Description Book, 1898—1915, 26 October 1914, 5/1514, NSWSA.
\textsuperscript{70}Illawarra Mercury, 5 August 1921.
\textsuperscript{71}Joan Wakeman in Noogaleek, 15. See Chapter Three for details of the declining informal economy.
\textsuperscript{72}Council debates reported in Illawarra Mercury, 10 June 1927.
\textsuperscript{73}Ibid.
This lack of recognition made the Koori possession of Hill 60 vulnerable to further incursion, and in 1939 the Department of Defence decided to fortify the hill. There was no public record of this event, nonetheless, it remains present in the collective memories of Koori and non-aboriginal people in the area, as Kooris were moved down the South Coast or to Coomaditchie, the last remaining Aboriginal camp at Port Kembla.\textsuperscript{74} Coomaditchie was a traditional camp site beside a freshwater lagoon, a short walk from Perkin's Beach, but in other ways less suitable than Hill 60. The area was gazetted a 'reserve for the use of Aborigines' in February 1929 and so was effectively under closer Government scrutiny.\textsuperscript{75} It offered no views of the surrounding ocean, and during the depression the Council established a large camp for the unemployed adjacent to the Koori camp, making conditions there overcrowded and placing further strain on the natural resources that Kooris were so dependent on.

The loss of Hill 60, coming on top of the other disposessions in the preceding forty years, was a major setback for Kooris. By 1940 Coomaditchie Lagoon was the only local area where Kooris lived. Land at Port Kembla had come under increasing control and scrutiny, especially through Government land resumptions, while natural resources were destroyed or depleted by population growth, environmental destruction and land clearance.\textsuperscript{76} These

\textsuperscript{74}Interview with Dick Henry, 2 and Noogaleek, op.cit. generally. For the recollections of non-aboriginal inhabitants see Interview with Morgan Simon, 12 and Mavis King in Preston, op.cit., 54.

\textsuperscript{75}See Letter from Chief Secretary's Department and Minister for Tourist Activities (C.A. Kelly), to South Coast Trades and Labour Council, 25 June 1962 in 'Aborigines, 1961—1970', South Coast Trades and Labour Council Records, D169/28/4, WUA. There is no direct evidence, but the creation of this reserve (number 6094) may have been related to the controversy occurring on Hill 60 at that time.

\textsuperscript{76}The Wiradjuri people also experienced a decreasing number of 'safe living places', which Read argues was caused by the more interventionist policies pursued by the APB after 1909. See Read, A Hundred Years War, 71 and also his "Breaking up these camps entirely": the dispersal policy in Wiradjuri country, 1900—1929', Aboriginal History, vol.8, no.1, 1984, 45—62.
changes meant that by 1940 survival for Kooris, as for the local white working class, was dependent on the limited opportunities for wage labour. Fishing continued but other casual work such as waterfront labour, day work on the Council sanitary carts or seasonal labour in the market gardens of the South Coast became more common Koori male occupations.

Links between Kooris and non-aboriginal society at Port Kembla were tenuous and distant. Some characteristics of town life were amenable to Kooris. Unlike some towns in New South Wales Kooris were allowed to buy alcohol at Port Kembla and the Whiteway Theatre was not racially segregated. The Council was more sympathetic than their municipal counterparts in Dubbo, Brewarrina, Yass and Condobolin, although this sympathy rarely extended to direct support. Yet white society was largely unconcerned about the plight of Kooris. The most telling demonstration of this marginality was the way that threats to Koori living places were never seen by local whites to be threats to the locality itself. White oral history also voices this division, revealed in the language of 'us' and 'them'. Ces Catterel recalled of the local Kooris, 'there were a few up on Hill 60. We didn't have any contact with them and mostly they stayed up there. You'd see a couple of them around the street at times.' This was a common characteristic of these oral narratives. Much like white itinerant labourers, Kooris were seen as transients or visitors to the town centre and were never afforded membership of 'local' society.

But Kooris at Port Kembla preferred space of their own away from white influence. That had been the attraction of Port Kembla from 1900 when the Berrwarra Point reserve had been abandoned. Increasing pressure on Koori living places concentrated the population at Hill 60, and also concentrated the feelings of local attachment as the hill came to represent 'shacks and freedom

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77 Interview with Ces Catterel, 10.
and happiness.\textsuperscript{78} The non-aboriginal locality centred on the town could not completely suppress these dissident voices, and it was only through Department of Defence intervention in 1939 that this alternative locality was finally destroyed.

\textsuperscript{78}Joan Wakeman in Noogaleek, \textit{op.cit.}, 9.
Chapter 5: The structures of locality

In 1914 Patrick Turner, a nightwatchman of 'temperate habits' from the Electrolytic Refining and Smelting Company of Australia Ltd (ER&S), was killed in a bicycle accident on his way to a meeting of the Wollongong branch of the Manchester United Independent Order of Oddfellows (MUIIOOF). Turner was unfortunate for by the end of the year a branch had opened at Port Kembla which would have made his journey unnecessary.¹ This new branch was indicative of the growing number of locally-based organisations, established in the 1900s and 1910s, which created a relatively self-sufficient town society for Port Kembla's white inhabitants by the 1920s.²

This chapter charts the material conditions of the town's development and outlines its characteristic social relations and cultural practices, all factors which contributed to a strong sense of local identity at Port Kembla. While some aspects of the town's development, such as the emergence of a class-based understanding of different areas of the town, fostered an alternative class identity, the overwhelming effect of the commercial, residential and social development of the town from 1900 to the late 1920s was to reinforce local identity. The central argument of this chapter is that key aspects of the town's development helped establish a sympathetic social and cultural context for the politics of locality. The following sections on commercial and residential development will concentrate on the period up until 1920. Obviously changes and additions to the commercial and residential space occurred in the 1920s

¹ Illawarra Mercury, 10 October 1914 and Reports of the Quarterly Meeting and Business Papers of the Sydney District of the Manchester Unity Independent Order of Oddfellows [MUIIOOF], July 1915, ML.
² In this case thirty members of the MUIIOOF Port Kembla no longer relied on the Wollongong branch. South Coast Times, 18 December 1914.
and 1930s, but by that time the focus of development had shifted to surrounding towns and suburbs of the Illawarra.

Commercial Port Kembla

Port Kembla came to life as a town in the first twenty years of this century, though early developments were modest. In December 1900 John Patterson was appointed the unofficial postmaster, a service he ran from his house near the Southern Coal Company's jetty. A new full-time Primary School was built in 1902, as fate would have it, on the future site of ER&S. St Stephens Church of England opened in August 1903 on land purchased from the Wentworth estate. The first Catholic mass and holy communion was performed by Father Walsh in 1905 at the home of Martin Fitzpatrick, a ganger with the Public Works Department (PWD).

These changes represent the beginning of a trend which situated important facilities and services at a local level, yet at this early stage the town was still without an identifiable centre. The locality appeared formless and indistinct to visitors. In August 1907 Inspector Tomkinson from the Post Master General's Office visited Port Kembla and noted that the present location of the Post Office near the Southern Coal Company's jetty was:

not central but no objection had been taken to its present position as owing to the very unsettled state

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3Letter from Inspector Burton to Secretary, Post Master General's Office, 19 July 1907 in Port Kembla Post Office Files.
4South Coast Times, 24 May 1902.
5St Stephens, 'History', loc.cit.
of the place it cannot be determined what would be
the most suitable position for any length of time.7

Township subdivision and development was delayed throughout 1907 by negotiations between ER&S and the State Government over land and wharfage rates, and legal action between the State Government and the Wentworth estate. These matters were resolved in January 1908 and ER&S began construction work immediately.8 Twenty temporary houses built by public works employees were removed from the new ER&S site, some of them being transferred north of Salty Creek where the Primary School was also relocated.9 North of Salty Creek appeared to be a possible town centre, and a site for future commercial development. In 1908 the Mercury noted that 'new structures are being built north of Salty Creek and there is quite a respectable

7 Letter from A.E. Tomkinson (Acting Inspector) to Post Master General's Office, 5 September 1907 in Port Kembla Post Office Files.
8 Negotiations between ER&S and the State Government concerned the speed at which the low-level jetty was being built and port charges. The Government agreed to finish the jetty promptly, however, it argued that wharf rates of 9d. per ton of goods shipped were set by the Port Kembla Harbour Act of 1898 and so could not be changed. The company countered that the Wharfage and Tonnage Rate Act of 1902 allowed the Government to set rates as low as 2d. per ton, and these rates were enjoyed by users of Newcastle harbour. The company placed pressure on the Government by claiming that it was also negotiating with the Queensland Government for potential factory sites. The outcome was that wharfage rates remained at 9d., but the Government did speed up the construction of the jetty during 1908. See Illawarra Mercury, 14 June and 8 November 1907 and NSWP, 1907 vol.27, 758 and 1510—1519. For the details of legal action between the State Government and the Wentworth estate see below.
9 Illawarra Mercury, 7 February 1908. The Mercury reported that '22 or 23 houses located on the ER&S site have been moved. T. Gibson, M. Fitzpatrick, W. Bailey, C. Petersen, J. James, T. Doolan and W. Bennett are now located on O'Donnell's land [the vicinity of present-day central Port Kembla], while B. Feeney, P. Peterson, J.R. Johanson, W. Alger and J. Bradley are situated on the rise north of salty creek.'
population there." But by 1913 this area was no longer considered a serious alternative for a town centre. That year the secretary of the Port Kembla Progress Association complained that the school site north of Salty Creek was 'a couple of miles out of town.'

In a sign of things to come, Port Kembla's town centre was not one defined by houses or schools (though they were important later), but by the location of industrial development, and once ER&S officially confirmed their choice of Port Kembla in January 1908 there was more certainty regarding the site of future town development. In 1908 the Wollongong Post Master, P.N. Prott found the location of the Patterson's unofficial post office near the Southern Coal Company's jetty 'ridiculous and certainly inconvenient' since 'the township's position is clearly defined.' The establishment of ER&S, the survey of the Wentworth estate for subdivision, and the creation of two major streets, Wentworth Street and Military Road, gave the town a more definite location and shape.

While industry led the way in defining the shape of Port Kembla, commercial activity soon followed. Storekeepers were attracted by Port Kembla's growing population and cheap land, first auctioned in June 1909. The blocks were all 43 metres by twelve metres and prices varied considerably. The best sites in Wentworth Street fetched 50s. to 70s. per foot, while some low-lying blocks were as cheap as 20s. per foot. At the first auction (held at Jackson's Boarding house because of rain), J.G. Fairley, storekeeper

10 Illawarra Mercury, 24 January 1908. See also a map of the area in 1908 showing the school and the 'workmen's camp site' to the north of the school in 'Fixed defences at Port Kembla', Department of Defence, Correspondence Files, 1913—1917, CRS A2023, A116/2/4, AA.
11 Letter from H.R. Lee (Secretary, Port Kembla Progress Association) to J.B. Nicholson, (State Member for Wollongong), 21 July 1913 in Port Kembla School Files.
12 Letter from P.N. Prott (Post Master Wollongong) to Post Master General's Office, 4 April 1908 in Port Kembla Post Office Files.
Figure 1: Advertisement for the first subdivision of the Wentworth estate, June 1909.
and W.P. Laughlin, a barber, both from Dapto, bought land and the following year opened stores at Port Kembla. The Wollongong-based builder and businessman, William Waters, also bought four blocks in the first subdivision.13 Along with storekeepers and builders, the Christian churches were also quick to purchase land and establish themselves in the new town, providing local forums for religious and social life.14

Projects which required large-scale commercial investment became more common and these helped change the face of the town centre. In 1911 the Licensing Court approved the licence for the Port Kembla Hotel, and the hotel was completed in June 1912 at a cost of £4000. In 1915 senior staff from ER&S, H.R. Lee and E.A. White among others, along with a local publican Dan Murphy, formed the Port Kembla Hall and Amusement Company. The company, supported by capital of £1200, constructed the 'Empire Hall' in Wentworth Street opposite Middleton's newsagency with the aim of showing moving pictures twice weekly.15

New halls and meeting rooms built in the late 1900s and 1910s provided local forums for political, religious and sporting groups. By 1915 there were three halls in Port Kembla: Murray's Hall (1909), Simon's Hall (1911) and the Empire Hall (1915).16 Murray's Hall (formerly Jackson's) was

13 Details of the first auction were reported in South Coast Times, 3 July 1909. Terms of the sale were 10 per cent deposit and the balance in seven annual payments at 4.5 per cent interest.

14 The Methodists opened a church in Wentworth Street in 1912, while the Presbyterians had an active presence in the town from 1914 and opened their church in 1923. See 'History of the Churches in the Port Kembla area', South Coast Times, (Supplement), 24 September 1951. In February 1915 Father Dunne from St Mary's Wollongong purchased two blocks of land in O'Donnell Street, and a combined Catholic church and primary school was opened by Archbishop Kelly in March 1919. In December 1923 the school was taken over by the Sisters of St Joseph. See Illawarra Catholic Sesquicentenary Committee, op.cit., 96—98.

15 Illawarra Mercury, 8 January 1915.

16 South Coast Times, 5 March 1915.
also the dining room of Sarah Murray's boarding house in Military Road, which could be converted for special occasions. Another boarding house at Port Kembla, Pascoe's, also had 'Rooms' available for meetings.

Halls also offered respectable mixed-sex venues for dances, balls, and showing moving pictures. The 1914 Annual Ball of the Political Labor League, held in Simon's Hall, attracted '60 couples', including a number of visitors from Wollongong and Mt Kembla.\(^{17}\) During winter Simon's Hall was also used for roller skating. As an indication of their role in supporting local organisations, Pascoe's Rooms and Murray's Hall both waived their fees for Progress Association fund-raising evenings.

The Port Kembla Hotel (renamed the Great Eastern Hotel in 1914) also provided a venue for meetings, and the Hotel was the forum for the establishment of new male sporting organisations. The Port Kembla Cricket Club, the Surf Club (both formed in 1912), the British Soccer Association (1913) and the Port Kembla Rugby League Club (1914), all held regular meetings and 'smoke socials' at the Hotel. The Progress Association also used the Hotel as a venue for annual dinners and banquets.\(^{18}\) But more importantly the establishment of the Hotel allowed informal male recreation and socialising to be carried out locally. Prior to the Hotel's opening, an enterprising Wollongong Hotelier had canvassed orders for drinks in the town and then delivered them to a pre-arranged place by coach.\(^{19}\) A second hotel, the Port Kembla Hotel, was opened in March 1917, highlighting the popularity of these hotels as social venues and meeting places for local men.\(^{20}\) Hotels, halls and meeting rooms provided the necessary venues for the development

\(^{17}\) *Illawarra Mercury*, 12 June 1914.
\(^{18}\) See, for example, *Illawarra Mercury*, 18 July 1913.
\(^{19}\) See Sergeant Noble's comments before the Special Licensing Court, *Illawarra Mercury*, 5 May 1911.
\(^{20}\) The Hotel was completed in early 1915, but a liquor licence was refused by the Licensing Court. It traded as a boarding house and restaurant until 1917.
of local social and political organisations. They helped situate social life within the town.

The town's continued commercial prosperity in the 1910s was ensured by population growth and the economic survival of ER&S. Rees, a baker from Woonona, opened a bakery in Military Road in February 1914. The ES&A (English, Scottish and Australian) Bank established a branch in the town in 1915, supplementing the services of the Government Savings Bank at the Post Office, which had been operating since 1911. Indicative of the extent of commercial development, the first edition of a town-based newspaper, The Port Kembla Pilot, was published by Robert Shipp in September 1920. Political action by local residents also enhanced the town's civic development. In 1915 the local Progress Association, a broadly-based organisation of locals formed in 1908, successfully lobbied the State Government to move the Primary School back from Salty Creek to Military Road. When the new school opened in 1916 many children who had previously commuted to Wollongong because of the poor conditions at Salty Creek returned to their town's school.

By the beginning of the 1920s the location of Port Kembla west of ER&S and Metal Manufactures Ltd (MM), had been firmly established by subdivisions of the Wentworth estate and one Government subdivision. The development of a bustling commercial area further underlined the town's location and helped define its centre. In 1920 commercial Port Kembla

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21 Illawarra Mercury, 27 February 1914 and Interview with Bob Rees, 1—2. The Rees family eventually moved to Port Kembla to live in 1918.

22 Illawarra Mercury, 24 September 1920. The Wollongong Public Library has some copies of the Port Kembla Pilot from 1924 and 1925, but these are in such a deteriorated condition that they are not available to researchers.

23 For details of this political action see Chapter Six.

24 See Port Kembla Subdivision Plans, ML.
boasted four boarding houses, two butchers, two milk vendors, two bootmakers, two carriers, a baker, a blacksmith and other specialised services such as doctors and banks, located mostly in Wentworth Street, Military Road and Fitzwilliam Street (just off Wentworth Street). This busy commercial centre catered for a population of 1622 people, living in 318 dwellings, and contained the stores and services necessary for the development of a relatively self-sufficient locality—a post office, hotels, halls, churches and a school. Port Kembla people still travelled to Wollongong for specialised services, such as hospitals and secondary education, but the change from 1900 was profound. By 1920 the essential requirements for everyday life could be met within the town itself.

**Residential Port Kembla**

Residential growth accompanied industrial and commercial expansion. From the initial subdivision of the Wentworth estate in 1909, the Wentworth trustees (the estates' administrators), were the major land owners and agents at Port Kembla, and this gave them a decisive influence on the form of residential Port Kembla. The Wentworth trustees had controlled 890 hectares of land around Port Kembla since the death of W.C. Wentworth in 1872. In 1900 most of the estate was leased to dairy farmers for 5s. an acre (or 0.4 hectares) per year. As part of the State Government's plans for the Port Kembla harbour in the late 1890s, the PWD initially considered resuming the whole parcel of land, but this move was challenged in the New South Wales Supreme Court in 1907. The estates' trustees successfully argued that 'it was

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25 *Sands' Sydney and New South Wales Country Directory*, 1920, ML.


27 *Port Kembla Subdivision Plans*, ML.
outside the functions of Government to go in for [the] trafficking of land. The size of the resumption was subsequently reduced to 226 hectares, and this significant reduction meant that the State Government had little control over the development of the town.

The Wentworth trustees owned most of the land adjacent to an area where the Government was about to spend over £200,000 on the new harbour. As one parliamentary critic noted during debate on the Port Kembla Harbour Bill in 1898: 'The Government are to spend thousands of pounds in making a harbour and in resuming land, and when the work is completed the holders of the adjoining land will be able to scrape in thousands of pounds from the public.' Later events proved this an accurate prediction. By 1915 the trustees were able to dispose of parts of the estate for prices ranging from £150 per acre for less desirable sections of the estate, to £600 per acre for prime sites in Wentworth Street.

But the development of Port Kembla could have progressed very differently. During 1907 and 1908 it was unclear how the creation of a township would proceed. Workers suffered from poor living conditions because of a lack of freehold land, and the local Progress Association called on the State Government to plan the township. In January 1909 a deputation from Port Kembla presented the Minister for Lands, S.W. Moore, a petition with 400 signatures calling for the subdivision of a Government township to alleviate the housing shortage. But the Progress Association lacked significant support from those who controlled Port Kembla’s development. The local Council, controlled by representatives from the surrounding rural towns

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29 Alfred Edden, (State Member for Kahibah) in NSWPD, vol.1, 1898, 360.
31 Illawarra Mercury, 29 January 1909.
of the Central Illawarra, feared having to pay the costs of forming and metalling the roads of a Government subdivision, and the State Government had indicated its approach to the matter in 1907 when the Minister for Public Works, C.A. Lee, told the *Mercury* that 'he did not intend to cut up the land for sale in building allotments, as he considered Wollongong as the residential area for the men working at the Port'.

In a feature on the development of Port Kembla in 1908, *The Sydney Morning Herald* noted that '[i]t is understood in well-informed circles that Port Kembla would become the industrial centre of the South Coast, and Wollongong the residential portion of the district'.

Government reluctance to subdivide partly related to the failure of its initial 890 hectare resumption, but it also reflected Government attitudes to Port Kembla. Port Kembla was seen as not so much a future 'town' with stores, services and houses, but as an 'industrial centre', with workers commuting daily. In 1916 the State Labor Government, led by Premier W.A. Holman, was more sympathetic to criticism of land companies reaping profit on rising land values, and released 100 lots in the area of Reservoir, Marne and Gallipoli Streets. The delay in Government action, however, allowed the Wentworth trustees to dominate and benefit enormously from Port Kembla's growth.

The lack of Government involvement meant that Port Kembla was not a planned town. In the early stages of industrialisation hundreds of hopeful workers, sometimes with their families, simply camped on PWD land in

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32 For the Council's concern over the costs of a Government subdivision see *Illawarra Mercury*, 23 March 1909 and 16 March 1909. For the comments by the Minister for Public Works see *Illawarra Mercury*, 12 February 1907.

33 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 August 1908, 8.

34 For the criticism of land companies see comments of the Minister for Public Instruction, A.C. Carmichael, in 'Transcripts of meeting between A.C. Carmichael and residents of Port Kembla in regard to the site for a new school', 17 February 1915, Port Kemba School Files. For details of the Government subdivision see comments by M.F. Morton (State Member for Allowrie) in *NSWP*, vol.65, 1916, 2273—2274 and Port Kembla Subdivision Plans, ML.
temporary houses or tents. Living conditions for these workers were very poor as industrial growth out-paced the provision of housing, roads and basic services such as sanitation and water. In March 1907 the Mercury noted the 'absorbing topic here just now is the water supply' as Port Kembla's dams were drained by hundreds of workers and 60 horses. 'From a health point of view', continued the Mercury, 'there is some cause for anxiety about overcrowding of tents and stables.'35 A continuing theme in the history of the town was a lack of adequate housing, yet people were determined to live locally and the residential areas of Port Kembla soon developed, despite C.A. Lee's vision of Port Kembla as purely an industrial area.

Together with the Wentworth estate, the local industries, ER&S, MM, the PWD and the Mt Lyell Cokeworks, had a major influence on the residential space of the town. By the early 1920s local companies had built 10 per cent to 15 per cent of Port Kembla's housing stock. ER&S owned 63 houses in Port Kembla by 1920. The Mt Lyell Cokeworks built sixteen homes for its employees, and in 1921 MM bought an entire section of the Government subdivision consisting of nine lots in Somme and Reservoir Streets.36

Apart from the provision of company housing, the industries of Port Kembla also affected residential development because the health of the housing trade hinged upon the fluctuating demand for labour at the local works. During the industrial boom at ER&S in 1916, for example, the South Coast Times reported that 'nearly all land on the previous subdivisions has been taken up' and 'the building trade was very brisk.'37 The success of ER&S and the subsequent consolidation of its position through the formation of MM ensured population growth and a solid rate of suburban development at Port

35 Illawarra Mercury, 8 March 1907.
36 NSW Board of Trade, 314.
37 South Coast Times, 17 March 1916.
Figure 2: Advertisement for the fourth subdivision of the Wentworth estate, October 1916.
Kembla throughout the mid to late 1910s, though occasional downturns at the local works could slow demand for land and housing.\textsuperscript{38}

The social geography of residential Port Kembla is revealed by an analysis of the 1917 Electoral Roll. The roll shows that Wentworth Street was the most populated street with 220 residents enrolled to vote. These were mostly working-class householders (113 residents), but also included the shopkeepers in the central area of the main street (10). Military Road, where 81 electors were enrolled, had a similar ratio of working class (52) to storekeepers (5). Darcy Road (61 residents), with its company housing, also contained a large number of working-class households (28). The Avenues were part of the successful second subdivision of the Wentworth estate, first opened in 1913, and had 44 people enrolled. The remainder of Port Kembla consisted of smaller, more middle-class streets such as O'Donnell Street (11 residents), Maune Street (7), Allan Street (6), Reservoir Street (5), Bass Street (4) and Church Street (2). There were also a number of houses behind Surf Beach (22), and Perkin's Beach (31). In addition there were some public works homes on Wollongong Road (10) and some remaining in the Salty Creek area (4).\textsuperscript{39}

The ER&S cottages in Darcy and Military Roads were typical of the working-class homes at Port Kembla. They were four-room weatherboard houses, consisting of three bedrooms and a kitchen. Ted Livermore, a labourer from ER&S, lived with his family in a four-room cottage at a cost of 10s. a week. He and his wife slept in one room, and his two children had a room each.\textsuperscript{40} George Keen, a crane driver at ER&S, had arrived in Port

\textsuperscript{38}Sales for the fifth subdivision of the Wentworth estate in 1919, for example, were slower because of the post-war recession and the lack of work at Port Kembla. See \textit{South Coast Times}, 6 June 1919.

\textsuperscript{39}Calculated from the State Electoral Roll for Wollongong, Port Kembla Division, 1917, ML. A total of 97 electors gave their address as 'Port Kembla' and so could not be placed in streets.

\textsuperscript{40}Evidence of Ted Livermore (labourer) in \textit{NSW Board of Trade}, 142—145.
Kembla with £50, two horses and a sulky in 1917. His house was built in 1918 at a cost of £400.41 Eleanor Allan worked as a music teacher and her husband was employed at ER&S as a ladler. Their two incomes allowed them to add a front and back verandah, and a washroom onto their basic Darcy Road home. The Allan’s home cost £375 in 1917, and they paid 16s. a week as part of a rent purchase scheme operated by ER&S.42

But the ER&S cottages were atypical in one sense. Rent purchase schemes were not common at Port Kembla, and only ER&S workers in company houses had this option. At least 60 per cent of all Port Kembla households lived in rental accommodation.43 Prices in the local rental market reflected the variable cycles of demand for labour at the local industries. A report from Port Kembla in 1912 noted an ‘outcry here against excessive rents’ of 12s. per week for a four-bedroom cottage.44 At the beginning of the war-time boom at ER&S single rooms were advertised at Port Kembla for as much as 22s. per week.45

Home additions were one way of expanding small four-room houses, and their popularity reflected not only the inadequate size of many Port Kembla homes to deal with growing families, but also the energy and

41 Evidence of George Keen (crane driver) in NSW Board of Trade, 146—154.
42 Evidence of Eleanor Allan (music teacher) in NSW Board of Trade, 126—136.
43 There are no figures on rates of home ownership and tenancy at Port Kembla, but some conclusions can be inferred from Central Illawarra and State-wide Census figures. According to the 1911 Census, 56 per cent of all households paid rent in the Central Illawarra. The percentage of rented homes was more likely higher for Port Kembla since the rural towns and villages of Central Illawarra, included in this figure, had fewer renters than industrial areas like Port Kembla. The 1921 Census noted that rates of home ownership in rural areas in the State were twice that of metropolitan rates (26 per cent) and one third more than urban provincial rates (37 per cent). See Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1921, Census Bulletin Number 20, 6. Robin Walker makes a similar point regarding tenancy rates in the working class inner-suburbs of Sydney. See his, ‘Aspects of Working-Class Life in Industrial Suburbs, 1913’, 39.
44 Illawarra Mercury, 29 March 1912.
45 South Coast Times, 12 March 1915.
commitment that people invested in improving their homes and thereby staying in Port Kembla. Verandahs were modified or rooms added to provide more space as families grew. Iris Jenks' father enlarged their small public works home during the 1920s:

There was only three rooms ... and then he eventually more or less built two more rooms, two bedrooms onto that for my sisters and I. He built two more rooms out of iron and some of it use to be built of bags, and we'd paint them with whitewash!\[46\]

In 1920 Henry Ellis, a butcher at Port Kembla who lived in a three-room public works house, told the New South Wales Board of Trade that he had pulled down the original wash house and built larger rooms to accommodate his family.\[47\] Gordon Rodwell's family lived in a two-bedroom weatherboard cottage in Third Avenue. During the mid-1920s one bedroom was for his mother and three daughters and one for two boarders, while the verandah was turned into a 'sleep out' for Gordon.\[48\] Sleep outs were a common addition and were usually reserved for the eldest male child in working-class households.

The affluent end of the housing market was small but nevertheless present at Port Kembla. The well-off petite bourgeoisie had more spacious homes than those of the working class, as evident from real estate advertisements. A year after the death of his wife, H.F. Banfield, manager of J.G. Fairley's, decided to sell his house in Wentworth Street:

\[46\]Interview with Iris Jenks, 3.

\[47\]Evidence of Henry Ellis (butcher) in NSW Board of Trade, 168.

\[48\]Interview with Gordon Rodwell, 15. See also Frank Gamble in Davis, op.cit., 15.
Port Kembla—For sale. W.B [weatherboard] residence 'Nirvana' ... possessing unsurpassed outlook and containing 3 bedrooms, dining room, breakfast room, kitchen, laundry. Land 40x140 [feet].
Apply H.F. Banfield.49

Likewise, the homes of the local middle class were obviously more spacious than working-class homes, and often had better services and facilities. Albert Rieck, in charge of the weighbridge at ER&S, married in January 1920, and upon returning from their honeymoon the couple moved into a new home in O'Donnell Street.50 To do this immediately after marriage was unusual at Port Kembla, as most couples lived with parents for a few years to save money for a deposit. Rieck purchased the land from his father for £80 and this was one of the first houses in O'Donnell Street. It was a two-bedroom weatherboard home built by a Wollongong builder, Parsons. It was connected to the water main, and electricity was available from the mid-1920s.51 There were advantages in being part of a respected middle-class family. Rieck's father had close links with the O'Donnell family, local agents for the Wentworth estate. James O'Donnell had promised Rieck's father first pick of the new fifth subdivision, as Albert Rieck recalls:

Old Jim O'Donnell, he was the agent for Wentworth,
and he said to father you're going to get the two best blocks in the town. He [father] said one on that

49 Illawarra Mercury, 14 May 1920.
50 Interview with Albert Rieck, 9—10.
51 Fortunately for Rieck the supply had been extended the same month as he moved. See Illawarra Mercury, 22 January 1920.
corner and on this corner and that's where they finished up.\textsuperscript{52}

Even more salubrious were the company houses for the staff. The first house constructed by ER&S was for General Manager, Bernard Magnus, in 1908. This house formed a clear contrast with the working-class houses in Darcy Road. As the \textit{Illawarra Mercury} reported:

On Tuesday Mr Magnus took possession of his residence. It is a splendid building of the Queen Anne style of architecture. It is built of brick with a tiled roof. The walls are plastered inside and out. The length of the building is 80ft, and it contains 13 rooms, all of which are tastefully furnished. The building is lighted with 35 electric lights, and electricity is used for every conceivable purpose throughout the house.\textsuperscript{53}

These staff houses were located in Private Lane near the Port Kembla Primary School. Port Kembla contained few wealthy areas, but Private Lane was one exception until the mid-1920s. Thereafter, both ER&S and MM purchased staff houses throughout Port Kembla.

By the 1920s Port Kembla possessed a thriving commercial centre surrounded by a distinctive residential area. This commercial and residential landscape formed a crucial part of the structures of locality, and also facilitated the town's social development. Alongside such changes to the built

\textsuperscript{52}Interview with Albert Rieck, 10.

\textsuperscript{53}\textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 26 March 1909. Magnus’ house also had a septic tank, the first in the town.
environment, the town's residents began to perceive their locality in more optimistic terms, and these two factors together were powerful forces for the development of local identity.

**Changing perceptions of the locality**

Prior to 1900 Port Kembla did not excite the imagination of non-aboriginal residents the way it would in later years. In 1890 George Sinclair, wharfinger for the Mt Kembla Coal Company, was chosen by residents to answer a Department of Public Instruction questionnaire regarding the application for a new school. Answering the question 'Is the locality likely to be permanently inhabited?' Sinclair wrote:

> There will always be some inhabitants, but the number will depend very largely upon the number of persons employed by the Port Kembla [Mt Kembla] coal company at their jetties at Port Kembla. 54

This was a modest answer that lacked the self-assurance typical of later communications with Government Departments. Industrialisation changed this, and unleashed a great deal of optimism among Port Kembla residents. In February 1902 the *Mercury's* Port Kembla correspondent reported that '[n]ew buildings were springing up all over the place' and that '[a]ltogether our little town has an air of prosperity.' 55 The *South Coast Times* reported three months later the 'first notable public event'; the opening of the new school, and added that '[t]he place is beginning to look quite town like.' 56 ER&S' preference for

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54 'Annex to the Application for Establishment of a Public School', 15 February 1890, Port Kembla School Files.

55 *Illawarra Mercury*, 14 February 1902.

56 *South Coast Times*, 24 May 1902.
Port Kembla in 1907, despite the delays, engendered confident predictions of a bright future. One correspondent wrote to the *Mercury*:

I picture in my mind’s eye, on account of the security of the works, hundreds of beautiful model cottages with their garden plots and families like olive branches around their table all brought about by the establishment of industries.\(^{57}\)

This confidence was becoming more common, but it was not shared by all sections of society. In 1907 a carpenter from Burwood, who was camped at Port Kembla waiting for work, told the *Illawarra Mercury* that he was returning home because 'from what he can see, [Port] Kembla will remain a canvas town for some time to come.'\(^ {58}\) This was a view common to itinerant male workers who often experienced the downside of rapid industrialisation. These men led lonely, isolated lives in tents or roughly-constructed houses on the fringes of Port Kembla, and the image of a 'canvas town' suggests poor living conditions and an uncertain future. The currency of this image increased during the depression, as one of the characters in Kylie Tenant’s *The Battlers* remarks, 'If it's anything like Port Kembla ... I'd sooner stay away. Men waiting around the steelworks, so that when a chap is killed they could get his job.'\(^ {59}\)

The divergence between the views of itinerant labourers and those of established residents reflected not only their different perceptions of the locality, but also the social distance between these two groups.

\(^{57}\) *Illawarra Mercury*, 12 July 1907.

\(^{58}\) *Illawarra Mercury*, 1 March 1907.

An understanding of Port Kembla divided into class-based streets was another perception which contradicted the image of a confident, thriving industrial town. This perception was based on the class differences in housing described previously, and it is most clearly revealed in the oral recollections of working-class residents who lived in Darcy Road. Many identified themselves as 'Darcy Roaders', a group of families who shared the experience of living in ER&S houses and working for ER&S.  

Colin Warrington was born in Keira Street, Port Kembla in 1918, but grew up in Darcy Road. He remembers:

Well they were always a close community in Darcy Road and Military Road which surrounded the football ground, and we grew up together as one huge family, and if you lived in Darcy Road you most certainly didn't take any cheek from anyone else living in Port Kembla. They were a pretty wild mob, but I don't think we were really bad.  

In this close-knit street community an important focus was on informal economy activities and outdoor recreation:

We always had something to do, fishing or anything we could do ... [to] find food to keep the family going, but mainly we specialised in any sport and in Darcy

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60 Many 'Darcy Roaders' also shared the same religion, Catholicism.

61 Transcript of Interview with Colin Warrington, (Interviewed by Denise Preston, 1983?), Wollongong TAFE, 2—3 and Interview with Edith Neaves, 12.
Road the girls were generally as good as the boys too.62

Residents from Darcy Road were also more likely to identify the staff houses in Private Lane as 'Rotten Row' or 'Pommy Lane', indicating their awareness of class divisions within the town.63 Others from Port Kembla were also aware of the specific identity of 'Darcy Roaders'. My mother, Heather Eklund, spent her childhood years in Reservoir Street not far from Darcy Road, and she recalls their toughness and their ability to 'look after themselves'.64 Experiences as ER&S tenants may have sharpened the class feeling in Darcy Road. Whatever its origin, this alternative perception of Port Kembla was cultural capital which both reflected and facilitated working-class identity and class politics.

But these voices of dissent were no match for the range of interests promoting Port Kembla's boom town image. Press and industry leaders were some of the first to encourage this image. In 1907 the Editor of the Illawarra Mercury wrote that 'there is every reason to believe that Port Kembla is destined to become an important industrial as well as shipping centre.'65 In 1910 a Sydney Morning Herald correspondent claimed that at ER&S 'quite a thousand men will be employed by the end of the year.'66 Employment levels, in fact, never went above 400 in 1910. In 1912 James Robertson, manager of the Mt Kembla Coal and Oil Company, stated that 'Port Kembla is evidently

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62 Transcript of Interview with Colin Warrington, (Interviewed by Denise Preston, 1983?), Wollongong TAFE, 3. See also Transcript of Interview with Len Ewart, (Interviewed by Wayne Davis, 1983?), Wollongong TAFE, 10 and Sid Hayes and Len Ewart. 'The Remarkable Story of D'arcy Road Sportspersons' in Davis, op.cit., 38—54.

63 Interview with Edith Neaves, 12 and Transcript of Interview with Colin Warrington, (Interviewed by Denise Preston, 1983?), Wollongong TAFE, 3—4.

64 Interview with Heather Eklund, 11—12.

65 Illawarra Mercury, 12 February 1907, editorial.

66 Sydney Morning Herald, 22 August 1910, 6. See also Sydney Morning Herald, 1 May 1912, 19.
destined to become a large manufacturing centre. Industrial enterprise is not
going to end with the electrolytic refining works.\textsuperscript{67} Land companies joined in
with claims that the town may become bigger than Wollongong, and also
offered exaggerated predictions of the size of the future workforce.\textsuperscript{68}

As was common in Australian industrial towns, contemporaries tried to
make sense of industrialisation by a comparison with the English
experience.\textsuperscript{69} In 1921 Federal Treasurer and former Liberal Prime Minister Sir
Joseph Cook visited Port Kembla and claimed that '[t]here was nothing to stop
the district forging ahead and becoming the Birmingham or Manchester of
Australia.'\textsuperscript{70} Parallels were also drawn between Port Kembla and the
Australian town of Newcastle. In 1923 the manager of ER&S, E.A. White told a
party of visiting farmers 'that he was confident that people now living would
see Port Kembla as big as Newcastle.'\textsuperscript{71} These large industrial centres were
seen as blueprints for future Port Kembla. The town's future did not have to be
creatively imagined; it was already embodied in the industrial towns of
England and Australia. Port Kembla was destined to become 'the next
Newcastle', or even 'the Birmingham of the South Coast.'

The logical extension of this growth narrative was the idea that Port
Kembla had matured, and this idea became common in the early 1920s. In

\textsuperscript{67}Evidence of James Robertson, \textit{PSCPW, 1912}, Northern Breakwater at Port Kembla, 29.
\textsuperscript{68}Advertisement for the third subdivision of the Wentworth estate in \textit{South Coast Times}, 26 February
1915 and Advertisement for the first subdivision of the Steeltown estate in \textit{South Coast Times}, 31 August
1928. This last advert, making much of the recent formation of AI&S, claimed that 10,000 men would be
employed by the company. Even by 1940 AI&S employed no more than 4500 men.
\textsuperscript{69}See, for example, John Lack, \textit{A History of Footscray}, Hargreen, Melbourne, 1991, 108 and Nancy
Cushing, "Creating the Coalopolis": Perceptions of Newcastle, 1797—1940’, Paper given to the National
\textsuperscript{70}I'llawarra Mercury, 4 March 1921.
\textsuperscript{71}I'llawarra Mercury, 5 April 1923.
1924 George Simon, a foreman at ER&S, spoke out against his town's Ambulance services being run by the Wollongong Ambulance Committee:

We are of age. Residents here think the time has come that Port Kembla should have a district of their own ... Port Kembla people say: We want an Ambulance in Port Kembla and we don't want any dictation from Wollongong.\textsuperscript{72}

The 'maturity' stage was characterised by increasing calls for municipal reorganisation and autonomy. In recognition of the town's development Robert Shipp was elected Mayor of the Central Illawarra Council in 1922. In 1927 the Port Kembla Progress Association debated the idea of new municipal boundaries based on the town.\textsuperscript{73} Simmon's claim of maturity was the culmination of a birth/growth/maturity narrative which dominated interpretations of the spatial changes at Port Kembla. In the 1890s Port Kembla was understood to be a suburb of Wollongong, a 'backwater' with an uncertain future. Industrialisation initially led to optimistic, sometimes utopian visions of Port Kembla's future. By the 1920s the realities of economic and social change gave most people a new sense of confidence and pride in Port Kembla, and rather that looking ahead, residents celebrated the town's 'coming of age', and passionately argued for its recognition and respect.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{72}South Coast Times, 28 November 1924.
\textsuperscript{73}Sydney Morning Herald, 4 February 1927, 14.
\textsuperscript{74}It is worthwhile noting the similarity between the birth/growth/maturity narrative of this locality and narratives applied to the development of the nation as a whole, by both late nineteenth and early twentieth-century contemporaries and more recent historians of nation and nationalism. Perhaps this narrative represents a shared cultural capital through which social and economic change at all different spatial scales is understood.
Town Life

The confluence of these spatial and social changes gave Port Kembla society a distinctive shape and quality in the 1920s. The establishment of commercial and residential Port Kembla, the shared dependence on local services and positive expectations for the town's future turned social life inward and helped create a distinctive town-based society and fostered local identity. A particular 'structure of feeling' developed which revolved around the political and cultural importance of town life.

The meanings conferred on the main street, Wentworth Street, were central to the construction of an apparently united locality. Commercial Port Kembla was a focus for friendly social interaction between residents of all classes, and the petite bourgeoisie had an important role in fostering local identity. Apart from the provision of credit and the cross-class contact engendered by their workplace mentioned in previous chapters, the petite bourgeoisie mobilised local identity through the Traders' Association and the local Council. The Traders' Association was formed in 1911, and was concerned with the promotion of local stores, the organisation of street-based entertainment and the scrutiny of the commercial space of Port Kembla to ensure that it was attractive and appealing. Throughout the 1920s the Traders' Association organised competitions, bazaars and shopping weeks.

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75 Main streets have had this integrative role in many other Australian towns. According to Kennedy, Argent Street in Broken Hill was 'the central place, the essential locale for every procession and public celebration, the shopping place where families gathered to meander of a Friday night or Saturday morning.' Kennedy, Silver, Sin, and Six Penny Ale, 1. In a survey of Victorian country towns in the late 1930s McIntyre and McIntyre note the 'social function of the main street' as a place 'for the exchange of gossip and news' and a meeting place for women and men. A.J and J.J. McIntyre, Country Towns of Victoria: A Social Survey, Carlton, Melbourne University Press, 1944, 27—28.

76 See Illawarra Mercury, 15 September 1911 and 3 June 1927.
Advertisements for local stores show how storekeepers tried to mobilise town loyalty. Middleton's ran this advertisement in April 1917: 'Spend your money locally and secure a good make at low prices.' In the late 1920s the town laundry, Townsends, addressed locals directly in their advert:

PORT KEMBLA RESIDENTS: Why leave your town when you are offered Better Work and Better Prices in all Classes of work from E. Townsend, O'Donnell Street, Port Kembla.  

The storekeepers also tried to protect their economic interests through the local Council. In 1929 moves by Alderman Shipp to reduce bus services to Wollongong gained the attention of one Mercury reader from Coniston, a small settlement located approximately halfway between Wollongong and Port Kembla. A. Fairfield wrote that Shipp was representing 'the interests of the storekeepers at Port Kembla' in trying to reduce bus services to Wollongong:

He [Alderman Shipp] would no doubt have liked a compound built around Port Kembla so that the people would be forced to spend their earnings and lives within for the benefit of a few storekeepers and himself.  

The control of bus timetables and the condition of roads were important issues for the storekeepers whose economic survival depended on local customers.

77 Illawarra Mercury, 27 April 1917.
78 Illawarra Mercury, 15 November 1929.
79 Illawarra Mercury, 22 November 1929.
The political and economic interests of the storekeepers were influential in building local loyalty, and this commerce bound residents into local economic relationships. Such relationships were the material context for the cultural importance of the main street.

Another factor which encouraged patronage of local stores was the relative lack of mobility of the customers. The 'compound' image which A. Fairfield referred to was already present—the result of poor roads and a lack of affordable transport options. In 1899 a storekeeper from Wollongong was given three hours to supply a coastal steamer at Port Kembla. He had such trouble negotiating the road and Tom Thumb's Lagoon that he arrived at Port Kembla only to see the ship leaving.\(^{80}\) Improvements to the road occurred over the years, but it was this isolation which initially helped the Port Kembla-based petite bourgeoisie establish themselves in the face of competition with stores from nearby towns.

New transport services, such as buses or trains, became available but often the costs were prohibitive or the timetables were not suitable for a quick shopping trip to Wollongong. In 1913 a motor bus joined coach services running between Port Kembla and adjoining centres such as Wollongong, Unanderra and Dapto.\(^{81}\) Yet in 1918 one Port Kembla resident at a meeting in Wollongong to lobby for a rail service complained that:

he had known them [residents] to have to wait two hours for a car or bus, and then the fares are not too reasonable. A good many people in Port Kembla could not afford to pay 3s return too often.\(^{82}\)

\(^{80}\) *Illawarra Mercury*, 8 July 1899.

\(^{81}\) *Illawarra Mercury*, 7 March 1913 and *Illawarra Mercury*, 26 September 1913.

\(^{82}\) Comments by Mr Dunne reported in *Illawarra Mercury*, 15 March 1918.
In 1918 3s. could buy two pounds of butter or one pound of coffee. Many working-class households survived on such slim margins that a shopping trip to Wollongong was an unaffordable luxury.

If the recurring image of a united and valued town centre in oral evidence from Port Kembla is any indication, the efforts of the storekeepers to encourage loyalty to shops in Wentworth Street were highly successful. In the 1920s Wentworth Street became a powerful symbol of local identity and unity. Edith Neaves, who came to Port Kembla only 'a few weeks old' in 1909, recalled of her childhood:

We use to go down the street of a Saturday morning and we go down purposely to have a chat. Everybody gathered in the main street in Port Kembla them days ... and you'd see groups having a little chat and it was lovely. It was happy days.\(^8^2\)

Shopping was about more than just consumption, it was an occasion that expressed attachment to locality.\(^8^3\) Ursula Lindsay, who also arrived at Port Kembla as a young child in 1909, remembered that her parents did shop in Wollongong but shopping in Port Kembla was altogether different:

\(^{82}\) Interview with Edith Neaves, 11. See also Interview with Morgan Simon, 8.

\(^{83}\) See Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle, 'Production and Consumption: Public versus Private' in D.H. Broom (ed) *Unfinished Business: Social Justice for Women in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1984. They argue that the economic significance and social meanings of consumption has been overlooked and under-theorised largely because it is women's work. Gail Reekie has also revealed the political and social significance of consumption in the retail industry. For example, she argues that in the 1890s large department stores in Sydney were sites of conflict and negotiation between masculinism and feminism. See Gail Reekie, *The sexual politics of selling and shopping* in Magarey, Rowley and Sheridan, *op. cit.*, 59—70.
It was a nice little town, everyone knew one another. When we were children, by the time we left the top of the street [she lived at the top of Wentworth Street] to go down, the shops closed at nine, we'd be lucky to get down the shop before they'd closed because you'd walk a little way and you'd meet someone you knew and it was a nice little town then.84

Even during the depression Wentworth Street was alive with energy and excitement, as this report from the South Coast Times demonstrates:

The main street presented a brilliant spectacle during the holidays, hundreds of people were busily engaged looking at the window displays, while all the storekeepers reported good business. Many competitions were held the winning numbers being announced by loud speaker outside the General Agency.85

The local commerce of Wentworth Street reinforced the connection people had to their locality. This was particularly the case for women who shopped daily in the main street. Edith Neaves recalled: 'You'd go and you'd sit down and there would be a seat for you to sit on behind the counter and

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84 Interview with Ursula Lindsay, 6.
85 South Coast Times, 2 January 1931.
talk while they were serving you.'\textsuperscript{87} Home deliveries also meant sociable though business-like contact between delivery men and women customers. Avis Bright remembered that 'relations with the tradespeople in town were very friendly', and during their delivery rounds 'they'd come in and have a cup of tea if they had time.'\textsuperscript{88}

Wentworth Street was also a major venue for a range of local organisations. To raise money for the local churches Ladies Guilds held 'bazaars', where decorated stalls selling home-made and donated goods lined Wentworth Street. In 1929 the Roman Catholic Bazaar, which sold home-made sweets, refreshments, cakes, and arts and crafts, raised £350 for the church funds after expenses were meet.\textsuperscript{89} The town band held monthly recitals on 'The Green', a vacant block diagonally opposite the Great Eastern Hotel. The use of Wentworth Street by such groups extended the symbolic meaning of the main street beyond shopping and socialising, to include religious and recreational aspects of local life.

Oral history cannot be used uncritically to support this picture of local society. It could be argued that respondents are 'remembering' an illusory idea of a united and conflict-free town which says more about their current attitudes and social conditions than about Port Kembla in the 1920s and 1930s. In this case, however, there is a significant correlation between contemporary written evidence and oral evidence. During the election campaign of March 1920 the State Labor Member for Wollongong, William Davies, focused on his local appeal which transcended party loyalties: 'Whether you are a Nationalist or Labor in sympathies give your first preference to the local man who has served you so well in the past 3 years.'\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{87}Interview with Edith Neaves, 11.
\textsuperscript{88}Interview with Avis Bright, (Interviewed by Narelle Crux, 14 October 1982), D153/8, WUA.
\textsuperscript{89}Illawarra Mercury, 9 November 1929.
\textsuperscript{90}Illawarra Mercury, 19 March 1920.
In 1929 the *Mercury* editor, S.R. Musgrave, complained of the strength of town-based parochial feeling in the Illawarra:

> It is only by united action that any community can make its influence felt. We fear that in the Illawarra the parochial feeling is too strong in some centres, and sectional rather than general welfare is the dominant note.\(^{91}\)

It could also be argued that memories of a united town were an expression of a dominant ideology concerning town life, rather than any lived experience. Such memories follow familiar forms and narratives, even the phrases used such as 'We were a big happy family', and 'everyone knowing everyone' have a ubiquitous presence in Australian conservative small-town ideology. In his history of Footscray John Lack argues that the idea of 'everyone knowing everyone' gained currency in the late 1930s, at the very time when Footscray's population was increasing and the town was undergoing significant social change.\(^{92}\) But Port Kembla's population was only one-tenth the size of Footscray in the 1930s, and moreover, memories of local unity originated not in conditions of social breakdown, but in a local historical and cultural context sympathetic to the development of local identity and localism.

Also, while nostalgic memories of a united Port Kembla are a strong theme, the oral record does reveal other allegiances and reflects the conflicts and divisions of Port Kembla in the 1920s and 1930s. Respondents who

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\(^{91}\) *Illawarra Mercury*, 13 September 1929.

spoke of people being more friendly and helping one another also related stories of stealing fruit and vegetables or identified particular social groups within the town. Edith Neaves, for example, recalled that one of the local storekeepers used the depression to sell old stock and also labelled the staff houses in Private Lane 'Rotten Row.'

Bob Rees, a local baker, remembered that most of his friends were from Wollongong and he preferred the company of staff from the local industries at middle-class social clubs like the Port Kembla Golf Club. The oral recollections of the local waterside workers most clearly reveal competing class allegiances and are dominated by memories of harsh working conditions. When asked about politics many respondents identify Port Kembla as a 'Labor area', a place where working people generally saw their interests as best served by the Labor Party, as Gordon Rodwell recalls:

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\text{[P]olitics here has been very labourised, and I presume if you were to be real brutal about it if you were a worker most of the good things of a worker's life has come from the Labor Party so, and it's always been a Labor area.} \]

A careful reading of the oral record reveals a range of representations of local society, indicating the complexity of identities and the existence of allegiances other than local loyalty. Both oral and written evidence, however, suggest that local identity was generally more important, especially in the 1920s, and this had wide-ranging effects on town life. In the 1920s Port

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93 Interview with Edith Neaves, 10 and 12.
94 Interview with Bob Rees, 5—6.
95 See, for example, Interview with William Bailey, (Interviewed by Glenn Mitchell, 14 October 1976), WPL.
96 Interview with Gordon Rodwell, 8.
Kembla society turned in on itself, and this can be seen through the personal relationships, cultural practices and patterns of leisure of this decade.

Port Kembla men and women overwhelmingly married each other. From April 1920 to April 1931, 57 marriages were recorded at St Stephens, Port Kembla. At the time of marriage only ten of the 114 newly-weds lived outside of Port Kembla.\(^{97}\) Typical of these experiences was Edith Neaves who, in January 1929, married a man she had lived next door to and grown up with.\(^ {98}\) Gordon Rodwell met his future wife 'on the dance floor' at the Port Kembla Soldiers' Memorial Club, where popular dances were held every week. They married in 1934.\(^ {99}\)

Friendship networks were also centred on Port Kembla although there were gender differences. Ethel Combes recalled that most of her friends were from Port Kembla because 'those days you really couldn't get out of Port Kembla.'\(^ {100}\) For women responsibility for child care and their participation in the more locally-based informal economy limited their mobility.\(^ {101}\) This, combined with their links to the town centre and the storekeepers through shopping, meant their links to the locality were deeply embedded in the practices of everyday life.

Men shared many of these experiences, as Gordon Rodwell remembers 'all the friends were from Port Kembla I think, all from Port Kembla. Well you didn't get much chance to get away anywhere. See you had no transport.'\(^ {102}\)

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\(^{97}\) St Stephens Marriage Registers, 21 April 1920 to 4 April 1931, D101, Box 12, WUA.
\(^{98}\) Interview with Edith Neaves, 6.
\(^{99}\) Interview with Gordon Rodwell, 14.
\(^{100}\) Interview with Ethel Combes, 7.
\(^{101}\) The terms 'informal neighbourhood economy' used by Frances, and 'local economy' employed by Mathews, both give a sense of the spatially-contained nature of these economic activities performed by women. See Raelene Frances, 'Shifting the Barriers: Twentieth-Century Women's Labour Patterns' in Saunders and Evans, \(op.cit.,\) 251 and Mathews, \(op.cit.,\) 158—170.
\(^{102}\) Interview with Gordon Rodwell, 12.
But men's relationship to locality was complicated by wage labour. With the regionalisation of the labour market from the late 1920s, the pool of friends, acquaintances and contacts from beyond the locality grew. As Morgan Simon recalled:

When you work in a factory like that [MM] a lot of your workmates came from other parts of Greater Wollongong [the current Wollongong City Council boundaries from Helensburgh in the north to Windang and Albion Park in the south] and I made some very very close friends and friends that I still have that worked with me all those years.\textsuperscript{103}

Yet the oral record of men from Port Kembla still emphasises attachment to the locality, if for different reasons. Men valued their town in terms of the male friends they had and the outdoor leisure activities they pursued. Port Kembla was 'a great town' because it offered access to surf beaches, fishing, Lake Illawarra and the relatively secluded bush around the lake.\textsuperscript{104} Men's memories of outdoor recreation contrast to women's memories of shopping and the emotional work of 'gossip' in the main street, but in both cases the oral record emphasises attachment to locality.

Local cultural practices also played a role in reinforcing attachment to locality. The ritual of 'the farewell', for example, had special meaning not just for those leaving the town, but for those staying behind as well. The farewell

\textsuperscript{103}Interview with Morgan Simon, 5.

\textsuperscript{104}Interview with Bob Rees, 4; Interview with Ces Catterel, 7 and Interview with William Bailey, (Interviewed by Glenn Mitchell, 14 October 1976), WPL.
was usually held in a local hotel and were organised for men who were about to leave the town:

On the eve of his departure for Sydney, Mr J. Fitzpatrick [a labourer for the PWD] was tendered a send-off by his fellow workers in the private smoke room of the Port Kembla hotel on Monday. The guest was presented with a silver mounted pipe as a token of esteem by his comrades.\textsuperscript{105}

Local doctors, bank managers, storekeepers and Aldermen were often given larger farewells that were akin to civic functions. Dr Noel Kirkwood on his move to Wollongong in April 1924 was farewelled by both the Port Kembla Cricket Club at their 'Annual Smoke Social', and by the town at a general civic farewell held at the Amusu Theatre with newsagent, T.J. McCann, presiding. Kirkwood was presented with a gold watch and Mrs Kirkwood with an etching of the University of Sydney. Women were rarely farewelled personally, but were sometimes included as 'wives' or 'daughters'. After speeches from prominent citizens and a music programme, 'Auld Lang Syne' and 'Jolly Good Fellow' were sung.\textsuperscript{106} These social events were ways that townspeople could express their appreciation of a valued local citizen, but they also symbolised the unity of those staying behind. The act of gift giving reminded locals of the small-town values that they felt resided in their 'community', and helped affirm their act of staying while their comrade set out for a new place.

\textsuperscript{105} Illawarra Mercury, 26 March 1920.

\textsuperscript{106} South Coast Times, 17 April 1924. See also the farewell given to J.A. Henry, Headmaster at Port Kembla Primary School, on the occasion of his move to Orange. Illawarra Mercury, 20 January 1922.
The corollary of 'the farewell' was 'the welcome', an important way for newcomers to be introduced to local society. As with farewells, welcomes were often given to prominent male newcomers. Local organisations such as friendly societies, the returned soldiers' league, unions and political parties were active in staging welcomes for newly-arrived men. In the latter years of the First World War the 'welcome home' was common for soldiers returning from France.\textsuperscript{107} Friendly societies also prided themselves on welcoming members from other areas or recruiting new members. In August 1926 Sister Stewart from the Grand United Order of Oddfellows at Port Kembla (The Five Islands Lodge) received a gold medal for her recruitment of twelve new members.\textsuperscript{108} Later that year the lodge gained a special mention for initiating 71 new members, the largest number throughout the State for the year.\textsuperscript{109}

Friendly societies and Ladies Guilds from the local churches performed similar roles for women, but generally women's welcomes were more informal greetings from neighbours. Evidence of these informal greetings is scant, but some women were welcomed by neighbours with either a short visit or a gift of food to help 'settle in.'\textsuperscript{110} Kin migration was often an important reason for movement to Port Kembla and many newly-arrived women received help and support from relatives already living in the town.\textsuperscript{111} These links were the

\textsuperscript{107}See, for example, the welcome home given to Charles Jackson at his mother's boarding house (Sarah Jackson) in Military Road. \textit{South Coast Times}, 11 January 1918. In January 1919 a welcome home was held for Sergeant Scott and Private Turrent at the Empire Hall. \textit{South Coast Times}, 3 January 1919.

\textsuperscript{108}\textit{The Oddfellow} (journal of the Grand United Order of Oddfellows), 15 August 1926.

\textsuperscript{109}\textit{The Oddfellow}, 15 November 1926. On the interpretation of farewells and welcomes I have benefited from Cohen, op.cit., 50—58.

\textsuperscript{110}Transcript of Interview with Hazel Parkes and Lee Forrester (Interviewed by Denise Preston, 1986), Wollongong TAFE, 5.

\textsuperscript{111}For example, Sarah Drury moved to Port Kembla in 1909. Her grandmother, Sarah Ann Watson owned a boarding house at Port Kembla, and in the following years employed all of her daughters, including Sarah's mother. Later, with the wealth accumulated from her business, she purchased a home for each of them in Port Kembla. See Interview with Sarah Drury, 1—2 and 10. Other family support was not as
beginning of relationships between women played out in the street or over the 
back fence, and were carried over to, and reinforced by, the interaction and 
shopping of the main street.

These points of entry into local society were crucial because in the 
1920s population growth came mostly from immigrants—new arrivals out to try 
their luck in the industrial boom town of the Illawarra. Explanations for the 
strength of local identity often concentrate on birthplace or long-term 
residence, but an analysis of marriage registers at Port Kembla show a large 
percentage of people were not locally born.112 Out of the 45 weddings 
performed at St Stephens, Port Kembla between 1920 and 1927, only five of 
the newly-weds were born in the town. Similarly, from 1927 to 1931 of the 
twenty-one weddings at St Stephens only two people were born in Port 
Kembla.113 That there was such strong local identity in a population where 
many were not locally-born residents attests to the successful operation of the 
processes and cultural practices which introduced and bound people into 
local society.

By the 1920s Port Kembla had acquired a range of local sporting, 
leisure and hobby clubs which catered for all tastes. The town had a number 
of halls and two picture theatres. Sporting teams, especially the Port Kembla 
first grade rugby league side, 'the blacks', were a focus of local loyalty. 
Throughout the 1920s the first grade team was a spectacular success. In its 

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extensive, yet still important in the adjustment to life at Port Kembla. Ethel Combes' family arrived in 
December 1913 and stayed in a boarding house run by a relative, Mrs Lucas, until they moved into one of 
the MM-built cottages. See Interview with Ethel Combe, 1.

112 See, for example, R.J. Sampson, 'Local Friendship Ties and Community Attachment in Mass Society: 
Stovall, 'Friends, Neighbours and Communists: Community Formation in Suburban Paris during the early 

113 St Stephens Marriage Registers, 21 April 1920 to 5 May 1927 and 2 July 1927 to 4 April 1931, D101, 
Box 12, WUA.
debut in Illawarra first grade football it was narrowly defeated by the Wollongong team in the grand final. The team were Premiers in 1922, 1923, 1924, 1927 and 1928 and reached the semi-finals every year until 1931.\textsuperscript{114} Trips to nearby towns were often undertaken to watch 'the blacks' play, so even when residents left their town they often were reaffirming their identity as people from Port Kembla.

Port Kembla, however, lacked a race track where the important male pastime of gambling could be centred. Wollongong, Unanderra, Bulli and Dapto had race tracks for horses and dogs and some men did travel to these tracks. But the prevalence of 'SP' or starting price betting and 'two up' in the town's hotels, billiard rooms and back lanes, meant that gambling could still be carried out locally.\textsuperscript{115}

For the youth of Port Kembla organised leisure activities ranged from church youth groups to cubs, scouts and girl guides. By the beginning of the 1930s Port Kembla had the biggest scouting group on the South Coast with a membership of 78, and an attendance rate of 82 per cent. This included 31 cubs, 41 scouts and six scout masters.\textsuperscript{116} The Girl Guides formed in December 1926 and were never as successful as the Scouts. By 1931 they numbered only 31.\textsuperscript{117} All the major churches had youth groups, and these were important

\textsuperscript{114}Len Ewart, 'Port Kembla Rugby League Football Club: The Club's History' in Davis, \textit{op.cit.}, 55—56. The Club was first formed in 1914 when it fielded a second and third grade side. The following year the competition was cancelled because of the First World War. The Club reformed in 1919.

\textsuperscript{115}See reports of a police raid on a billiard room in Wentworth Street in \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 11 and 18 May 1923.

\textsuperscript{116}\textit{Australian Boy Scout Association—South Coast and Tablelands Area}, Annual Reports no.7 and 8, 30 June 1931 and 30 June 1932, ML.

\textsuperscript{117}\textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 13 February 1931.
social networks for young people, with many meeting their future spouses in these forums.117 Morgan Simon recalled:

We had a young people's organisation in the [Methodist] church in those days and a lot of them married in the clubs, like I mean in the church clubs, and they are still very close friends to us now.118

Leisure of a less formal nature was probably more common. Oral history respondents remember the harbour, beaches, Lake Illawarra and Tom Thumb's Lagoon as places where they played as children, whether it was sliding down the sand hills at the back of Perkin's Beach or catching fish in the harbour. Disused industrial buildings, like the old shacks that belonged to the Mt Kembla Coal and Oil Company or the abandoned PWD quarries, were popular haunts. These childhood experiences provided a common fund of nostalgic memories which were often drawn upon in later life to reaffirm the importance of one's locality.

The distinguishing 'structure of feeling' of Port Kembla society in the 1910s and 1920s was its town-centredness; a feature which had its origins in the material conditions of Port Kembla's development, and the cultural practices of everyday life. The commercial and residential development of the town encouraged a growing perception of Port Kembla as a boom town, and formed a unique context for local society. The social relations and cultural

117 Interview with Edith Neaves, 3. She remembers of the Methodist Youth group: 'We had to go to our Sunday school—that was a must them days—and then to church when we were teenagers, if we wanted to. We weren't forced to and we generally liked going and a gang of us would get together and all go and just sort of meet there.'
118 Interview with Morgan Simon, 6. Simon met his future wife in the church group and they married in 1939.
practices that came with town growth led to an inward-looking society. This was an experience not always shared by itinerant labourers and some of the working class who developed a class-based understanding of the town, but most residents shopped locally, married each other, had locally-based friendship networks and energetically participated in town-centred social and cultural life. These conditions were fertile ground for a politics based on the centrality of local interests above all others, including class interests, and these competing political allegiances are the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter 6: Class, locality and politics

The political landscape of Port Kembla was dominated by two principal types of politics. The first, the politics of locality, was based on assertions of local unity and calls for development and progress through town-based organisations. Its origins were in the material conditions of local society, and a powerful ideology of localism. The second type was class politics, tensions arising out of the class divisions in local society, and was most clearly revealed during industrial conflict. This chapter focuses on these two dominant modes of political mobilisation till 1930, identifying two periods where class politics challenged the general dominance of the politics of locality—1917 to 1920 and the late 1920s to the beginning of the depression in 1930.

The politics of locality

A specifically town-based political interest first appeared in 1906 when locals complained of the inadequate water supply to Port Kembla. A petition signed by 90 residents was forwarded to the Minister for Public Works, C.A. Lee, and a public meeting was held in June, the first of its kind at Port Kembla.¹ The lobbying was successful and a reservoir was built the following year, in an area which was later subdivided and named Reservoir Street.²

This new town-based politics was solidified with the formation of the Port Kembla Progress Association in 1908. The Association took the form of many similar organisations throughout the Illawarra, as Progress Associations became more common from the turn of the century.³ The appearance of these

¹ Illawarra Mercury, 18 May 1906 and 29 June 1906.
² Illawarra Mercury, 8 October 1907.
³ The first such Association was formed in Helensburgh in 1894. A Progress Committee was formed at Mt Kembla in 1899, and a Progress Association was active at Dapto from at least 1903.
organisations in the Illawarra arose out of the growing urbanisation of the region and the increasing responsibilities of local government. Organised groups of ratepayers found they could more effectively and persuasively present their grievances to councils. There was also a broader ideological context. Enthusiasm for decentralisation (which led to a Royal Commission into Railway Decentralisation in 1911), and the identification of 'the city' as a parasitical and pernicious influence on the whole country's development, also informed many of the demands for progress and development at a regional or town level.

The immediate origin of the Port Kembla Progress Association was a public meeting at which it was agreed that 'the time has arrived when a Progress Association should be formed.' Both residents and those employed at Port Kembla who lived elsewhere were eligible to join, although only residents were eligible for office. The President and Vice-Presidents were nominated by the meeting. As there were nineteen nominations for a committee of twelve, a ballot was held at Middleton's General Store which resulted in an executive dominated by the local middle class and petite bourgeoisie. These men had many of the skills and resources for leadership and public speaking, but the executive also contained two labourers from Electrolytic Refining and Smelting Company of Australia Ltd (ER&S), and two untraceable names who were also probably labourers who had not registered on the Electoral Roll.

The mix of men from different classes highlights an important aspect of the politics of locality. For the Association to represent the legitimate political voice of the town it had to appear representative. This can be seen in constant references by the *Illawarra Mercury* and the *South Coast Times* to a 'representative number' or a 'cross-section' of local residents being present at

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*Illawarra Mercury*, 21 August 1908 and *Illawarra Mercury*, 1 September 1908. Occupations are taken from the 1909 State Electoral Roll for Wollongong, Port Kembla Polling Place, ML.
meetings.\textsuperscript{5} In this sense, then, the Progress Association represented a political coalition of different classes in the town, its success or otherwise a barometer of the state of class relations at Port Kembla.

The Port Kembla Progress Association lobbied the Central Illawarra Council and the State Government for services and public investment at Port Kembla. Throughout its history affairs were conducted by a core of twelve male executive members. Many grievances arose out of what residents saw as municipal neglect and mismanagement, and issues such as the sanitary service, the state of local roads, bridges and footpaths and the subdivision of the Wentworth estate dominated proceedings.\textsuperscript{6} In 1908 the Progress Association was even performing some of the actions of a council, collecting donations from tradespeople and others at Port Kembla for road maintenance.

The Association arose out of the common problems facing residents in a new town with few services or amenities, and the increasingly powerful feelings of local identity which accompanied Port Kembla's development. But locals also shared common political adversaries—Wollongong-based interests, the local Council and the Wentworth estate—and conflict and competition with these adversaries helped unite the town politically, and fuelled the politics of locality in the 1900s, 1910s and 1920s.

In 1908 before a Hotel Licensing inquiry E.A. White, general superintendent of ER&S, claimed that Port Kembla residents 'did not want to remain an offshoot of Wollongong, but [wanted] to be better than Wollongong.'\textsuperscript{7}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{5}For example, see Illawarra Mercury, 21 August 1919 and South Coast Times, 5 September 1919.
\textsuperscript{6}See letters received by the Council from the Progress Association in CIC Minute Book, 14 October 1908 (railway crossing at Port Kembla); 11 November 1908 (sanitary contract); 15 January 1909 (road from Wollongong); 14 October 1910 (horse trough at Port Kembla); 13 March 1913 (roads at Port Kembla) and 10 October 1917 (insanitary conditions at Port Kembla), C1/5, WPL. Other correspondence from the Progress Association can be found in the Port Kembla School Files.
\textsuperscript{7}White's comments at the Licensing Inquiry were reported in Illawarra Mercury, 10 October 1908.
\end{flushleft}
White’s comment highlights the political implications for Port Kembla of the close proximity of the large commercial centre of Wollongong. There were a number of influential political organisations at Wollongong including the Wollongong Council, the Wollongong Chamber of Commerce and the Wollongong Traders’ Association with different political agendas, but all shared a concern to capture for themselves the benefits of Port Kembla’s industrial development.

Wollongong interests dominated the early political debates surrounding Port Kembla’s future. From 1897 representatives and officials from Wollongong enthusiastically supported the proposal to construct a deep water harbour at Port Kembla. While many from Wollongong had hoped Wollongong harbour would be the centre of any new development, the failure of the Wollongong Harbour Trust in 1895 cleared the way for Wollongong representatives to support the Port Kembla proposal. As the Parliamentary Committee’s Report noted in discussing the rival Wollongong site: ‘[l]ocal feelings and interests have merged in a general agreement that all further expenditure should be incurred in giving effect to the Departmental proposal in connection with Port Kembla.’

The representatives from Wollongong were confident that the town’s regional dominance would continue, despite the location of the harbour at Port Kembla. This confidence came from a particular understanding of the new harbour. In 1897 the Mayor of Wollongong, Henry McCabe, was asked by a Parliamentary Committee investigating the construction of the harbour at Port Kembla about the effects of Port Kembla’s future growth. He replied:

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8 The Wollongong Harbour Trust had advocated expansion of Wollongong harbour by a seaway connecting the harbour to Tom Thumb’s Lagoon. However, this expensive and ambitious plan failed to receive permission from the State Government to raise the necessary money, and the Trust was dissolved in December 1895. See ‘Expenditure on Harbour Works at Wollongong’, *NSWV&P*, vol.2, 1883—1884; ‘Amounts of Public Money advanced in forms of grants, etc for labour to the Wollongong Harbour Trust’, *NSWV&P*, vol.4, 1894—95 and *Government Gazette*, no.804, 2 December 1895.

9 *PSCPW*, 1897, Deep Water Harbour at Port Kembla, 14.
When we get the Port Kembla harbour, I think I am quite right in saying that the mines will be kept going certainly half as much again as they are now. The increased wages which are paid will be distributed in the town and that of itself will make a great difference. I dare say a large population will gather around Port Kembla, but the providing for ships and that kind of thing will go on from here [Wollongong]. In my opinion Port Kembla will be to Wollongong as Port Adelaide is to Adelaide.\(^\text{10}\)

Such views continued into the early twentieth century. In 1912 Alderman R.M. Krippner of Wollongong Council wrote to the *Illawarra Mercury*:

> It is because I take the broad outlook I can see in the not very distant future a large manufacturing centre at Port Kembla with Wollongong as the business and residential centre.\(^\text{11}\)

Thus, the Port Kembla harbour was seen to be of direct benefit to Wollongong's economic development, and Wollongong representatives pursued this vision of a wholly industrial Port Kembla, serviced by a commercial and residential centre at Wollongong. Political conflict between representatives of the two towns was in part motivated by different visions for the future of Port Kembla.

Tension and conflict with Wollongong interests continued throughout the ensuing decades, adding to Port Kembla's insularity. The maintenance of the

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\(^{10}\) Evidence of Henry McCabe (Mayor of Wollongong) in *ibid.*, 213.

\(^{11}\) *Illawarra Mercury*, 26 November 1912.
road from Wollongong to Port Kembla was one contentious issue, and in 1927 the Illawarra Mercury reported these comments by Alderman T. Kiernan of Wollongong Council:

Despite the natural advantages of Port Kembla he did not think anyone would prefer to live there than Wollongong, provided Wollongong was equally as accessible. The present Port Kembla Road was a disgrace to the Municipality and hundreds of people were kept from shopping in Wollongong every week.\(^\text{12}\)

For Kiernan the road represented both a link to Port Kembla so that workers could live in Wollongong and work in Port Kembla, and a way of siphoning trade to Wollongong. These moves by Wollongong interests provided the residents of Port Kembla with a readily identifiable opponent. At a Progress Association meeting in 1925 a State Government plan to unite Wollongong and Port Kembla brought shouts of 'We don't want anything to do with Wollongong.'\(^\text{13}\)

Economic and political competition with surrounding towns like Wollongong were crucial to the political mobilisation of local identity at Port Kembla, as exemplified by the Progress Association, but not only Wollongong interests were opposed to the idea of a viable town at Port Kembla. The farmers of the Central Illawarra were uneasy about the plans and hopes for an industrial Port Kembla, and through their domination of the local Council, they came to

\(^{12}\text{Alderman Kiernan reported in the Illawarra Mercury, 13 May 1927. The case of Kiernan neatly demonstrates the economic as well as political dimension to Wollongong/Port Kembla relations, because Kiernan himself was a building contractor who undertook considerable work at Port Kembla, and the state of the road would have had a direct bearing on his ability to access the Port Kembla market.}\)

\(^{13}\text{South Coast Times, 6 November 1925.}\)
represent major opponents to Port Kembla's growth and development, further uniting disparate political groups in the industrial town.

The Central Illawarra Council was established by a group of well-to-do dairy farmers and land owners in 1859. By 1900 the Municipality was divided into three wards with three Alderman each, covering the towns of Dapto, Marshall Mount, Yallah, Mt Kembla, Figtree, Port Kembla and Unanderra, the site of the Council Chambers. In 1900 the Council's Mayor was James O'Donnell, dairy farmer and landowner at Port Kembla and Unanderra. Other Alderman that year included Joseph Dobinson, a storekeeper from Figtree, Harry Graham, a baker from Mt Kembla, John Brown, a farmer from Dapto (and one of the original Alderman from 1859), John Richards, a storekeeper from Unanderra, George McPhail, a dairy farmer from Dapto, William Moran, a dairy farmer from Figtree and William Beach, a former world-champion sculler and dairy farmer from Dapto.\textsuperscript{14} Franchise and eligibility for local Government elections were limited. Under the Local Government Act of 1906 (with amendments in 1907 and 1908) only male ratepayers could stand for office, and only male ratepayers, lessees of crown land and owners of companies occupying rateable land could vote in local government elections.\textsuperscript{15} At the 1901 Council elections there were 670 electors enrolled, but only 126 voted.\textsuperscript{16} This municipal electoral apathy, combined with the paternalistic dominance of

\textsuperscript{14}See CIC Minute Book, 1900, C1/4, WPL and Sands' Sydney and New South Wales Country Directory, 1900, ML. Another Alderman, W. Cook, could not be definitely identified because of the number of 'W. Cooks' in the municipality.


\textsuperscript{16}New South Wales Statistical Register, 1901, 8.
wealthy local dairy farmers and storekeepers, ensured that the Council was dominated by rural interests well into the twentieth century.

Farmers reacted uneasily to the coming of industrialisation to their Municipality. James and Michael O'Donnell, farmers who held land at Port Kembla and Unanderra, wrote to the Council objecting to the proposed smelting works at Port Kembla in April 1907 for fear that pollution from the works would 'create a nuisance.'\textsuperscript{17} However, economic change also presented opportunities, and the O'Donnells soon recognised this. Within two years James O'Donnell was acting as local agent for the Wentworth estate, and Michael O'Donnell had sold his farm and opened an auctioneers firm with H.N. Stumbles.\textsuperscript{18}

Gentlemen farmers like the O'Donnells adapted more readily than others since subdividing and land speculation was only a step away from the experience of subletting to small leaseholders, but others remained ambivalent and sometimes hostile about Port Kembla's ensuing growth and industrialisation. The farmers on the Council hindered the subdivision of Port Kembla and were slow in providing metalled and formed roads and an effective sanitary service.

The reaction at Port Kembla was to identify the farmers on the Council as one of the chief political adversaries to the town's development. In 1913 Thomas Downie, former president of the Progress Association and wharfinger at Port Kembla, told a meeting that '[h]is opinion was that the present members of the Council only know how to make roads and bail yards.'\textsuperscript{19} In March 1918 Aldermen visited Port Kembla to inspect the state of the roads but, as the \textit{South Coast Times} reported, 'a party addressed such abusive language at them that they moved on.'\textsuperscript{20} At a public meeting called at Port Kembla to discuss

\textsuperscript{17}CIC Minute Book, 10 April 1907, C1/4, WPL.
\textsuperscript{18}Firth, \textit{op.cit.}, 8.
\textsuperscript{19}\textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 18 July 1913. A bail yard is part of a milking shed which holds the cow's head in place.
\textsuperscript{20}\textit{South Coast Times}, 8 March 1918.
'Municipal grievances' in May 1918, H.R. Lee, Alderman since 1912 and accountant at ER&S, claimed that the Council had 'no right to take rates at Port Kembla and spend it on farmers' roads.' His comments were met with applause and Lee backed his claim saying that the Council collected £800 in rates at Port Kembla and only spent £200 on the town.\footnote{South Coast Times, 17 May 1918. See also Lee's letter to the Illawarra Mercury, 9 July 1912. In support of his candidacy for Council elections Lee wrote: [R]emember that it was the Council, in conjunction with the Wentworth estate (for whom Jas [James] O'Donnell is the local representative) who are responsible for the deplorable state of the streets of the township of Port Kembla.' This particular identification of Port Kembla's political adversaries combined the Council, the Wentworth estate and one of the estate's local agents, dairy farmer, James O'Donnell.}

In the 1920s the farmer-dominated Council was also the focus of political struggles at Port Kembla for municipal reform by groups such as the Progress Association. The demographic changes that had occurred in the Central Illawarra since 1900 had left the Council with an anachronistic ward structure. A fourth ward had been added in 1908, however, municipal representation had very little to do with population density. By the 1920s Port Kembla made up the bulk of ward number one and its population had increased rapidly to almost 3000, while ward number four (the rural areas of West Dapto, Brownsville and Yallah) had decreased to 300. Alderman Shipp expressed the Progress Associations' view of the matter to the Council:

> It was not fair that 3000 ratepayers that provided three-fifths of the revenue should only have the same representation as 300 ratepayers that provided one-eighth of the revenue.\footnote{Alderman Shipp's comments to the Council were reported in Illawarra Mercury, 13 September 1929. See also report of the meeting of the Progress Association in Illawarra Mercury, 9 August 1929.}
Municipal representatives such as Shipp, who was endorsed by the Progress Association, had been advocating civic autonomy since the early 1920s. In February 1927 a separate municipality attracted the attention of the Association. In June representatives from the Port Kembla Traders' Association, the Progress Association, the Australian Workers' Union (AWU) and the Tourist Association approached the Minister for Local Government, M.F. Bruxner, with a plan to create a separate municipality. The Minister suggested altering ward boundaries, a compromise the Progress Association was willing to accept. The rural representatives on Council, however, successfully stalled the proposal, arguing that the viability of the Council would be undermined if a significant part of its revenue base was removed. From the point of view of the Port Kembla representatives it appeared as if the Council was using the revenue generated by Port Kembla ratepayers to subsidise less-populated rural areas which were the farmers' traditional electorates.

The trustees of the Wentworth estate were another 'outside' influence identified as pernicious by Port Kembla-based interests. In 1915, when the trustees asked the Department of Education for £1800 for just under one hectare of land for a new school, they attracted considerable local criticism. The Minister for Education, A.C. Carmichael, had criticised the Wentworth trustees after

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23 For example, see Shipp's comments at the Progress Association meeting in South Coast Times, 8 February 1924. In 1920 Shipp was endorsed by the Labor League, so his move to Progress Association endorsement by 1924 is an interesting shift in light of the arguments presented here.

24 Sydney Morning Herald, 4 February 1927, 14.

25 South Coast Times, 24 June 1927.

26 Municipal reform did not come about until September 1934 when the Municipality was proclaimed a Shire with three ridings. This change failed to please Port Kembla Aldermen (who all voted against it) and can be generally seen as a victory for the rural representatives on the Council. Riding A, which included Port Kembla and nearby towns such as WIndang, Berkeley and Warrawong had four Councillors and a population of 7760, while Riding B, which included Mount Kembla, Unanderra and Figtree, had the same number of Councillors with a population of only 2500. See CIC Minute Book, 8 August 1934, C1/10, WPL and 'Shire of Central Illawarra, Information Sheet, July, 1944', CIC Minutes of Finance Committee, C/2/2, WPL.
meeting with the 1915 deputation of Port Kembla organisations referred to above.27 The Minister called the trustees an 'unpatriotic body of citizens [without] the soul or instincts of citizens ... If they had had any of the bounden instincts of citizens, they would have given the land to the Government.'28 His comments were reported in the local press, and a correspondent identified as 'Taxpayer' wrote to the *South Coast Times* in support of the Minister's sentiments:

> The local bodies have done excellent work in attending to the wants and welfare of the township and for its general advancement, but who has ever heard of the Wentworth Estate or family doing a hand-stand or giving a single shilling to anything in the district ... Their main object appears to be dodging expenses in forming roads on the various subdivisions ... Mr Carmichael was fully justified in using the language reported, and I for one hope that he will see 'these soulless people damned' before paying them any fancy price for land to be used for educational purposes.29

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27 See 'Transcripts of meeting between A.C. Carmichael and residents of Port Kembla in regard to the site for a new school', 17 February 1915, Port Kembla School Files.
29 *South Coast Times*, 26 February 1915. See also H.R. Lee's letter in the *Illawarra Mercury*, 9 July 1912, quoted above footnote 21. The estate also came in for criticism in 1923. At a Progress Association meeting in May that year, called to discuss the Wentworth trustee's offer of ten hectares of land at Port Kembla to the Council, one speaker criticised W.C. Wentworth (the fourth), the current local representative of the estate, because the land offered was all sand hills. Wentworth's motive, according to the speaker, was 'to save himself from being involved in a lawsuit in regard to the encroachment of sand onto a ratepayer's property.' See *Illawarra Mercury*, 11 May 1923.
"Taxpayers' anger was directed at the trustees' disinterest and lack of support for local development, and the letter explicitly contrasts this disinterest with the actions of 'local bodies'. Characteristic of the ideology of localism which underpinned the politics of locality, the political sphere was divided into locals versus outsiders, the former were seen to be motivated by genuine local 'needs', the latter by monetary gain only. Tense and conflict-ridden relations between the representatives of Port Kembla, Wollongong-based interests, the farmers of the Central Illawarra and the Wentworth trustees helped forge links between diverse political groups at Port Kembla. This political map seemed to confirm the role of 'outsiders' as the main threat to local development and reinforced the dominant perception of local politics as a united town struggling against 'outsiders'. With political problems and threats located beyond the boundaries of Port Kembla, the mirage of a united town could remain largely unchallenged.

While outside forces promoted localism at Port Kembla, there were also powerful local political interests behind the formation of the Progress Association and the mobilisation of local identity. The role of the ER&S was crucial, and, as part of its wider agenda to secure control over the town, ER&S attempted to control the Progress Association. Three of the original twelve executive members of the Association were staff from ER&S while the first president, Bernard Magnus, was manager of ER&S, and company accountant, H.R. Lee, was one of the two vice-presidents. The first issue which the Progress Association concerned itself with, the provision of classes in engineering, assaying and surveying in cooperation with the Department of Public Instruction at the local Primary School, clearly demonstrated the self-interest of ER&S. ³⁰

³⁰Illawarra Mercury, 29 August 1908.
ER&S had a strong paternalistic interest in Port Kembla and endeavoured to control the town's development and create an image of unity which belied class difference, but influencing the Progress Association was only one strategy the company pursued. ER&S also tried to construct a residential environment owned and managed by the company through a vigorous housing policy, as previous chapters have shown. ER&S also opened a company store, the Port Kembla Industries' Co-operative Store, better known as 'the Co-op', in Military Road in 1916.

The creation of an appropriately skilled yet pliant local workforce was another important priority for ER&S. To this end the company focused on the technical and industrial education of local children. In October 1917 the copper smelter agreed to provide an instructor in woodwork one afternoon a week free to the sixth grade boys at Port Kembla Primary School. In April 1918 the company offered technical lectures to sixth grade boys and a tour of each stage of the smelting works. In November 1918, after the company complained of the 'deplorable lack of efficiency' shown by its typists, it donated six typewriters to the school and provided a trained typist to instruct the children.

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31 This is only partly accurate for the other local companies, MM and Australian Fertilizers. These two companies pursued similar strategies and many ER&S initiatives were adopted by them, however, from the late 1920s they began to develop their own style of management as ER&S declined in economic importance. These comments focus on ER&S since comprehensive records from that company are available.

32 Minutes of Directors' Meetings, ER&S Records, 21 April 1916.

33 Memo from Senior Inspector to Chief Inspector, 23 October 1917 in Port Kembla School Files.

34 Letter from J.A. Henry (headmaster) to Department of the Education, 12 April 1918 in Port Kembla School Files. The offer was accepted. For a report on the first lecture by A.P. Selby-Davidson and tour of the works see South Coast Times, 17 May 1918.

ER&S's influence extended beyond the industrial and political sphere. Senior staff such as H.R. Lee, were active in local society in a range of political, cultural and sporting groups.\textsuperscript{36} Lee's activity was never as official representative of the company, but the Board of Directors of ER&S were aware of his invaluable work, covertly looking after the company's interests in local politics. In 1912 he was granted an 'honourarium' of £52 for 'services in connection with the public institutions of Port Kembla.'\textsuperscript{37} In 1918 ER&S also sponsored a 'Recreation Club' located in the Technical Hall. The Club, under the leadership of A.A. Slack from the staff (who the \textit{Mercury} noted 'has been instrumental in establishing similar concerns in other places'), organised sports among the employees and established a library and reading room in the Hall.\textsuperscript{38}

During the 1919 influenza pandemic ER&S stepped in to organise public health and welfare measures. Inoculation depots were set up at the Industries' Co-operative Store and at the company's ambulance room.\textsuperscript{39} In April that year employees at ER&S began contributing 3s. per week to the families of those affected.\textsuperscript{40} This was soon formalised into the Staff and Employee Provident Fund (which included MM), with the staff contributing 2s.6d. per week. During May, June and July, the worst months of the pandemic at Port Kembla, the fund distributed £129 in relief and delivered 700 meals to 108 houses.\textsuperscript{41}

Localism's rhetoric of unity and consensus merged neatly with the company's own agenda, and ER&S attempted to harness the politics of locality for their own industrial and political gains. They had correctly gauged the

\textsuperscript{36}For a list of the organisations that Lee was involved in see Mitchell, \textit{op.cit.}, Appendix IV.

\textsuperscript{37}Minutes of Directors' Meetings, ER&S Records, 26 November 1912. An 'honourarium' is an honorary reward recognising professional services for which no price can be set.

\textsuperscript{38}\textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 26 January 1918.

\textsuperscript{39}\textit{South Coast Times}, 7 February 1919.

\textsuperscript{40}\textit{South Coast Times}, 25 April 1919.

\textsuperscript{41}Annual Report of the Fund in \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 2 January 1920.
strength of local concern about the town and its future, and through judicious
influence in the political and social life of the town hoped to endear the company
to residents and ensure future development suited their interests.

Attempting to draw on the power of localism, many of the ER&S's policies
presented the image of a united, classless locality. Joint picnics between
employees and the staff were instituted in 1913 and were organised by a 'Picnic
Committee'. These committees were forums where staff and workers could mix
in a co-operative atmosphere. On picnic day conciliatory speeches from both
management and unions usually finished off a day of sports and prize giving. In
March 1919 an official luncheon was held at the Port Kembla Hotel where E.
Johnson, local secretary of the AWU, proposed a toast to ER&S and claimed
that 'the men always got a fair crack of the whip at the hands of the company.'
The State Secretary of the AWU, George Buckland, in proposing 'the day we
celebrate', stated that picnic day was a day when 'they should unite for the
purpose of social reunion. They were always fighting the other side and the
other side were always resisting, but the electrolytic employees, in normal times,
were as a rule met by the company in a very fair spirit.'

The 1910s were years of increasing union activity and class conflict both
throughout the nation and at Port Kembla (as the next section will detail), but the
politics of locality remained influential despite the rise of class politics. This was
possible because the town-based coalition extended beyond the uneasy truce
embodied in the Progress Association to include other local organisations
acting in concert over specific issues. In February 1915, for example, a
deputation consisting of representatives from the Progress Association, the
Labor League and the Parent's and Citizen's Association met the Minister for
Education, A.C. Carmichael. The deputation presented a united case for a new
school at Port Kembla. All of the speakers supported the opening comments by

42 South Coast Times, 7 March 1919.
H.R. Lee, representing the Parent's and Citizen's Association. Mr Farrar told the Minister, 'I am instructed by the Political Labor League to fully endorse the remarks of Mr Lee in connection with the school.' Likewise, other speakers endorsed Lee's opening remarks in what was an impressive demonstration of town solidarity, influential in securing a new primary school for Port Kembla which was built the following year.

Along with increasing working-class activism, the First World War also had a deleterious effect on the Progress Association, as active members left and money was redirected to organisations such as the Port Kembla Red Cross League and other war-related fund raising. By June 1915 Port Kembla-based organisations had raised over £700 for the war effort. Many of the former leaders of the Progress Association, such as H.R. Lee, Thomas Downie and Percy Laughlin, focused their energies on the work of the Port Kembla Recruitment Committee or the Port Kembla Rifle Club. But while the First World War had sapped the strength of the Progress Association, the politics of locality was not necessarily the antithesis of the nationalist and patriotic work that war brought. Nationalism and localism were not mutually exclusive. Indeed, during the War, the affirmation of nationalism, patriotism and fund-raising for the War was carried out by town-based organisations, and this had the effect of

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43Lee's move from the Progress Association to the Parent's and Citizen's Association reflects the importance the ER&S attached to its involvement in the education of children to create an appropriately-skilled industrial workforce. See Sherington, op.cit. 129—130.

44For details of this meeting see 'Transcripts of meeting between A.C. Carmichael and residents of Port Kembla in regard to the site for a new school', 17 February 1915, Port Kembla School Files.

45Illawarra Mercury, 8 June 1915.

46The Port Kembla Recruitment Committee was formed in July 1915. Its members included former prominent Progress Association members, H.R. Lee, Thomas Downie, W.P. Laughlin and E.A. White. See South Coast Times, 16 July 1915. The Rifle Club had 40 members by May 1915 and constructed a rifle range behind Perkin's Beach, which was completed in August that year. On the activities of the Rifle Club see Illawarra Mercury, 2 April 1915, 4 June 1915; South Coast Times, 21 May 1915 and [Port] Kembla Rifle Range, 1915—1918, Department of Defence—Correspondence Files, MP367/1/577/5/521, AA.
reinforcing local bonds, at least until heightened industrial conflict dating from 1917.

Class Politics

The origins of the industrial conflict of the late 1910s at Port Kembla can be traced to the increasing organisation and activism of local working-class organisations from 1910, and an important forum for the development of class politics was the industrial and political struggles between staff and workers at ER&S. The paternalism of ER&S was a powerful influence on local society as Mitchell, in his study of ER&S and pollution, concludes:

ER&S bought more than a major industry to Port Kembla.
It bought industrial processes as well as company officers, social mores and values and ideas for community development. In short, the accoutrements and mechanisms to operate a hegemonic situation accompanied the new factory.47

But Mitchell's analysis of ER&S policies assumes that the company was the sole and all-powerful political and social force in Port Kembla, and underestimates the increasing prominence of the working class in local politics. ER&S did bring 'mechanisms to operate a hegemonic situation' to Port Kembla, but its policies were also influenced by conflict and interaction between ER&S management and an increasingly active local working class, and this conflict most clearly revealed the presence of class politics at Port Kembla. Hegemony didn't arrive ready-made; it had to be struggled over, and even then the company's will didn't always prevail.

47 Mitchell, op.cit., 95.
The workers at ER&S formed the Electrolytic Employees' Association (EEA) in December 1910 and submitted a list of claims to the company.\textsuperscript{48} The EEA's use of the name 'Association' instead of 'union' suggest its moderation in industrial affairs, but although it did not have radical or militant intentions, it embarked on a successful campaign of industrial action in 1911. In July the first serious stoppage occurred at the works, precipitated by the removal of a labourer, William Fargood, from the tank house to the yard and his consequent loss of a 6d. bonus.\textsuperscript{49} The details of the Association's grievances are not known, although the manager of ER&S, Bernard Magnus, told the \textit{Mercury} that:

\begin{center}
[I]t had been the custom ever since the works started to employ a body of men whose services would be utilised in various capacities. One day they might be employed on the wharf unloading ore from the steamers, the next in some other department of the works, and their pay varied according to the nature of the duties.\textsuperscript{50}
\end{center}

It was probably this arbitrary placement in different jobs and the consequent variation in wages that riled the Association. As the \textit{Australian Mining Standard} noted, 'a state of irritation prevail[ed] in some parts of the establishment.'\textsuperscript{51} The strike lasted twenty-two days and the dispute was then submitted to arbitration. The Association also went to the Wages Board for a general increase. 'If the Board makes any important amendments' noted the pro-company \textit{Australian Mining Standard}, 'it will be an admission that it is not beyond the influence of

\textsuperscript{48} Illawarra \textit{Mercury}, 30 December 1910. An earlier claim in May 1909 had been successfully resisted by the company. See Minutes of Directors' Meetings, ER&S Records, 14 May 1909.

\textsuperscript{49} Illawarra \textit{Mercury}, 25 July 1911 and Minutes of Directors' Meetings, ER&S Records, 27 July 1911.

\textsuperscript{50} Illawarra \textit{Mercury}, 25 July 1911.

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Australian Mining Standard}, 27 July 1911, 81.
vigorou appeal. The Association was successful in arbitration and a more favourable award was handed down in December 1911.

This union activity hardly matches the image of absolute ER&S hegemony portrayed by Mitchell, and the similar picture of working-class passivity implicit in Firth's work. In fact, ER&S management were keenly aware of working-class political activity, and new paternalistic strategies were in part reactions to union activity. For example, the company picnics and the garden competitions were established in 1913, a few years after the strike action of 1911. In November 1916 E.A. White, general superintendent of ER&S, cabled one of the directors of the company, R.G. Casey, at that time in London. He asked Casey to inquire about insurance 'against damage caused through riots or civil commotions.' In 1917 the company also tried to attract more police to the town by offering a house on the corner of Military and Darcy Roads 'to be rented to the police department for an extra constable.' That the rhetoric of local unity evoked by the company through industrial paternalism was linked to

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52 Australian Mining Standard, 14 December, 1911, 595.
53 See Managing Director's Fifth Annual Report for the year ending 31 October 1911, ER&S. The new award was published in Illawarra Mercury, 9 January 1912.
54 See Mitchell, op. cit., 83—94 and Firth, op. cit., 43.
55 The same pattern of company response to working-class mobilisation occurred at the Mt Morgan Gold and Copper Mining Company, ER&S's parent company. The workforce at Mt Morgan became more organised and militant from the early 1900s. The similarities could be explained by the fact that many ER&S workers came from Mt Morgan, and brought with them these traditions of union organisation. See Grahame Griffin, 'J.H. Lundager, Mount Morgan Politician and Photographer: Company Hack or Subtle Subversive?', Journal of Australian Studies, no. 34, September 1992, 20.
56 Minutes of Directors' Meetings, ER&S Records, 7 November 1916. Casey replied that the insurance market in London was 'congested with similar business for Australia.' Clearly the minds of managers and company directors in Australia were alive with fear of the consequences of working-class mobilisation. See also Moore, The Secret Army and the Premier, 17—28.
57 Minutes of Directors' Meetings, ER&S Records, 17 January 1917.
the rise in class politics at Port Kembla emphasises the close relationship between the two forms of politics.

Working-class resistance through more informal means was also an important context for ER&S's industrial and political strategies. There were many individual or collective acts of resistance, but these rarely find their way into the historical record. Some families in ER&S houses tampered with electricity meters.58 Others refused to participate in the company's garden competition, used by ER&S to encourage workers to keep their houses in good repair, thus lowering maintenance costs and the cost of living.59 Results for every year were published in the Mercury for all to see, another pressure to encourage tenants' participation.60 Those who lived near the railway lines at the Government subdivision risked trespassing fines to collect coal that slid off overfilled wagons.

The youth of Port Kembla were not easily convinced by free lectures and instructions in working-class respectability—New Year's Eve celebrations at Port Kembla often resulted in the destruction of property, and vegetable gardens were common targets for young thieves. Because of their secret nature the full extent of these acts of resistance can not be gauged, but such dissent gives further weight to the argument that the working class at Port Kembla, before the late 1930s, were as not acquiescent as other accounts have suggested.

While class politics at Port Kembla originated in the industrial struggles of local industry, it soon moved into town-based organisations. In March 1913 the Port Kembla Political Labour League appeared on the political landscape. The secretary of the EEA, Charles Clifford, was also secretary of the new League,

58 Interview with Colin Warrington, (Interviewed by Denise Freston, 1983?), Wollongong TAFE.
59 This was revealed in a frank report in the South Coast Times 15 August 1919: 'It has been the practice of the E.R.&S. Co. for some time past to give prizes each month to encourage their tenants to make their premises always have a neat and attractive appearance; also to cut the cost of living by having a vegetable patch.'
60 For example, see Illawarra Mercury, 22 October 1926.
and it proved immediately popular. The League had sixty names of interested people prior to the foundation meeting, and in May 1913 the League held a social dance at Simon's Hall raising £20 in what was reportedly the highest attendance for such a function at Port Kembla.\textsuperscript{61} With Clifford as secretary and at least four men from the EEA including the president, E. Newtown, on the committee, the influence of the Electrolytic Association was clear. The League also attracted local storekeepers such as W.P. Laughlin, barber, and Alexander Pascoe, blacksmith at the PWD quarry.

ER&S workers, with the support of some local storekeepers, developed the Labor League into an influential local organisation.\textsuperscript{62} The Labor League represented an alternative forum to the Progress Association for residents to air

\textsuperscript{61}For the report of the people interested before the first meeting see \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 7 March 1913. The report of the social function is in \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 2 May 1913. Members of the first executive of the Port Kembla Political Labor League (from \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 28 March 1913) included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President:</td>
<td>Alexander Pascoe</td>
<td>Blacksmith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-Presidents:</td>
<td>John Fitzpatrick</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>J. O'Malley</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee:</td>
<td>Frederick Forrester</td>
<td>Labourer, ER&amp;S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Raymond Chesher</td>
<td>Labourer, ER&amp;S</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thomas Jenks</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T. Wells</td>
<td>Storekeeper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E. Newtown</td>
<td>Labourer, ER&amp;S and President, EEA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{62}The radical credentials of the branch were underlined by an incident in 1915 when the branch passed a motion condemning Premier W.A. Holman's recruiting activities. The Port Kembla police were asked to investigate after the local State Member, M.F. Morton, claimed in the New South Wales Parliament that such actions were undermining the recruiting effort. The sponsor of the motion, George Matchett, a labourer for the PWD, was reported by the police to have 'strong socialistic views' and that 'owing to his influence ... several members of the League who had expressed their intention of enlisting had failed to do so.' The matter was dropped after Matchett assured Parliament of his support for the war effort, but not before prosecution under the War Precautions Act was considered by the Attorney-General's Office. See 'Defence: Statement regarding alleged utterances at a meeting of the Port Kembla Political Labor League regarding recruiting', \textit{NSWPP}, 1915—16, vol.2, 1003—1004.
their grievances. Indeed, the movement of class politics from the industrial workplace into town-based organisations coincided with a drop in popularity of the Progress Association in 1913. In June 1913, the same month that the Labor League held another successful social dance (a ‘plain and fancy dress ball’\(^{63}\)), the *Mercury* reported:

Is it dead? Several prominent townsmen would like to know whether the Port Kembla Progress Association is dead or gone, as it is six months since a meeting was held. If the association has become deceased it is probable that an endeavour will be made to form a P & C [parent's and citizen's] association.\(^{64}\)

An attempted reformation meeting in July 1913 resolved that due to the small attendance, membership fees should be reduced to 1s. per year.\(^{65}\)

From a position of increasing strength the working-class representatives at Port Kembla in 1913 attempted to move class politics to the town centre and into the very stronghold of the politics of locality, the Progress Association. There was some hint of this change in 1912 when the EEA and the Progress Association held joint meetings.\(^{66}\) Word of the new strategy must have passed around for in September 1913, 130 people turned up to the Annual Progress Association meeting, as both sides marshalled their forces. A ballot was held at

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\(^{63}\) *Illawarra Mercury*, 27 June 1913.

\(^{64}\) *Illawarra Mercury*, 23 May 1913.

\(^{65}\) *Illawarra Mercury*, 11 July 1913. See also former president of the Progress Association and local wharfinger, Thomas Downie's comments at a Progress Association banquet in July 1913: 'Mr.T. Downie deplored the fact that so little interest was being taken in the PA [Progress Association] and he urged every resident to join the Association.' *Illawarra Mercury*, 18 July 1913.

\(^{66}\) *Illawarra Mercury*, 9 August 1912.
the meeting and the results published in the local paper. The elections ended in a stalemate with neither the labourers nor the staff from ER&S gaining a clear ascendancy on the new executive.\textsuperscript{67} The Progress Association became a site for political conflict characteristic of class politics, rather than the negotiation and truce of the politics of locality. This was ultimately detrimental to the Association and it faded from the political scene, replaced by the active and healthy Labor League.\textsuperscript{68}

The increasing strength and broad front of class politics at Port Kembla culminated in the industrial conflicts of the late 1910s and 1920. In September 1917 the AWU (which had taken over from the EEA in 1916), stopped work in sympathy with the railway and waterfront workers during the General Strike. In September 1917 ER&S wrote to suppliers and customers informing them that the company was 'unable to take delivery of any ore or copper bearing material until further notice' due to the general strike.\textsuperscript{69} The new award which resolved the strike in December 1917 was accepted by the AWU, although it was 'the opinion of the members...that the award was in no way commensurate with the cost of living at Port Kembla.'\textsuperscript{70} The end of the war raised expectations that pre-war wage levels would be restored, and dissatisfaction simmered as the branch tried unsuccessfully to have their award wages altered in the face of post-war inflation.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{67} Illawarra Mercury, 23 September 1913.

\textsuperscript{68} For example, see South Coast Times, 14 August 1914: 'For some time past there has been a lack of interest displayed by members of the Committee in the Progress Association.' This was in contrast to the continual reports of Labor League activity. In February 1914, for example, the League organised a farewell party attended by 100 people for its founding secretary. Charles Nicholson, when he announced his impending move to Newcastle. See Illawarra Mercury, 20 February 1914.

\textsuperscript{69} Minutes of Directors' Meetings, ER&S Records, 6 September 1917.

\textsuperscript{70} AWU Minute Book, 12 December 1917.

\textsuperscript{71} On post-war inflation see Macintyre, The Oxford History of Australia, Volume 4: The Succeeding Age, 193.
Discontent was exacerbated by industrial downturn at Port Kembla. At
ER&S the blast furnace closed down in late December 1918 and one hundred
men were put off for a month.\textsuperscript{72} In March the next year another one hundred
men were laid off, and finally in June, a shipping strike and a depressed market
for copper led to the closure of all furnaces at ER&S. The company had been
unable to sell any copper since October 1918, and it was trying to finance its
continued operations with the sale of gold.\textsuperscript{73} Workforce numbers fell from a peak
of 600 in 1918 to 400 in 1920.\textsuperscript{74}

Construction work began at MM in early 1918, and these workers
provided an injection of numbers to the AWU at Port Kembla. Many of these new
workers at MM also appeared to be more militant than ER&S workers, and they
led the early moves towards industrial action. In April 1919 workers at MM met to
discuss a new award handed down by the State Arbitration Court. The men
claimed the minimum rate of 10s. a day did not take into account the rising cost
of living.\textsuperscript{75} By the end of the year joint meetings of AWU members at ER&S and
MM were claiming a basic wage of 13s. a day. In December ER&S management
abruptly pulled out of negotiations and the workers at MM were further inflamed
when MM management claimed that the Board of Trade case due for the next
year would not apply to them. The local branch were becoming increasingly
interested in strike action, and the State Secretary of the AWU had to remind
branch members that they were not allowed to strike without central executive
permission.\textsuperscript{76}

On the 20th December 1919, 500 workers from ER&S and MM (close to
the total combined workforce at that time) went on strike. Members from the
\textsuperscript{72}South Coast Times, 3 January 1919.
\textsuperscript{73}South Coast Times, 7 March 1919 and South Coast Times, 6 June 1919.
\textsuperscript{74}South Coast Times, 7 May 1920.
\textsuperscript{75}South Coast Times, 25 April 1919.
\textsuperscript{76}See generally AWU Minute Book, 1919—1920.
AWU and FEDFA were involved, and the company agreed to submit the dispute to the Wages Board in mid-February—the strike having lasted almost two months.\textsuperscript{77} Both unions managed to achieve a virtual 100 per cent compliance in the order to strike indicating the strength of the unions and working-class solidarity. The AWU generally shunned strike action and preferred arbitration, however, the Port Kembla branch led the way this time and all State branches went on strike a few months later over the forty-four hour week.\textsuperscript{78}

The uneasy relations between management and workers at ER&S and MM had broken out into more sustained class conflict. The industrial conflict at Port Kembla mirrored nation-wide developments. Connell and Irving have noted the increasing working-class militancy from 1910 to 1920, while Turner argues that the period from 1919 to 1920 'exploded in the most costly series of strikes Australia had yet known.'\textsuperscript{79} It was not just a case of management versus workers, however, as the local petite bourgeoisie played a decisive role in the strike of 1920; the origins of which can be seen in the growth of commercial Port Kembla in the 1910s.

In 1911 the local petite bourgeoisie formed the Storekeepers' Association, indicating a degree of independence and a willingness to pursue their own interests.\textsuperscript{80} As the petite bourgeoisie became an established part of local life in the 1910s, their everyday interactions in the main street drew some closer to their predominantly working-class customers. This was reflected politically in the involvement of prominent storekeepers in the Labor League. Well-known storekeepers like W.P. Laughlin and Robert Shipp were active in the Political Labor League from the late 1910s. Laughlin, the town's barber, was president of the League in 1914, 1915 and 1917. The blacksmith, Alexander

\textsuperscript{77}AWU Minute Book, 12 February 1920.
\textsuperscript{78}Turner, \textit{op.cit.}, 199—200.
\textsuperscript{79}Connell and Irving, \textit{op.cit.}, 205 and Turner \textit{op.cit.}, 194.
\textsuperscript{80}\textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 15 September 1911.
Pascoe, was the Labor League president in 1913 and a candidate for Council elections in 1914, while Shipp was a successful Labor League candidate in the local government elections of 1920.\textsuperscript{81}

Such links were not unusual in the Labor Party of the early twentieth century. In Sydney from the 1880s storekeepers and workers commonly formed municipal alliances. Labor ideology was broad enough to include small storekeepers and local businessmen. Even in its more radical moments, Labor's critique of capitalism rarely extended beyond large monopolies, banks and 'parasitical' middle men who made up the 'money power'.\textsuperscript{82} The development of such links between the petite bourgeoisie and the working class at Port Kembla gave class politics a firmer grounding within the town. As I argued in Chapter Two, the primary site for class conflict and class politics was the industrial workplaces of Port Kembla, but with the increasing strength of working-class politics in the 1910s the influence of class politics extended beyond the workplace to the town centre. By forging links with the working class, the petite bourgeoisie were crucial to this development.

By 1920 the local petite bourgeoisie were economically reliant on their working-class customers, politically linked to the working class through the Labor League, and socially close through the daily round of shopping and socialising that occurred in the main street. This was an important context for their role in the strike of early 1920. To survive months without wages the strikers at ER&S and MM formed a Distress Relief Committee 'to organise fund raisers and receive donations.' Local fisherman contributed cart loads of fish, and quarry workers passed the hat around at a special meeting.\textsuperscript{83} The working class were willing to aid their striking comrades, but so too were local

\textsuperscript{81} Illawarra Mercury, 23 January and 3 April 1914.


\textsuperscript{83} South Coast Times, 16 January 1920.
storekeepers. There were 'periodic collections among tradespeople', and donations were also forthcoming from 'leading professional and commercial men.' The *Mercury* noted that 'Mr Fairley's [owner of Fairley's general store] kind treatment of the men during the crisis has been commented on.' In early February, Shipp organised a benefit at his Theatre which raised £40 for the strikers. When the strike was settled a meeting of the workers officially thanked him for his help. Three years later, the AWU offered Shipp membership of the union, but officials of the union informed the branch that he was not eligible.

Storekeepers often supported striking workers in industrial disputes throughout Australia. Connell and Irving note that in such cases local business people were supporting the social fabric of the town, as much as unions themselves. There was also a degree of self-interest involved, for many storekeepers relied on a 'good name' with their mainly working-class customers, which could be threatened if support was not forthcoming. However, there is no evidence of storekeepers being pressured to support strikers with credit or donations at Port Kembla, and on the whole, their support appears to have been freely and generously given. Whatever their motives, the intervention of the storekeepers in the strike of 1920 showed the strength of this third political force and brought class politics into the town centre.

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84 Illawarra Mercury, 2 January 1920 and South Coast Times, 16 January 1920.
85 Illawarra Mercury, 12 March 1920.
86 Illawarra Mercury, 13 February 1920.
87 South Coast Times, 27 February 1920.
88 AWU Minute Book, 8 February and 19 February 1924.
90 In contrast, John Lack has noted the intimidation of storekeepers at Footscray to support the Harvester strike of 1911. See Lack, *A History of Footscray*, 180.
Re-establishing 'order' in the 1920s

Following this peak of industrial unrest and class conflict in 1920, class politics at Port Kembla began to ebb in the 1920s. An important context for this decline was the severity of the post-war recession; unemployment and underemployment, together with the rising cost of living, were not conducive to radical industrial action. By the end of 1921 the Mt Lyell Cokeworks and the Public Works Department (PWD) quarry were temporarily closed and ER&S had worked only intermittently during the year because of the drop in world copper prices.91 In 1921 the Wollongong Benevolent Society had 230 requests for assistance as compared to 170 for 1920, reflecting the worsening regional situation.92

While there were economic reasons for the decline in working-class militancy, the fate of the One Big Union (OBU) at Port Kembla demonstrates some of the particular local conditions which undermined the class politics that had culminated in the strike of 1920. Historians such as Hagan have seen the eventual failure of the OBU as a victory for labourism, but from this local perspective it was the ideology of localism as much as labourism which finally brought about its failure.93

The OBU was a syndicalist revolutionary strategy initially inspired by the International Workers of the World, although it was a more moderate version which gained the increasing support of the working class at Port Kembla from 1917. The strategy envisaged an industrial takeover of the major parts of the capitalist economy by a united working class. As part of a strategy to create that unity, the New South Wales Trades and Labour Congress established the Workers Industrial Union of Australia (WIUA) to secure:

91 South Coast Times, 23 December 1921.
92 Wollongong Benevolent Society, Annual Report for 1920 and 1921, ML.
the abolition of capitalist class ownership of the means of production—whether privately or through the state—and the establishment in its place of social ownership by the whole community.  

The branch of the AWU at Port Kembla were keen supporters of the OBU. The idea was particularly strong among the working class of the Illawarra because of the influence of the Miners' Federation. In October 1918 the AWU Port Kembla branch moved that steps be taken to change the AWU constitution 'thus establishing democratic administration and cementing the One Great Union principle.' The moderate AWU executive, however, were not so enthusiastic and relations between the union and the WUIA deteriorated. In July 1919 the AWU's newspaper The Worker complained of the 'blowfly, maggot creating, white-ant tactics of the W.I.U. of A. '

Branch members at Port Kembla became increasingly frustrated with their executive over the delays to the OBU strategy. In November 1922 the branch resolved that membership tickets from workers whose union had signed the WIUA preamble should be interchangeable with AWU tickets. In January 1923 the branch moved that 'the consumption [sic] of the O.B.U. should not be further

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95 Gollan notes that 'a substantial minority of the members of the union favoured the idea.' ibid., 10.

96 The WIUA was the initiative of the Miners' Federation and the Union became the first official affiliate in late 1919. See ibid., 8—10.

97 AWU Minute Book, 21 October 1918.

98 The Worker, 24 July 1919.

99 AWU Minute Book, 22 September 1922.
delayed. By this time the AWU executive had changed its approach to the OBU. As The Worker noted, if the OBU stood for 'political action and arbitration' and not 'madness, direct action, sabotage, dissension and destruction of the union movement' as embodied by the International Workers of the World, then the AWU would support it. The OBU offered the AWU executive a chance to become the centre of a new organisation with considerable industrial and political muscle, and this non-revolutionary interpretation of the OBU became dominant. In 1924 the OBU was dealt a final blow by the failure of a provisional council, representing the unions interested in the OBU, to achieve registration in the Commonwealth Arbitration Court.

The radical OBU strategy was hampered by the conservative executives, which dominated unions such as the AWU, and the state-organised arbitration system, but local conditions at Port Kembla also highlighted the difficulties of building links with other unions. The AWU’s award at MM and ER&S gave preference to members of the AWU, so the resolution offering membership to kindred OBU organisations could not be legally honoured. Moreover, there was a faction within the local branch who were more concerned about protecting local members’ jobs than creating large cross-union industrial organisations. This was apparent in January 1922, when a motion was passed 'that holders of AWU tickets be given preference above all others when putting men on.' For

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100 Ibid., 9 January 1923.
103 AWU Minute Book, 2 January 1922.
these men the threat of competing with other workers for jobs activated their local loyalties and overrode their class affiliations.

The radical edge to the OBU was lost and working-class radicalism was contained by forces that were both local and national, but developments within the labour movement were only one factor in the growing conservatism at Port Kembla in the 1920s. The involvement of the petite bourgeoisie in the strike of 1920 at MM and ER&S had materially benefited the striking workers and brought class politics to the town centre, but apart from these specific moments of class tension, the commercial centre was a powerful unifying symbol of the locality, and by developing economic, social and political links with the working class, the long-term impact of the petite bourgeoisie throughout the 1920s was to reinforce localism. The apparent classlessness of the main street, and its role as a forum for cross-class interaction discussed in a previous chapter, reinforced a growing political consensus which placed town interests above all others.¹⁰⁴

There were other forces promoting town interests too. Throughout the 1920s ER&S and to a lesser extent Australian Fertilizers and MM continued their paternalistic industrial strategies. This activity increased cross-class interaction and worked to smooth over industrial conflict. In March 1925 at the combined

¹⁰⁴Main streets were symbolically and politically significant sites in Australian towns during this period. Not only were they forums for the daily interaction of shopping, they also were the principal site for processions, carnivals and demonstrations. During political conflict or protest they were often the site of struggles over meaning and control of a locality. In Wollongong, for example, the campaign led by the South Coast Free Speech Committee in 1932 and 1933 to hold meetings of unemployed men in the main street of Wollongong, met with considerable resistance from the Wollongong Council, who refused to grant permission for the meetings. At the same time members of the New Guard also targeted these meetings and attempted to disrupt them with heckling and threats of violence. See Richardson, *The Bitter Years*, 77—78. Details of this dispute and the South Coast Free Speech Committee’s attempt to appeal to the State Attorney-General for remission of the sentences can be found in New South Wales Attorney-General’s Department, Special Files, ‘Remissions, Fines and Sentences imposed on Workers for Participating in unauthorised public meetings in Wollongong.’, 1930—1932, 5/7783.3, NSWSA.
ER&S, MM and Australian Fertilizers Employees Picnic Day the *Mercury* correspondent noted:

There was much comment in connection with the harmonious nature in which the administrative staff mingled with the employees, being for all the once on an equal basis.\(^{105}\)

...But the focus of middle-class political activity widened beyond industry in the 1920s. There is no direct evidence but this change in strategy may have originated in the apparent failure of paternalism to quell the rise of the class loyalties at Port Kembla. Certainly ER&S were looking for new solutions—a system of bonus payments, associated with the new scientific management strategies, was instituted in 1919—but the overwhelming response was a new style of paternalism or welfarism which extended to the organisations of town society. Beginning in the early 1920s, the local middle class began participating in and dominating a range of influential local organisations. Moreover, new industries had joined ER&S at Port Kembla, and a company-based paternalism would no longer reach the majority of local workers. The Port Kembla middle class had to branch out into other areas of local society to come in contact with workers.

The Port Kembla Returned Soldiers, Sailors Imperial League Sub branch, for example, was formed in 1920 and was active from 1921.\(^{106}\) The League had a cross-class membership with middle-class men such as E.A. White (ER&S), Thomas Downie (shipping agent and retired wharfinger), H.P. Greenwood (manager at MM) and Dr Noel Kirkwood filling most of the

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\(^{105}\) *Illawarra Mercury*, 13 March 1925.

\(^{106}\) For the formation meeting see *Illawarra Mercury*, 4 June 1920.
leadership positions. The petite bourgeoisie were active with members such as H.F. Banfield and C.F.T. Jackson, and there were working-class members too like Jack Warrington, Ted Livermore and Patrick Meurant, labourers from ER&S and MM. In March 1921 about 60 members attended a Returned Soldiers' meeting, which gives some indication of their local support.

Such organisations were important forums for cross-class interaction and the demonstration of middle-class political leadership. Friendly societies performed a similar role, and were increasingly popular at Port Kembla in the 1920s. In 1923 friendly societies directly or indirectly affected around 860 people at Port Kembla, or 41 per cent of the local population, and although slightly less than the State average for 1930 of 47 per cent, it was nevertheless a significant portion of the local population.

The cross-class nature of friendly societies is highlighted by their membership lists. In 1928 the Independent Order of Oddfellows (IOOF) opened a branch at Port Kembla. By 1932 there were 34 members consisting of seventeen labourers, nine skilled workers, one storekeeper (the local newsagent T.J. McCann), and three middle-class members. Cross-class membership ensured that social interaction wasn't class specific, not only in the fortnightly transaction of lodge business at meetings, but in the round of social

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107 South Coast Times, 14 January 1921.
108 Illawarra Mercury, 25 March 1921. One example of the support given to the Returned Soldiers by local companies were loans to help them build their Soldiers' Memorial Club in Military Road. ER&S offered £400, MM £200 and Australian Fertilizers £100. See Minutes of Directors' Meetings, ER&S Records, 6 July 1928 and Illawarra Mercury, 16 March 1923.
109 Green and Cromwell argue that to calculate the number of people covered by friendly society benefits, the membership should be multiplied by four to include 'dependants' (Green and Cromwell, op.cit., 214—216). In 1923 the MUOOF had 187 members and the GUOOF had 28 members (These figures are from Manchester Unity Journal, 1 October 1923 and The Oddfellow, 15 April 1923 respectively). Port Kembla's population in 1923 was 2115. Police Census reported in Illawarra Mercury, 25 December 1925.
110 Australian Triple Links, 1 July 1929.
111 Friendly Society Subvention Registers, 7/10558, NSWSA.
engagements that were a vital part of the friendly society activities.\textsuperscript{112} The executives of friendly societies were dominated by middle-class and skilled working-class men, despite labourers forming the numerical majority in most lodges.\textsuperscript{113} With the middle class providing the leadership of these organisations, which stressed class cooperation and brotherly respect, friendly societies were institutions which worked against class conflict.

Those prominent in friendly societies often had a strong sense of civic responsibility and were busy participants in local society. The list of the financial members of the Independent Order of Rechabites (IOR), formed in January 1927, contained the names of George Simon, Thomas McCann and George Humble, all members of the Port Kembla Progress Association.\textsuperscript{114} The cross over in membership suggests that friendly societies and the Progress Association sprang from like-minded individuals who were energetic local citizens, and strong supporters of the ideology of localism.

After a number of years of inactivity, the Progress Association re-formed in February 1922, signalling its return as an important forum for local politics in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{115} The immediate reason for the re-emergence of the Progress Association is not clear from the available records, but an important context

\textsuperscript{112}On friendly society social life generally see Manchester Unity Journal, 1 October 1923 and The Oddfellow, 15 March 1925. For example, in 1921 the MUIOF Social Dance at Port Kembla attracted 50 couples. See Illawarra Mercury, 28 October 1921. This issue is given only a brief mention in Green and Cromwell's study. Green and Cromwell, op.cit., 29—30.

\textsuperscript{113}For example, the executive of the GUOOF for 1925 included three from the local middle class (two foreman and a copper roller); two from the petite bourgeoisie (one blacksmith and a boot maker); one from the skilled working class (a crane driver), and two working-class members (both labourers). See The Oddfellow, 15 February 1925.

\textsuperscript{114}On the formation of the IOR see South Coast Times, 7 January 1927. The list of members is from Friendly Society Subvention Registers, 7/10561, NSWSA. McCann was president of the Progress Association in 1924, while Simon was president in 1920 and 1926. Humble was active in the Port Kembla Ratepayer's Association in the 1930s.

\textsuperscript{115}Illawarra Mercury, 17 February 1922.
were two pressing local issues that required attention. Firstly, the Central Illawarra Council and the PWD had been involved in a long-running dispute over the responsibility for the maintenance of a bridge on the Wollongong/Port Kembla Road. The bridge had fallen into disrepair and was particularly dangerous, and one of the first actions of the new Association was to forward a petition from Port Kembla residents to the Minister for Public Works. Secondly, as I have argued, competition with Wollongong was often behind the political mobilisation of Port Kembla residents, and this may have been the case with the revival of the Progress Association, as Wollongong Council had lobbied the Minister for Local Government, George Cann, to absorb a section of the Central Illawarra Municipality (those living on the southern side of Mt Keira Road), and had further designs on capturing Port Kembla as well.\textsuperscript{116}

More generally, the Progress Association arose out of the social and cultural context in the 1920s which was so locally-centred. A meeting in November 1924 demonstrated the extent and the character of town-based political unity. The Association convened a meeting regarding the inadequate water supplies experienced by residents. A resolution was passed calling on the State Member for Wollondilly, William Davies, to approach the Minister for Public Works, R.T. Ball.\textsuperscript{117} The representatives of Port Kembla's middle class, working class and storekeepers were working together, even voting together for the good of the town, and those who voted for the resolution included the ubiquitous H.R. Lee, James Perry, secretary of the local branch of the AWU, and

\textsuperscript{116}Wollongong Council was eventually successful with the Mt Keira residents, who became part of the Municipality in early 1924. See \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 10 March 1924. For the Wollongong Council's initial moves on this issue, and its designs on Port Kembla see \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 19 December 1921 and 16 February 1922.

\textsuperscript{117}The state seat of 'Wollongong', which Davies had represented from 1917 to 1920, had a name change to 'Wollondilly' from 1920 to 1927, after which it was changed back to 'Wollongong' until 1930 when it was renamed 'Illawarra'.

Robert Shipp. Common issues could unite members of the Progress Association—the state of the local environment and the provision of services. On certain issues, locality could transcend class.

While local loyalties were strengthened in the 1920s other allegiances did not simply disappear. They remained present ready to be reactivated in the right conditions. Industrial conflict, for example, could break through the apparent unity of localism and reveal the competing class allegiances of locals. In March 1923 there was a brief strike at MM over pay rates involving 200 men. One man who decided to work during the strike was asked by a deputation of workers to leave: 'He was escorted to the gates by some hundreds of men and given a "send-off" amidst hoots and cheers.' This event indicated the solidarity of the workers and their ability to enforce class allegiances against the occasional transgressor. Another strike at MM in February 1924 exposed the competing loyalties of class and locality, when poor attendance at the fortnightly Progress Association meeting was reportedly due to 'some members being on business in connection with the strike at the MM Works.'

Strikes most clearly revealed class loyalties, but local unions were themselves influenced by localism in the 1920s, their politics moderated by the ties of kinship and the cross-class links that infused the town. Some unions like the AWU had been drawn into the town-based alliance. Prominent members of the AWU such as Jack Mathews, Fred Finch and E. Scott were active in the Progress Association. The policies of the local branch of the WWF were moderated by the kinship links that transcended divisions between employees and employers on the waterfront. George Sloan, secretary of the WWF from 1928 to 1936, was the brother of Ben Sloan, one of the four stevedores working

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118 Illawarra Mercury, 14 November 1924.
119 Illawarra Mercury, 2 March 1923.
120 South Coast Times, 8 February 1924.
at Port Kembla. Richard Dodd, branch auditor was the brother of Robert Dodd, another Port Kembla stevedore.\textsuperscript{121} William Bailey, a waterside worker in the late 1920s and 1930s, and an opponent of the dominant moderate faction, recalled:

There was such a lot of relations in the union at that time ... The stevedores would pick their relatives ... and some other men would borrow money off the stevedores so they would give them a job.\textsuperscript{122}

The moderate faction within the branch ensured its survival (until 1936 at least) because those proposed for branch membership were usually friends or relatives of existing branch members.\textsuperscript{123} These local kinship networks had undermined union militancy and compromised the branch's effectiveness.

Sectarianism was another potentially divisive issue, but efforts were made at a local level to minimise the political impact of any religious conflict at Port Kembla. The conscription referendums of 1916 and 1917 had stirred sectarian conflict throughout Australia, and in the early 1920s the issue became prominent in the Illawarra. At Wollongong the Union Jack was burnt in the May Day March of 1921 and the New South Wales Protestant Federation passed a resolution condemning the action.\textsuperscript{124} The Protestant Federation was active on the South Coast and was accused of trying 'to stir up sectarian strife among the workers' during the 1922 State elections.\textsuperscript{125} Catholics and Protestants traded

\textsuperscript{121} Griffith, 'The Growing Militancy of the South Coast Branch of the Waterside Workers' Federation', 38—39.

\textsuperscript{122} Interview with Walter Bailey, (Interviewed by Gary Griffith, 10 April 1980), T18, WUA.

\textsuperscript{123} Griffith, 'The Growing Militancy of the South Coast Branch of the Waterside Workers' Federation', 37.

\textsuperscript{124} Illawarra Mercury, 6 May 1921.

\textsuperscript{125} Comments by William Davies, (State Member for Wollondilly) in Illawarra Mercury, 24 March 1922.
letters and articles in the local press accusing each other of dividing society and threatening the moral order.\textsuperscript{126}

At Port Kembla, though, a conscious and public effort was made to avert religious conflict. In March 1922 the three managers of the local industries, E.A. White (ER&S), H.P. Greenwood (MM) and R.J. Craig (Australian Fertilizers), all prominent Anglicans, officiated at the St Patrick's Day celebrations at Port Kembla.\textsuperscript{127} A few months later after the annual Roman Catholic Bazaar a 'prominent worker in connection with the bazaar' was quoted by the \textit{Illawarra Mercury}: 'So far as Port Kembla is concerned the sectarian question is dead—we received support from all denominations. It was one of the pleasing features of the bazaar.'\textsuperscript{128}

Throughout the 1920s the politics of locality effectively managed to gloss over or divert local political conflict, although industrial conflicts revealed the continuing presence of class politics at Port Kembla. The political loyalties of locals were drawn away from class and union by the influence of cross-class organisations and the rhetoric of town unity. It was not a matter of one type of politics replacing another, but rather the co-existence of different loyalties and identities which were brought to different situations. Class politics remained strong in the industrial workplace while the politics of locality dominated the town centre, and appeared to speak for the majority of local inhabitants in political dealings with the Council, Wollongong-based interests, the State

\textsuperscript{126}See \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 24 March 1922 and 7 April 1922.

\textsuperscript{127}\textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 24 March 1924.

\textsuperscript{128}\textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 15 May 1922. In everyday life the situation may well have been different. Avis Bright, from a committed Methodist family, recalls that her sister married a Catholic and 'my family was horrified. Marriages just weren't mixed.' Interview with Avis Bright, (Interviewed by Narelle Crux, 14 October 1982), D153/6, WUA. Many other oral history respondents, however, claim that such religious conflict was not present at Port Kembla. See Interview with Iris Jenks, 3--4 and Interview with Ursula Lindsay, 10. Either way, the point remains that links between religious conflict and its political manifestation had been blocked at Port Kembla, stopping these social and religious tensions from gaining a public/political dimension.
Government and other relevant parties. But from the late 1920s the politics of locality confronted more serious threats—increasing working-class activism and a deteriorating economy.

**The breakdown of town alliances**

From 1926 there was renewed activity from the unions at Port Kembla which went beyond occasional industrial action. In May 1926 the FEDFA went on strike at the PWD quarry demanding a 44 hour week.\textsuperscript{129} The next month there were moves by the Wollongong branch of the Labor Party and unions such as the WWF, the Carpenters and Joiners, the AWU and the Meatworkers, to re-form the Illawarra Trades and Labour Council which had been dormant since 1917.\textsuperscript{130}

Industrial conflict in the late 1920s, like previous incidents that decade, revealed hidden political divisions, but it also widened those divisions in a more comprehensive attack on the image of town unity. The timberworkers' strike, which began at Port Kembla in March 1929, precipitated a public disagreement about the merits of the strike. Two members of the local middle class, S.C. Jones, engineer from Australian Iron and Steel Ltd (AI&S), and F.H. Rickleman, a metallurgist at ER&S and later works superintendent, wrote to the *Illawarra Mercury* regarding the strike:

> At the present time in this district a comparatively small number of men have been compelled to strike against the Industrial Arbitration Award, whose rulings they cheerfully

\textsuperscript{129} *Illawarra Mercury*, 24 June 1926. The 44 hour week had been introduced by the State Government led by Premier J.T. Lang at the beginning of the year, however, due to a technicality in their award the FEDFA claimed they were working 48 hours and being paid for only 44.

\textsuperscript{130} *Illawarra Mercury*, 16 July 1926 and Richardson, *The Bitter Years*, 14 and 24.
accepted for many years because conditions have been favourable to them.\textsuperscript{131}

This overview of the strike presented the strikers as a minority in the district (thereby implicitly evoking the localist rhetoric of unity), driven to industrial action by opportunism and compulsion (by outside union organisers perhaps?). The correspondents were especially riled by a demonstration one week earlier outside the timber yard at Port Kembla, near the train station at the northern end of the main street. During a picket of the yard, one man who chose to work was verbally harassed and 'escorted' home by members of the picket much like the incident at MM six years earlier, and he didn't return to work the next day.\textsuperscript{132} Jones and Rickleman's letter continued:

\begin{quote}
The demonstration which took place outside the South Coast Timber Co.'s mill last week is one which the majority of unionists will deplore. If the aim of the organisers is to further depress local industry and so aggravate prevailing unemployment and distress, it will be conceded that they may be quite successful.\textsuperscript{133}
\end{quote}

Here the striking workers are presented as acting against the interests of the district. The demonstration was targeted particularly because unionists had publicly expressed their anger and exposed the absence of unity at the very

\textsuperscript{132} \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 16 August 1929.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
heart of the symbol of cross-class unity and harmony—the main street. The unionists had defiled the symbolic unity of local society.¹³⁴

These emerging divisions were reinforced the following week when a letter in reply signed by 'Timber Worker' from Port Kembla appeared in the Illawarra Mercury:

'[Jones and Rickleman's letter] showed that men who drew big salaries are out of touch with modern thought ... If Messrs Jones and Rickleman followed their argument through to its logical conclusion, it would be better for this country if the workers were reduced to the same standard of living as Chinese coolies ... It is very nice for men like Messrs Jones and Rickleman to preach contentment, their bank balances will not be reduced, except perhaps they may be shareholders in the timber company.'¹³⁵

'Timberworker' emphasised the different class positions of Jones and Rickleman—their higher wages, their bank balances and the possibility they may be shareholders—all characteristics which the striking timberworkers undoubtedly did not share. This focus on difference further undermined the image of unity and common interest which localism had presented throughout the 1920s.

The paternalism of ER&S, an important force behind localism, also waned with the economic decline of the company in the late 1920s.¹³⁶ The company backed away from many of its activities in local society. From 1926 the

¹³⁵Illawarra Mercury, 30 August 1929.
¹³⁶Blainey, The Peaks of Lyell, 216.
Port Kembla Industries Co-operative store, jointly run by ER&S and Australian Fertilizers, was the subject of continual company investigations regarding its lack of profitability. The store, which now included a butcher’s shop, had failed to achieve the loyalty and support of sufficient numbers of customers at Port Kembla. In April 1926 auditors found operations ‘far from satisfactory’ and reported ‘a low turnover’ for the previous six month period.\textsuperscript{137} In October 1926 auditors recommended disposal of the store and it was sold to Frost Brothers in March 1928.\textsuperscript{138} The political focus on the town and town-based unity encouraged by the paternalism of ER&S dissipated, as operations at the copper smelter were reduced to a bare minimum by 1929.

Unemployment and the influx of itinerant workers in the late 1920s initially led to a resurgence of localism around the issue of providing jobs for local men before ‘outsiders’. In 1926 municipal representatives from Port Kembla used the Council to appeal for State Government projects to ease local unemployment, and in 1928 the Progress Association wrote to the major companies at Port Kembla asking them to employ local men before others.\textsuperscript{139}

But the depth of the crisis overturned many of the conditions that supported the politics of locality. Although the political rhetoric of 'jobs for locals' continued, by 1930 the barometer of the local political alliance, the Progress Association, was having trouble attracting members and interest was falling away.\textsuperscript{140} Discussions were held about how to get people interested in the Association. During a Progress Association meeting in January 1930, as the \textit{Mercury} reported:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{137}Minutes of Directors' Meetings, ER&S Records, 21 April 1926.
\item \textsuperscript{138}Minutes of Directors' Meetings, ER&S Records, 6 October 1926 and 19 March 1928.
\item \textsuperscript{139}See CIC Minute Book, 14 July 1926, C1/6, WPL and \textit{Ilawarra Mercury}, 16 March 1928.
\item \textsuperscript{140}\textit{Ilawarra Mercury}, 4 March 1930.
\end{itemize}
[a] lengthy discussion eventuated regarding the matter of getting people to attend to the meetings of the association ... However the discussion eventually lapsed without any decision being arrived at for improvement.\textsuperscript{141}

The following March there was also discussion on ways to increase the Association's popularity:

Various speakers contended that attendance could be greatly improved if the importance of the meetings was impressed upon members of the community. Finally, it was decided to circularise residents particularly suggesting that they help to advance their own individuals [sic] and the interests of the community by attending the association meetings.\textsuperscript{142}

The decline in popularity of the Association represented the breakdown of the uneasy political truce which the Association represented. By 1930 the politics of locality was a waning political force.

Politics at Port Kembla was characterised by the shifting relationship between the politics of locality and class politics. The politics of locality, as embodied by the Progress Association and other town-based political alliances, gained strength from the material conditions of local society—a town-centred labour market, paternalistic companies, and the cross-class interactions of everyday life and local organisations. These diverse forces came together in the 1920s and were reinforced by an ideology of localism which pitted 'locals'

\textsuperscript{141} Illawarra Mercury, 24 January 1930.

\textsuperscript{142} Illawarra Mercury, 11 March 1930.
against 'outsiders'. But class politics was everpresent, centering around conflict between ER&S management and its workforce, and culminating in the strike of 1920 at ER&S and MM. In the late 1920s class allegiances again emerged from beneath the layer of town loyalty through industrial conflict and economic downturn.

The relationship between the two types of politics, then, was an uneasy co-existence of separate loyalties. As both types of politics waxed and waned it was not a matter of the replacement of one type of politics by another for both had their origins in Port Kembla's economic and social structure, and both had their strong areas—in the industrial workplaces for class politics, and in the town centre for the politics of locality. It was when one type of politics entered the domain of the other—for example, when the working class tried to take over the Progress Association in 1913, or when unions in the 1920s were infused by localist sentiment—that it can be most clearly stated that one particular way of organising politics was dominant. Throughout this whole period it was the politics of locality which most often appeared to represent Port Kembla's legitimate political voice, and most often crossed over to influence unions, the industrial workplace and the working class generally. But the effects of the depression were only just beginning to be felt in 1930, and it eventually brought new challenges to the town-centred politics, reactivating class allegiances and ushering in a new competing force—the Illawarra region.
Chapter 7: The challenges to locality

In the years 1920 and 1921, 91 Port Kembla residents chose to be married at St Michaels Church in Wollongong.¹ I argued in the previous chapter that Wollongong and other regional towns acted as powerful outside threats bringing political groups at Port Kembla together, but they also attracted locals away from Port Kembla, like those who wished to be married at the prestigious and well-located Anglican church. So while class and local allegiances vied for ascendancy at Port Kembla, there was another dimension to society and politics—a series of contending developments mostly from outside of the town which challenged the long-term viability and integrity of a self-sufficient and inward-looking locality.

This chapter has three main parts. The first part details the long-term challenges to the Port Kembla locality, including changes in transport services, spatial developments at the edges of the town, and the reorganisation of State Government administrative boundaries. The second part also considers factors which challenged the locality of Port Kembla, but particularly those which aided the regionalisation of the Illawarra, such as the tradition of regionally-organised politics in the Illawarra and the changing management strategies of Port Kembla companies. The third discusses the effects of the depression, the changing political and social landscape of the 1930s, and, given the growing power of the region, includes region, along with class and locality, within the analytical framework.

¹ St Michaels Wollongong, Marriage Register, 1920—1921, ML
Long-term challenges to the locality

New transport options, dating from the late 1910s, began to undermine the locally-based nature of Port Kembla society. Delays in the establishment of effective and affordable transport to and from Port Kembla provided an opportunity for the development of local shops and services in the town, however, by about 1920 new railway and transport services were beginning to strengthen links between regional towns, facilitating the regionalisation of the Illawarra.  

One of the most important of these developments was the inauguration of the first rail service to Port Kembla in January 1920. This train service allowed male working-class commuters working at Port Kembla, and living elsewhere, mainly in Wollongong, easier access to Port Kembla, providing they could afford the weekly fare of 2s.2d. In 1920 approximately 300 men from the combined workforce at Electrolytic Refining and Smelting Company of Australia Ltd (ER&S) and Metal Manufactures Ltd (MM) of 800 lived in Wollongong, with a smaller number from Dapto, Unanderra, Fairy Meadow and Corrimal.

The rail service also provided easier access to Wollongong for Port Kembla residents, modifying the close relationship between the dependence on local services and the development of local identity outlined in Chapter Five. Port Kembla lacked a secondary school and the train service to Wollongong led to Port Kembla children attending Wollongong schools—

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2 Mitchell and Sherington, op.cit., 66.
3 As Cardew notes reviewing the impact of the rail network in the Illawarra: 'The railway was a force for centralisation and integration of the various urban settlements.' See Cardew, 'Urban Settlement in the Illawarra, 1890—1940' in Robinson, op.cit., 95.
4 For a copy of the timetable see Illawarra Mercury, 12 September 1920.
5 NSW Board of Trade, 314. Passenger trains to Port Kembla consolidated the earlier introduction of workers' trains from Stanwell Park (located on the coast twenty-seven kilometres north of Port Kembla) to Wollongong in 1908.
Wollongong High, St Mary's Catholic Girls School or the Christian Brother's Catholic Boys School. Edith Neaves attended St Mary's from 1924 to 1925, travelling by train every day from Port Kembla to Wollongong with 'half a dozen' other girls. Colin Warrington also commuted by train to Christian Brothers. Morgan Simon attended Wollongong Technical College in 1932 to complete his intermediate certificate. An impressive number of tickets, 1334, were issued at Port Kembla station in March 1924, indicating the extensive number of locals who travelled away from their locality utilising the train service. The experience of secondary education in Wollongong had a significant impact on Port Kembla children, for it exposed them to people and places beyond their town, and memories of travelling to Wollongong have an important presence in the oral narratives of the generation who grew up in Port Kembla in the 1920s and 1930s.

In the 1930s mobility was further increased by the motor car and bus. In the preceding decade Council debates regarding speed limits and road maintenance indicated the growing presence of motor transport. Although car ownership at Port Kembla was initially restricted to the staff from the local

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6 Interview with Edith Neaves, 4.
7 Transcript of Interview with Colin Warrington, (Interviewed by Denise Preston, 1983?), Wollongong TAFE, 5.
8 Interview with Morgan Simon, 1.
9 South Coast Times, 25 April 1924.
10 For example, Interview with Edith Neaves; Interview with Morgan Simon and Transcript of Interview with Colin Warrington, (Interviewed by Denise Preston, 1983?), Wollongong TAFE.
11 See CIC Minutes, 14 May 1924, C1/6, WPL for a Council resolution setting motor car speed limits at fifteen miles per hour in town areas. See also Mitchell and Sherington, op.cit., 91. Car registrations throughout New South Wales rose from 28,665 in 1921 to 144,749 in 1931. See New South Wales Year Book, 1940—41, 358.
Photograph 11: Some of the first passengers on the new Port Kembla to Wollongong bus service in 1913.

Photograph 12: An aerial view of Port Kembla in 1930. In the bottom left-hand corner men can be seen alighting from the early morning commuter train from Wollongong and the northern suburbs of Thirroul, Bulli and Fairy Meadow. These commuters symbolised the increasing regionalisation of the labour market in the 1930s.
industries and local doctors during the 1920s, by the 1930s some petite-bourgeois and working-class families had access to cars as well.12

In a growing regionalisation of consumption and leisure, trips to Wollongong by car or bus were common by the late 1930s. Sarah Drury and her husband often spent Friday night in Wollongong shopping or eating takeaway fish and chips in their Dodge utility 'watch[ing] the people walk up and down Crown Street.'13 Late night shopping on Friday night was popular, and many young women and men would go on from the Wollongong stores to dances at the Wollongong Surf Club or the Returned Servicemen's Club.

Better transport threatened certain interests groups within Port Kembla, notably the petite bourgeoisie who relied on local customers, but such developments did offer tangible benefits to locals. There was opposition from some at Port Kembla to the introduction of the Port Kembla/Wollongong train service.14 The president of the Wollongong and District Citizens' Association, M.J. Wilson, complained of 'opposition [which] arose from the Port Kembla end; it was that end which was blocking the whole business.'15 But, highlighting the complexity of local reactions to transport improvements, others

12 During the depression local baker, Bob Rees, travelled to Wollongong by car to collect money from the Department of Labour and Industry for the food relief tickets presented at his family's store. See interview with Bob Rees, 5. A few working-class households had access to trucks or delivery vehicles which could be borrowed for a short time. See, for example, Interview with Edith Neaves, 9 and Colin Warrington in Davis, op. cit., 37. By 1939 one in four families in Australia had access to a car. See Peter Spearritt, 'Cars for the People' in Ann Curthoys, A.W. Martin and Tim Rowse (eds) Australians from 1939, Fairfax, Syme & Weldon, Sydney, 1987, 119.
13 Interview with Sarah Drury, 16.
14 For example, in April 1918 the Progress Association decided that the rail service was not a priority and did not appoint delegates to a conference on the issue scheduled for the next month. See South Coast Times, 19 April 1918. For background to the lobbying and introduction of the train service see Historical Notes on the Port Kembla, Unanderra and Moss Vale Branches, Public Transport Commission, Sydney, 1977, 66—67.
15 Wilson's comments were reported in South Coast Times, 13 March 1918.
at Port Kembla supported the introduction of passenger trains. Ted Livermore, a local resident representing the Port Kembla branch of the Australian Workers' Union (AWU), reportedly told a public meeting at Wollongong:

"[I]f the passenger service was established to Port Kembla it would be the making of the town, and would not be detrimental to its progress, as some people seem to think. He was sure that it would be the means of a number of people settling in Port Kembla and would also induce people to build."\(^{16}\)

In other cases local groups, such as the storekeepers, had conflicting interests in improved transport. The storekeepers feared that their customers would travel to other towns to shop, but they also desired better delivery services for their own goods. In 1918 J.G. Fairley, owner of J.G. Fairley's, Port Kembla, reportedly stated at a public meeting in support of the train service that 'he experienced difficulty in getting his goods conveyed to his Port Kembla branch.'\(^{17}\) Robert Shipp complained to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works in 1923 of the inadequate transport facilities, which meant that he could not secure fresh chaff for his Port Kembla store.\(^{18}\) Access to the 'outside world' was not always an imposition by regional or Wollongong-based interests, for some locals actively sought the benefits of improved transport too.

There were other long-term developments which exposed the locality to outside influence. The previously distinctive spatial boundaries of the town, a

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\(^{16}\) Livermore's comments were reported in *Illawarra Mercury*, 15 March 1918.

\(^{17}\) Fairley's comments were reported in *ibid*.

key context for the growth of local identity, were compromised by industrial and suburban development of the late 1920s and 1930s. The most significant alteration to the town's distinctive boundaries came in 1927, when the Hoskins Steelworks was established on a site north of Port Kembla on the road to Wollongong. While Australian Iron and Steel Ltd (as the company became in 1928) was officially called 'AI&S, Port Kembla', the Blast Furnace and the surrounding mills and foundries were closer to Cringila and Warrawong. Previous industrial development had been located close to the town centre, but as AI&S grew it bridged the gap between Port Kembla and Wollongong, symbolic of the increasing integration of Illawarra towns.

In the 1930s the growth of new suburbs around Port Kembla also blurred the discrete spatial boundaries of the town. Cringila, three kilometres north-west of Port Kembla, was an amalgam of two housing estates, Steeltown Housing estate which opened in the late 1920s, and Belvedere estate which opened in the mid-1930s. In 1934 Charles Hippisley opened a mixed business and unofficial post office in Newcastle Street, Cringila. In 1935 a primary school for 70 to 80 pupils was built, and by the early 1940s the population had grown to 665.

Warrawong, only two kilometres south-west of Port Kembla, also grew at a fast pace from the mid-1930s. The BHP Review commented in 1936:

Warrawong over a period of two years has emerged from its natural bush state to a township of 500 people with a post office and a modern shopping area.

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19 The first housing estate at Cringila was approved by Council in January, 1928. See CIC Minutes, 11 January 1928, C1/6, WPL.
20 Central Illawarra Housing Report, 1943 in Committee Minutes Book, CIC Minutes, C2/2, WPL.
Immediately west of Warrawong was Toohey's estate, named after the estate owner, a milk vendor from Kogarah. By 1937 it contained 42 houses with a population of 171. In the 1940s it was renamed Lake Heights. Windang, primarily a tourist and fishing town six kilometres south of Port Kembla, also grew in the late 1930s, the population reaching 153 by 1937.\(^{22}\)

These developments complicated political and social boundaries on the margins of Port Kembla. In the mid-1930s Cringila was understood by some to be a 'suburb' of Port Kembla and in that sense dependent on its larger neighbour, but some residents in these new suburbs were finding their own voices and breaking away from Port Kembla's political representation.\(^{23}\)

In 1934 some Cringila residents found it 'discourteous and extraordinary' that the Port Kembla Ratepayers' Association believed they were entitled to speak for Cringila on the location of their new school.\(^{24}\) From the mid-1930s these nearby towns attracted shops and services, formed their own Progress Associations, and energetically pursued their own local interests.\(^{25}\) Ultimately, these competing localisms blurred the boundaries of the Port Kembla locality, and undermined the apparent unity and legitimacy of Port Kembla's political voice.

\(^{22}\)Ibid.

\(^{23}\)On the understanding of Cringila as a suburb of Port Kembla see letter from J. Kelly (storekeeper at Cringila) to W.M. Hughes (at the time Federal Member for North Sydney), 25 July 1938 in 'Port Kembla Post Office', Item no. GA37/2383, SP439/3, AA. Kelly wrote to W.M. Hughes asking that he be appointed the 'unofficial post master at Cringila, a growing suburb of Port Kembla' on the basis of his war service record. He was unsuccessful and the position was taken by Charles Hippisley.

\(^{24}\)Illawarra Mercury, 25 April 1934.

\(^{25}\)The Cringila Progress Association was formed in 1935, originally as the 'Steeltown Progress Association'. See Number 1 Committee Report, 5 August 1935 in CIC Minute Book, C1/10, WPL and Illawarra Mercury, 21 April 1939. Warrawong had its own Progress Association by at least 1940. See CIC Minute Book, 30 January 1940, C1/15, WPL for a record of a letter from the Warrawong Progress Association.
From the mid-1930s the State Government also facilitated challenges to the locality of Port Kembla through a series of planning and administrative reforms. These reforms distanced political and administrative power from the locality, and also reinforced the moves to regionalisation. We have seen that in previous decades localism at Port Kembla benefited from outside political domination by the farmer-dominated Council, but in this case the array of Government Committees were more formidable opponents often beyond the direct influence of locals, and, moreover, Port Kembla-based representatives were often co-opted onto many of these organisations.

In 1936 the Port Kembla and Environs Planning and Advisory Committee was established and given the task of balancing industrial and residential development in the Port Kembla area.\textsuperscript{26} The members of this 'committee of experts'—as the Minister for Works and Local Government, E.S. Spooner, called them—included a lecturer in town planning from the University of Sydney, officials from such Government departments as the Public Works Department (PWD), the Department of Works and Local Government and the Valuer General's Department, as well as the Engineer of the Central Illawarra Shire.\textsuperscript{27} The Committee began drawing up plans for the construction of roads, the allocation of areas for industrial, residential and recreational use, and the provision of new water, sewerage and electricity infrastructure. The results of the Committee's work included the construction of the Port Kembla Olympic Swimming Pool in 1937, and the bridge at Lake Illawarra in 1938.\textsuperscript{28} In 1936 another committee, the Port Kembla Housing Committee, was formed to investigate the housing shortage at Port Kembla.

\textsuperscript{26} Sydney Morning Herald, 6 August 1936, 10.
\textsuperscript{27} Spooner, The History and Development of Port Kembla, 17.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 17—18. In 1938 the Committee's name was changed to the Illawarra Regional Planning Advisory Committee and its scope extended to include the area from Stanwell Park to Shellharbour. See H.E. Maiden, The History of Local Government in New South Wales, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1966, 275.
They, along with Spooner, planned the construction of a 'Temporary Settlement' in Wattle Street, Warrawong, which was completed in 1938.

In 1941 the State Government divided New South Wales into seventeen administrative units, known as 'regions'. In the 'Illawarra' region, the Illawarra Regional Development Committee assumed responsibility for planning, although it did not function effectively until after the War. The Committee consisted of representatives from each of the Illawarra Councils (Robert Shipp from Central Illawarra), and officials from the PWD and the Lands Department. The incorporation of the Central Illawarra Council into the Greater City of Wollongong in September 1947, along with the local Councils of Bulli, Northern Illawarra and Wollongong, was a culmination of this Committee's work and regional focus. These local government and planning reforms amounted to a regionalisation of the political and economic boundaries used for administration and control. State Government Committees, 'experts' and a regionally-based Council gained control over some major aspects of life at Port Kembla—the management of industrial development, the provision of local services and housing. The ability of residents to exert influence over their local environment declined as opportunities for local political participation were restricted or were incorporated into political forums with a broader regional focus.

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29 See Illawarra Regional Development Committee, Minutes of Meetings 1945—1960, B1/1/1, WUA and Background Notes—Regional Organisation in NSW, B1/3/1, WUA. The Committee was joined by the Illawarra Regional Planning Authority in 1952. See Illawarra Regional Planning Authority, Annual Reports, 1952—1959, WPL.

The challenge of region

Like the influence of State Government planning reforms, many of the forces which undermined locality promoted region as its replacement. Regionalisation had its origins in the growing regional basis of the labour market in the Illawarra, but its strength was also built on a tradition of regional political involvement in Port Kembla which dated back at least to the campaign to secure a safe harbour for the Illawarra in the 1890s.\textsuperscript{31} This campaign was led by the South Coast Harbour League, a coalition of Illawarra-based mining and shipping interests and state and municipal representatives organised by W.H. Rees, an auctioneer and real estate agent from Wollongong. Representatives from the contending Illawarra sites for the harbour (Bellambi, Wollongong and Port Kembla), agreed to abide by the Government's decision on the best site. This gave the Harbour League credibility with the State Government, and once the Government's Parliamentary Standing on Public Works concluded that Port Kembla was by far the most desirable location for a deep-water harbour, the League focused on lobbying for Port Kembla in the late 1890s.\textsuperscript{32}

The Wollongong political elite were influential, but regionally-based groups like the Harbour League gained credibility and ultimately greater strength because of their district-wide membership. The League successfully presented their vision for a harbour at Port Kembla in terms of a broad regional interest, and opponents could be derided as 'sectional' or 'parochial'.

\textsuperscript{31}Henry Lee's research on the economic development of the Illawarra in the nineteenth century suggests that the historical antecedents to this regionally-based developmental politics may date from as early the 1860s. In that decade there were political campaigns in the Illawarra to secure a new harbour for Wollongong, and in the 1870s and early 1880s there was extensive lobbying for the South Coast railway line. See Henry Lee, 'The Development of a Coal Trade in the Wollongong District of New South Wales'.

\textsuperscript{32}On the credibility of the League within State Government circles see the comments of J.H. Young (Minister for Public Works), NSWPD, 1896, vol.5, 4166.
Of the Newcastle-based opposition in the New South Wales parliament, for
example, the Premier, G.H. Reid, was quoted as saying that he had 'never
seen in the House a greater glare of local self interest voting against a public
work.'\textsuperscript{33}

The \textit{Illawarra Mercury} was also influential in focusing regional attention
on Port Kembla. The paper's editor in the 1890s and 1900s was Archibald
Campbell, a free trade liberal and State Member for the electorate of Illawarra
from 1891 to 1903. Representing the electorate imbued him with a regional
rather than town-based approach. He was heavily involved in regional politics
and regional organisations like the South Coast Tourist Union and the
Illawarra Mutual Building Society.\textsuperscript{34} Between 1896 and December 1898 the
\textit{Mercury} gave considerable coverage to the struggle to have the Port Kembla
Harbour Bill passed, and Campbell wasn't adverse to harshly criticising the
bill's opponents. In one editorial he described the Newcastle-based Labor
members who opposed the bill as 'mere provincialists of a very mediocre type'
whose 'absence from parliament would be a distinct gain to Labor.'\textsuperscript{35}

Once the Port Kembla Harbour Act was passed, Campbell's editorials
continued to suggest that the construction of the harbour at Port Kembla was
vitally important for the whole Illawarra. In 1900, for example, the paper
editorialised that the success of the district was dependent on the construction
of the harbour.\textsuperscript{36} Port Kembla, according to the interpretation circulated by the
\textit{Illawarra Mercury} and organisations like the South Coast Harbour League,
was a place of great consequence for the whole region.

In 1910 S.R. Musgrave succeeded Campbell as editor and followed
the tradition established by Campbell in backing regional interests. Musgrave

\textsuperscript{33}Quoted in the \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 22 December 1898.
\textsuperscript{34}See Connolly, \textit{op.cit.}, 41.
\textsuperscript{35}\textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 10 December 1898.
\textsuperscript{36}\textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 4 January 1900, editorial.
was involved in regional pressure groups such as the Wollongong and District Citizens' Association, a Wollongong-based organisation with a strong regional focus formed in 1913. An editorial in 1917 revealed his regional attitudes. That year Charles Hoskins publicly announced his intention to build a steelworks at Port Kembla if the State Government would construct a railway line from Moss Vale to Port Kembla. Musgrave was excited at this prospect, but sounded a note of warning:

To help forward this progress the residents will have to be roused to a spirit of community life which is at present lacking. Progress will not be achieved by shirking the duties of citizenship as so many of our residents do at present.\textsuperscript{37}

This 'community life' was not based on any one town, but on the Illawarra district. Indeed, Musgrave understood localism to be an impediment to 'progress'. The editorial continued, 'And when it comes to select a route for that railway petty parochial ideas will have to be abandoned in the interests of the whole community.'\textsuperscript{38}

The \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, under Musgrave, was a ideologically-diverse paper, promoting regionalism at the same time as providing space for the celebration of localism. Correspondents from most of the major towns wrote regular reports under the headings of 'Port Kembla', 'Dapto', 'Corrimal' and others. This fostered interest in local affairs and created images of self-sufficient town-based societies. But the more powerful message, contained in

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 22 April 1917, editorial. Musgrave remained in charge of the paper until his death in 1943.

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Ibid.}
editorials and campaigns for regional development, was the privileging of regionalism over localism. Before Port Kembla-based political groups had been able to articulate concerns specific to Port Kembla in the late 1900s, the economic and political meanings of the town were being defined by broader regional interest groups. These Illawarra-wide understandings of the town were persistent challenges to the boundaries of an autonomous locality.

In the continuous lobbying between the regions of New South Wales and the State Government, the towns and political organisations of the Illawarra were to some extent united by a principal rival—the Newcastle region. As a region similar to the Illawarra (through the importance of coal mining, and later the steel and metal industries), competition with Newcastle for public investment heightened regional feelings in the Illawarra. When the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works reported in favour of the Port Kembla proposal in 1897, opposition from Newcastle, expressed through Newcastle-based members of State Parliament, became more heated and engaged in what the *Sydney Morning Herald* called 'stone-walling tactics'.

In 1898 Alfred Edden, State Member for Kahibah, spoke against the Port Kembla Harbour Bill in the New South Wales Parliament. Comparisons between Port Kembla and Newcastle were, Edden argued, unwarranted:

> It is of no use to institute a comparison between Newcastle and the two penny-half penny place such as that where it is proposed to construct this work. What is the use of comparing Port Kembla with a

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39 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 December 1898, 10. The *Illawarra Mercury*, 10 December 1898 also noted the 'violent opposition and prolonged stone walling', a phrase that may have been borrowed from the *Herald's* report published on the previous day.
Newcastle was a generally reliable port for the northern coalfields, whereas the southern coal trade was hampered by the lack of a reliable, all-weather harbour in the Illawarra, so the possibility of a deep water harbour at Port Kembla threatened Newcastle's comparative advantage, a fact not lost on Newcastle political interests. The *Newcastle Morning Herald* published editorials identifying the Illawarra and Port Kembla specifically as 'rivals' of Newcastle.

Opposition from Newcastle resulted in considerable anti-Newcastle feeling in the Illawarra. Even after the Port Kembla Harbour Act was passed, the resources given to Newcastle were constantly compared to the situation in the Illawarra. A public meeting at Wollongong in March 1902 passed a resolution urging the Government 'to provide more improved wharfs and loading appliances to expedite shipping' at Port Kembla. One speaker claimed that 'at Newcastle it was a case of asking and receiving.' In 1903, after years of drought, economic downturn and public spending cut backs,
lobbying for the rapid completion of Port Kembla harbour became explicitly linked to the future of the whole Illawarra, and opposition from Newcastle appeared to be a direct threat to the viability of the region. In 1904 the editor of the Mercury wrote that 'the district without a harbour is like a bird without its wings ... Illawarra is entitled to first recognition from the treasury of NSW; and if Newcastle is to come in, then treat them both on terms of equality!'\textsuperscript{44}

From the 1920s regional political organisations gained an even higher profile in the Illawarra. A signal of the growing concern for regional political co-ordination came in 1920 when a meeting of Aldermen and the usually parochial Progress Associations of the South Coast called for greater cooperation between all towns.\textsuperscript{45} At the meeting Alderman N.S. Smith of Wollongong Council recognised the political value of regional cooperation:

\begin{quote}
Different Governments would pay more attention to the needs of the Coast if a cohesion of all governing bodies took the place of the present system of making important wants known by disconnected and single advocacy.\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

Such regional cooperation became common in the 1920s as regionally-based groups like the Cross Country Railway League, the South Coast Tourist Union, the Illawarra Chamber of Commerce and the Wollongong and District Citizens' Association among others, began to dominate development politics in the Illawarra. The Illawarra Chamber of Commerce, for example, was formed in 1920 with E.A. White from ER&S filling the president's chair. The

\textsuperscript{44} Illawarra Mercury, 24 September 1904, editorial.
\textsuperscript{45} Illawarra Mercury, 19 March 1920.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
Chamber consisted of Port Kembla industrialists and professional and commercial men from Wollongong. It lobbied for transport and communications improvements in the Illawarra, including the upgrading of Port Kembla harbour and the construction of the Moss Vale to Port Kembla railway line.47 Another group, the Wollongong and District Citizen's Association, was formed and led by a self-consciously regional leader, J.F. Beatson, an Alderman on Wollongong Council and Mayor on numerous occasions from the 1890s to the 1920s.48 In 1920 Beatson claimed that the Association represented not only Wollongong, but the 'district generally' and predicted that 'Illawarra was bound to progress if civic pride was kept alive as the district had all the essentials necessary for greatness.'49 After his death in 1927, Musgrave wrote in Beatson's obituary that '[h]is desire always was to work for the advancement of the Illawarra district, rather than his native Wollongong.'50

These lobby groups increased regional political co-ordination—the South Coast Water Supply League, for example, consisted of 'delegates from all public bodies, industries and employees' associations'—but they also drew

47 Evidence of E.A. White (president of the Illawarra Chamber of Commerce, manager of ER&S), PSCPW, 1927, Duplication of Coaling Plant, 8; Illawarra Mercury, 4 April 1930 and South Coast Times, 27 January 1933.
48 Wollongong and District Citizens' Association, Annual Report for 1920—21, MSS 113/1, WPL. J.P. Beatson (1860—1927) was Alderman on Wollongong Council and Mayor from 1891 to 1897, 1905 to 1907, 1908 to 1911 and 1914 to 1922. His influence on the Wollongong and District Citizens' Association was such that members of the Association discussed disbanding following his death in 1927. This idea was rejected but the death of Beatson was a factor which finally precipitated the end of the Association in 1930.
49 Secretary's Report, Minutes of Annual Meeting, 26 February 1920, Wollongong and District Citizens' Association, MSS 113/1, WPL.
50 Obituary of J.F. Beatson by S.R. Musgrave in Illawarra Mercury, 6 May 1927.
former Port Kembla-based political leaders into regional politics.\textsuperscript{51} The secretary of the Water Supply League from the early 1920s was H.R. Lee from ER&S. Lee, who had formerly been so active in local society, moved into many of these regional organisations in the 1920s including the Water Supply League and the Cross Country Railway League.\textsuperscript{52} By 1931, two years before his death, Lee was secretary of the Australian Mines and Metals Association and advising industrial officer to the New South Wales Chamber of Manufacturing.\textsuperscript{53} Robert Shipp moved from municipal representation in the early 1920s to serve on State Government planning committees in the 1930s, and eventually he was elected Alderman to the new Greater City of Wollongong Council in 1947. Prominent managers at Port Kembla also became more involved in regional politics. J.P. Caddy, W.E. Jones (MM), R.J. Craig (Australian Fertilizers) and Cecil Hoskins (AI&S) were active in the Illawarra Chamber of Commerce from 1930.\textsuperscript{54} These moves were indicative of the widening political boundaries of the regions' well-off petite bourgeoisie and middle class.

Working-class men also became more regionally organised. In June 1926 the Trades and Labour Council in the Illawarra Region was resurrected.\textsuperscript{55} Steve Best was appointed organiser, Patrick Molloy, president, and their office was established in Wollongong. With the onset of the

\textsuperscript{51} Letter from H.R. Lee (secretary, South Coast Water Supply Advisory League) to Wollongong and District Citizens' Association, 26 August 1925 in Wollongong and District Citizens' Association, Correspondence, MSS 113/2, WPL.

\textsuperscript{52} See an article by H.R. Lee in \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 11 March 1927 for details of the public and private lobbying for the railway.


\textsuperscript{54} See \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 14 March 1930 for a report of the Chamber's annual meeting.

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 16 July 1926 and Richardson, \textit{The Bitter Years}, 14 and 24. The Labour Council had faltered following the 1917 General Strike.
depression, however, the Labour Council lost its impetus. It was overwhelmed by the number of unemployed and non-unionised workers who had come into the area. Richardson, in his history of the Illawarra labour movement during the depression, notes the Labour Council began to 'function merely as a sounding board for workers discontent.' But despite the collapse of the Labour Council, the depression represented only a temporary set back to the regionalisation of the labour movement. Most unionists were convinced that further regional organisation was necessary for the effective representation of Illawarra workers, and building links between the coal miners and the unions covering the growing steelworks became vitally important in re-establishing a healthy labour movement after the worst of the depression.

Another force for regionalisation in the Illawarra in the 1930s were new management strategies pursued by Port Kembla's major industries, particularly AI&S and MM, which severed the close links between industry and locality. The older approach, as exemplified by ER&S's attempts to create a company town, became less influential. As F.H. Rickleman, the general superintendent of ER&S noted in 1933, 'notwithstanding that there are much larger companies operating in the district, we are more largely interested in local activities than other companies.' The largest industry in the 1930s, AI&S, did not show any great interest in the town itself, being more concerned with strategies for controlling and managing their workforce. Its arena for political action, especially after the BHP takeover, was more national than local.

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56 Richardson, *The Bitter Years*, 54.
57 Letter from F.H. Rickleman to Colin Fraser, 3 October 1933, BHAS Collection, 1/84/3, MUA.
58 For example, the company contributed £500 to the National Party funds for the 1930 State election. See Minutes of AI&S Directors' Meetings, 24 September 1930, BHPA/S24/1. On the absence of paternalism at BHP see Docherty, *op.cit.*, 66 and 148 and Kennedy, *Silver, Sin and Six Penny Ale*, 145—146.
By the late 1930s MM had developed a management style which combined welfarism with a strong concern for efficiency and order. A company history written in 1939 noted that:

A prominent feature throughout the Works is Cleanliness and Tidiness, the value of which in efficiency, as well as from a psychological point of view, is fully realised by the management and employees alike.\(^\text{59}\)

Representations of the works from company's publications give an indication of MM's self-image. Figure 3 shows a clear graphic of the works, superimposed on a photograph of the town. MM stands out as an efficient, clean and ordered area, while the rest of Port Kembla appears cluttered, untidy and dirty. Figure 4 shows a similar imposition of a stylised representation of the works on an aerial photograph of Port Kembla. Such images provide further evidence of the focus on the factory, at the expense of the communal and environmental context, which MM's approach entailed.

MM didn't stop at altering photographs of the works. They also changed the landscape surrounding their factory. In 1939 the \textit{Illawarra Mercury} reported that MM had removed a small hill from their property for purely aesthetic reasons. The report continued,

\begin{quote}
The M.M. has the neatest and best kept factory grounds in Port Kembla and manage to keep the
\end{quote}

\(^{59}\) \textit{MM Gazette}, (21st Anniversary Issue), Port Kembla, 1939, 9.
Figure 3: Aerial photograph of Port Kembla overlaid with a graphic of MM, taken from a company publication, 1950?

Figure 4: Masthead of the M.M. Gazette showing a stylised representation of the works, June 1939.

Chapter Two, had such an influence on Port Kembla society and politics, that regional factors, along with class and locality, must be introduced into the analysis. The conjunction of regionalism, localism

Committee, which included prominent labour identities like Alderman Jack Mathews, E. Scott and Fred Finch, resolved that 'Port Kembla was loaded with

60 Harvest Memory, 27 January 1950.
spacious area spotlessly clean. The grounds always boast a bright showing of greenery and flowers.\textsuperscript{60}

This new concern for efficiency and aesthetic presentation was very different from ER&S’s town-based paternalism. At the centre of the AI&S and MM approach in the 1930s was the control and arrangement of the workplace, and the town of Port Kembla was peripheral to such strategies. Port Kembla itself, which had formerly attracted the interest of local companies and had been vital to the politics of locality, was increasingly replaced by management strategies which ignored the town altogether.

\textbf{The depression}

By 1930 these forces for regionalisation, and process of labour market regionalisation outlined in Chapter Two, had such an influence on Port Kembla society and politics, that regional factors, along with class and locality, must be introduced into the analysis. The conjunction of regionalism, localism and the depression experience at Port Kembla produced contradictory outcomes which require careful analysis. The onset of the depression initially haltered the growing influence of region as some locals attempted to re-assert the boundaries of the locality against 'outsiders', but in other ways the depression hastened the decay of the locality's boundaries, and ultimately the long-term trend towards regionalisation continued largely unhindered.

One reaction to the depression, common in many towns throughout Australia, was to try and isolate the labour market from the full effects of nationwide unemployment. At Port Kembla in 1932 the Port Kembla Relief Committee, which included prominent labour identities like Alderman Jack Mathews, E. Scott and Fred Finch, resolved that 'Port Kembla was loaded with

\textsuperscript{60} Illawarra Mercury, 27 January 1939.
more than their fair share of unemployed from other parts." Alderman Mathews was a vigorous supporter of Port Kembla workers and demanded that they be given preference in municipal works. In 1933 the Council's Health Committee recommended that no residents from 'other municipalities' be allowed to erect camps in the Central Illawarra. While it was impossible to seal off the locality from the depression, such responses demonstrated the continued presence of localism and the way local allegiances could be reactivated by an economic crisis.

Not only labour leaders, but some local workers too focused on 'outsiders' who were taking local men's jobs. There was an adverse reaction to workers from Lithgow, many of whom had followed the Hoskins Iron and Steel Ltd to Port Kembla, because they were understood to be taking the jobs of locals. Colin Warrington, a 'Darcy Roader' who worked as a shop assistant in a local hardware store in the mid-1930s and later at ER&S, recalled that AI&S 'bought quite a few people to here from Lithgow to start the steelworks, which didn't help things in this area.' A BHP publication relates the story of J. Mathews, who transferred from Lithgow to Port Kembla in 1928, and notes that 'local people had not exactly welcomed the newcomers from Lithgow, in some cases openly resenting the fact that they were taking jobs which might have been filled by local men.' The precise impact of Lithgow workers on the Port Kembla labour market is difficult to ascertain from available evidence, although many did have previous experience in steelworking and, therefore, better than average chances of securing work. The presence of such stories in the oral and written evidence reveals the conflict that occurred at the social boundaries of the locality.

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61 Illawarra Mercury, 12 March 1932.
62 Colin Warrington in Davis, op.cit, 33.
Paradoxically, attempts to isolate local workers from the effects of the depression, far from bringing Port Kembla together, actually revealed the limitations of the localist rhetoric. Attempts to exclude non-ratepaying citizens from being considered 'locals' demonstrated that the principal electorate of localism was a select group of male ratepayers. This can be seen in the renaming of the Progress Association to the Port Kembla Ratepayers' Association in 1932, and in moves by the Ratepayers' Association in 1933 to encourage the Council to 'take action with a view to restricting or stopping the number of unemployed from other municipalities building humpies etc in this district'.64 The Ratepayers' Association represented a smaller constituency at Port Kembla, for many living in unemployed camps, boarding houses or overcrowded rental accommodation did not pay rates, and others left destitute by the depression could not afford to pay.65

Similar moves, which highlighted the growing division between local political organisations and the unemployed, came from within Council itself. In 1933 Alderman Shipp moved that Council give preference to 'unemployed ratepayers' for relief work on Five Islands Road near Port Kembla.66 For its part the broader interests of Council were in protecting their own revenue base of ratepayers. Itinerant labourers always had a tenuous relationship with local society, but during the depression the Ratepayers' Association, Port Kembla Aldermen and other local bodies such as the Relief Committee sharpened these divisions, attempting to impose an increasingly exclusive definition of who was a 'local'.

64 *South Coast Times*, 21 April 1933.
65 By August 1934 ward number one (consisting principally of Port Kembla and the nearby towns of Windang and Berkeley) in the Central Illawarra Council had arrears in rates totalling £5137. See 'Financial statement for 1934', CIC Minute Book, 8 August 1934, C1/10, WPL.
66 *South Coast Times*, 4 August 1933.
But the depression didn't only affect itinerant workers. Few sections of local society were left untouched. The broad impact of the depression was to divide Port Kembla, discrediting appeals for local unity, and clearing the way for increasingly powerful regional interests. Morgan Simon recalled that 'there was no or very little class distinction in those days [before the depression], but you did get a bit more of it in later years.' Simon believed that in the 1930s some 'people [at Port Kembla] had more money than others [at Port Kembla] and they built beautiful homes.' Simon's views, influenced by the experience of living within sight of the unemployed camp at Coomaditchie, were different to many respondents who claimed that the depression united Port Kembla. Ces Catterel, a boy of twelve in 1930 whose father worked for the PWD, recalled of the depression:

'It brought them together, as I say. People could help each other if somebody had vegetables, perhaps a lemon or something—you wouldn't go and buy any, you'd give them out to your neighbours. So it helped that way.'

This apparently contradicts the argument that town unity was undermined by the depression, however, such memories call upon a specific understanding of what constituted Port Kembla. In Catterel's case, his memory of the unifying effects of the depression is bounded by an understanding of Port Kembla as being constituted by the group of families, like his own, who lived near the Port Kembla Power House and worked for the PWD. These workers had a tradition of mutual aid and reciprocity. In late 1925 they decided to all work half time

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67 Interview with Morgan Simon, 8.
68 Interview with Ces Catterel, 8.
and spent their off weeks fishing and gardening, rather than lose half their workforce. Cooperation and mutual support was limited to these family, neighbourhood or workforce groups, despite the fact that these memories are presented in terms of the whole town helping. Colin Warrington specifically recalls of the depression that, 'if anyone was in trouble, in close proximity to the street where he lived, well, these people—neighbours, friends and family—would help.' Memories formed in the consensus of the 1920s were often projected by respondents onto the Port Kembla of the depression. The broad alliances of the 1920s, however, were shattered through the conflict and division of the depression, and the scope of the bonds of reciprocity and mutualism substantially curtailed.

Spatially too, the depression foregrounded divisions in the town's social geography. It became less tenable to understand Port Kembla as a united town when there were such identifiable areas of misery and deprivation alongside wealth and affluence. In the 1930s new expensive areas of Port Kembla were developed which had a disproportionate number of middle-class residents. In Robertson Street 57 per cent of those in the paid workforce were from middle-class occupations—foremen, doctors, accountants and clerks to name the most common. In Bland and Donaldson Street 25 per cent of residents were in middle-class occupations, and this was twice the average for the whole of Port Kembla. At the same time, three camps for the unemployed sprang up on the margins of the town, remaining throughout the 1930s. In 1932 there were over 1000 people living in humpies, shacks and tents made with material scavenged from industrial sites, ex-army tents and recycled kerosene tins. Even within the town itself Military Road and Darcy Road, for

69 William Davies (MLA for Wollongong), NSWPD, 1929—30, vol.121, 2893 and Interview with Ces Catterell, 6.

70 Colin Warrington in Davis, op.cit., 30.

71 Calculated from the State Electoral Roll for the District of Illawarra, 1940, ML.
example, took on a dowdy appearance, and in the newer subdivisions jerry-built homes or tents pitched on blocks of land were reminders of the crisis of the depression. These changes did not go unnoticed and they appear in the oral record, as Morgan Simon remembered during 'the depression in 1930, 31 and 32',

there were a lot of people out of work that came from all over New South Wales and Australia to try and find work ... You'd see them by the hundreds at seven o'clock in the morning standing outside the steelworks office where they use to select you.

The depression also undermined the role of Wentworth Street as a symbol of local unity. Echoing the industrial conflicts played out in the main street in 1929, the town centre became the focus for clashes between the police and unemployed men in the early 1930s. On the 12th of May 1931 unemployed workers at Bulli, Wollongong and Port Kembla demonstrated against the presence of police at the food relief depots. At Port Kembla an unidentified man addressed a crowd at the corner of Allan and Wentworth Streets, only to be arrested by a squad of police from Wollongong. The police charged the crowd and Alexander Slade, an unemployed man camped at Port Kembla, was knocked unconscious by a constable (after an Inspector Gibson had hit him across the face with a whip) and arrested for indecent language. Later, at Slade's trial, two members of the Relief Committee, Alderman Jack Mathews and Fred Finch, gave evidence that the police had charged without

72 Illawarra Mercury, 29 January 1932 and Richardson, The Bitter Years, 71—74.
73 Interview with Morgan Simon, 3. See also interview with Sarah Drury, 8; Interview with Ethel Combe, 11 and Interview with Ces Catterel, 10.
provocation, and the constable had hit Slade without reason. This event caused considerable bitterness in Port Kembla. Alderman Mathews noted in Court that when he remonstrated with Inspector Gibson on the day the Inspector had replied, 'We have to keep law and order Mr Mathews', to which Mathews had responded, 'It is the most cowardly thing I ever saw. You will hear more of this.'

Following this violence the relief depot became a potential flashpoint as unemployed men assembled every week to collect their relief docket under the watchful gaze of police. On the 17th of May, further scuffles broke out as police refused to allow members of the local Relief Committee to issue food relief docket. That afternoon, at a protest meeting attended by 200 people, the police baton charge of the previous week and their interference in the provision of food relief was condemned. The mood in the town centre was nervous. The Traders' Association, fearing further outbreaks of violence, and perhaps rioting and looting, requested that Council keep the streets lights on all night. The town centre's role as a unifying symbol was tainted by political dissent and heavy-handed police intervention that occurred there during the depression.

As the local social geography and symbols of local unity fractured, so too did town-based political alliances. The depression drove economic and political wedges between former partners in the local alliance. The petite bourgeoisie, who had enjoyed good relations with working-class customers, reined in the provision of credit and became less forgiving to debtors. From 1920 to 1926 there was very little legal action by storekeepers at Port Kembla.

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74 This version of events is based on evidence given before the trial and the Illawarra Mercury's report of the 15 May 1931. For proceedings of the trial in the Police Court see Illawarra Mercury, 3 July 1931. The charge against Slade was dismissed.
75 Illawarra Mercury, 22 May 1931.
76 Illawarra Mercury, 15 May 1931.
in the Wollongong District Court, however, from 1926 to 1931 stores such as Kemp's, Frost Brothers and Philpot's were suing not only suppliers, but also customers to recover money owed.\textsuperscript{77}

This distancing of the working class from the storekeepers was often emotionally difficult for storekeepers. Bob Rees, a baker in Military Road remembered:

Well it [the depression] was pretty grim here. Well, the only thing that kept us going was they [the unemployed] were subsidised by the Government, the docket for their bread, and of course I'd have to go into Wollongong into the Government department and collect the money. We just survived that's all. We were in a fair debt to the mills for the flour and that sort of thing. A lot of business folded up here. We had a terrific amount of people coming in here asking for a loaf of bread. We couldn't give them all free bread and all that type of thing.\textsuperscript{78}

John Philpot, who started work in his father's general store, Philpot's, in 1927, remembers the financial difficulties that food relief brought—'My worst recollection was of getting the money from the Government'—but he also recalls that dealing with the unemployed 'was a constant strain.' Storekeepers were interacting less with women customers with money, and more often with dispirited unemployed men offering food coupons:

\textsuperscript{77}Wollongong District Court, Plaint and Minute Books, 7/9960 (1920 to 1926) and 7/9961 (1926 to 1931), NSWSA.

\textsuperscript{78}Interview with Bob Rees, 5.
People would come to us and say they had work but nothing to eat or to dress themselves with and I was only a boy and my father was the softest touch and he'd give them boots and clothes and that would be the end of it.\textsuperscript{79}

The change in the gender of customers was crucial in bringing the petite bourgeoisie closer to the alienation and anger of unemployed men, and distancing working-class women from their formerly close contact with the town's storekeepers.

The change in relations between the working class and the storekeepers has entered the oral record of the working class in the form of an ambivalence about the petite bourgeoisie during the depression. Edith Neaves remembered sociable contact with storekeepers, but also recalled that Philpot's used the depression to sell old stock—in fact, the same stock that John Philpot remembers his father giving away:

I remember I went up to Philpot's and he got an old pair of shoes out of the box that had been there since the shop opened I think—pointy toes and laced fronts—they were the funniest shoes I ever put on. I didn't ever wear them. I would rather go bare footed. He got rid of a lot of his old stock that way, old Philpot ... it wasn't really right but he did it and I think a lot of that went on.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{79} Transcript of Interview with John Philpot, (Interviewed by Denise Preston, 1983?), Wollongong TAFE, 2—3.

\textsuperscript{80} Interview with Edith Neaves, 10.
The local middle class also sought to distance themselves from the consensus of the 1920s, and the depression galvanised them into new forms of separate political action. Some turned to the paramilitary organisation of the New Guard; J.P. Caddy, manager of MM was a prominent member, while others in senior management at MM and Al&S were also suspected of involvement. Caddy also helped establish a united conservative response to organised labour through the organisation of the United Australia Party (UAP). For this he used the resources available to him through his industrial contacts. In November 1932 he wrote to Sir Colin Fraser, company director and leading figure in the Collins House Group, asking for a £50 donation to the newly-formed branch of the UAP at Port Kembla. 'With the help of the companies' wrote Caddy, 'we are endeavouring to stir up the people in our

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81 Tracing the history of secret paramilitary organisations like the Old Guard and the New Guard, as Andrew Moore notes, is a very difficult task. See Moore, op.cit., IX. There is a popular tradition at Port Kembla, supported by some historians (see, for example, John Merritt, 'The Federated Ironworkers' Association in the Depression', Labour History, no.21, November 1971, 57), that the New Guard had a large and active branch at Port Kembla. Local researcher, Glenn Mitchell, interviewed a prominent storekeeper at Port Kembla who admitted involvement in the New Guard, but it is more than likely that most members came from senior staff at Al&S and MM — it is on this group where most of the suspicions and allegations expressed in some oral history interviews fall. (See, for example, Interview with Morgan Simon, 19) Beyond a few hints, however, there is little evidence to suggest that the New Guard was very active at Port Kembla. The New Guard did break up demonstrations of unemployed men in Wollongong, but there is no evidence of similar actions at Port Kembla and, in fact, minutes of the New Guard's Executive Council indicate that in October 1931 there was no separate branch at Port Kembla, and the combined membership of the localities of Wollongong and Port Kembla amounted to only thirty. See Minutes of the Executive Council, 15 October 1931 in 'New Guard Movements', Premier's Department Special Bundles, 9/2459, NSWSA.
elected to a sense of their responsibilities. Another manager, Cecil Hoskins of Al&S, was active in the All For Australian League, an organisation of Sydney-based businessmen which acted as a respectable front for recruitment to the Old Guard. Like Caddy, Hoskins used the resources of his company to help finance operations.

**Working-class mobilisation**

After the worst of the depression the space left by the discrediting of localism was filled by working-class mobilisation. Unions had struggled through the depression, but improved economic conditions from 1934 slowly helped turn around union membership and influence. Strike funds were replenished as workers achieved some permanency, and the numbers of unemployed men camped around the town, who had represented such a threat to unionism, slowly decreased.

It was not just economic recovery that led to working-class mobilisation. The years of consensus politics in the 1920s left a conservative mark on local workers which was not easily removed. In 1933, for example, F.H. Rickleman, who had taken over from E.A. White at ER&S, commented that 'the daily paid employees are on the whole an excellent lot of men.' But he identified a

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82 Letter from J.P. Caddy to Colin Fraser, 5 November 1931, 'MM Ltd, 1928—1932', BHAS Collection, 1/127/27, MUA.
83 Moore, op.cit., 92—93.
84 The All For Australia League originated from a meeting of Rotarians in January 1931. Hoskins was one of the original members of the League's Committee. See Trevor Mathews, 'The All for Australia' in Robert Cooksey (ed) *The Great Depression in Australia* (Labour History special edition), no.17, November 1970, 136—147. A Wollongong branch of the League was formed in March 1931. See *South Coast Times*, 27 March 1931.
possible threat from 'outside intervention from both sides.' Indeed, many of the new union leaders of the mid-1930s were from outside Port Kembla, and had arrived during the depression. Shunned by local labour and civic leaders at Port Kembla, it was these men who turned local workers, embittered by their depression experiences, towards industrial action and growing militancy.

This mobilisation was primarily expressed through union organisation and industrial conflict. The first tentative sign of a new working-class activism came in July 1934 with the bricklayer's strike at Al&S, outlined in Chapter Two. Communist activists at Al&S took heart from the strike and urged workers to 'get into your unions, follow the lead of the miners, oust reactionary leaders and put militant leaders in office, who can and will give a correct lead in the struggles that take place.' The industrial conflicts of 1936 demonstrate that local unions were becoming progressively more confident. That year the FIA and the Moulders' Union demanded a 40 hour week and a 3d. increase per hour at Al&S. As the Industrial Department at Al&S noted, the FIA 'gave notice to the company that it intends upon starting a policy of direct action.' The FIA and the WWF also engaged in a ten week stoppage over the dismissal of a union delegate, Norman Annabel, and as a result the FIA was de-registered by the Federal Industrial Commission.

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86 F.H. Rickelman to Colin Fraser, 12 September 1933, 'Reports and comments on Kembla works by D. Yates & F.H. Rickelman', 1/84/3, BHAS Collection, MUA.
87 Griffith, 'The Growing Militancy of the South Coast Branch of the Waterside Workers', 63.
88 *The Red Blast*, (Issued by the Communist Party), no.15, 28 August 1934, copy in Al&S Port Kembla, Industrial Department—Correspondence File, Industrial Relations, BHPA/W2/131/2.
89 Industrial Report for the six months ending 13 October 1936, Al&S Port Kembla, Industrial Department—Industrial Reports, BHPA/W2/80/1. See also Tom Sheridan, 'A Case Study in Complexity: The Origins of the 1945 Steel Strike in New South Wales', 87—109 for a review of union politics and industrial conflict in the 1930s and early 1940s, leading up to the 1945 strike at Al&S.
90 Sheridan, 'A Case Study in Complexity: The Origins of the 1945 Steel Strike in NSW', 90—93.
In 1937 the old kinship networks that had compromised the WWF's effectiveness were swept away by new radical leaders, who were successful at branch elections. The new secretary, Ted Roach, was a former UWM activist, member of the Communist Party, and, importantly, a newcomer to the area. He, along with other 'militant transferees', as Griffith describes them, joined the branch in 1936. Reflecting the broad front of working-class mobilisation, the FIA also gained a new militant leadership under Pat McHenry in 1937. Al&S's Industrial Department reported in May 1938 that McHenry had "immediately entered upon an active campaign of union organisation throughout the metal trades and metal refining industries in this district." By 1940 union mobilisation was extensive. The Industrial Department noted that the unions were 'taking full advantage of the present abnormal circumstances [war time] to launch an offensive to achieve maximum gains.'

The 'Dalfram' dispute of late 1938 and early 1939, well-covered by other historians, shows the extensive nature of working-class mobilisation in the Illawarra. The 'Dalfram' was a ship that berthed in Port Kembla in mid-

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92 Murray and White, op.cit., 94. By 1937 the FIA's membership has increased to 2200, compared to 60 in the period 1928 to 1932. ibid., 79.
93 'Half Yearly Industrial Report for the period ending 31 May, 1938', AI&S, Port Kembla, Industrial Department, BHPA/W2/80/3.
95 For details of the dispute see Griffith, 'The Growing Militancy of the South Coast Branch of the Waterside Workers', Chapter 5 and John White, 'Port Kembla Pig Iron disputes', Labour History, no. 37, November 1979, 63—77. For an argument which places the strike in its social and economic context see Len Richardson, 'Dole Queue Patriots' in John Iremonger, John Merritt and Graeme Osborne (eds) Strikes: Studies in Twentieth Century Australian Social History, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1973, 143—157.
November 1938 to load pig iron bound for the Japanese port of Kobe. On the 18th of November the WWF refused to load the ship, arguing that the pig iron was being used by the Japanese military against China and that it may eventually be used against Australia. The waterside workers, and other working-class organisations at Port Kembla, had shown an increasing interest in militarism throughout the 1930s, and the fate of the Chinese people during the Japanese invasion. The dispute was the culmination of a decade of growing political activism by waterside workers both at Port Kembla and in other ports throughout Australia.

The Conservative Federal Government, under Prime Minister J.A. Lyons, responded to the WWF boycott by arguing that foreign policy was not the concern of unions, but of a democratically-elected Government. When an end to the dispute was not forthcoming, Federal Attorney-General, Robert Menzies, applied the Transport Workers Act on the 6th of December, legislation dating from 1929 that required workers to obtain a license to work on the waterfront. No workers registered, evidence of the extensive solidarity that had developed in the region's working class, but a more serious threat to the continuation of the dispute came a few days later when AI&S closed down, arguing that it could no longer continue operations. This lockout engendered considerable bitterness towards AI&S, left 4000 workers unemployed for the Christmas holidays and effectively cut off much of the local financial support

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96 Griffith, 'The Growing Militancy of the South Coast Branch of the Waterside Workers', 72—76. Griffith outlines the context of the dispute including the WWF's increasing interest in world peace, the Australian Government's decision to stop the sale of iron ore to Japan in May 1938, and a number of sporadic stoppages regarding the export of war materials to 'aggressor nations' in Sydney and Melbourne during 1937 and 1938. As early as 1931 the Port Kembla UWM had expressed its support for Chinese workers and peasants. See Illawarra Mercury, 27 March 1931.
from unionists. On the 21st of January 1939 the WWF agreed to load the Dalfram under protest, and the Government promised to review of the policy of trading with 'aggressor nations'.

The Dalfram dispute facilitated new unity in the Illawarra labour movement, which had previously been divided between supporters and opponents of Lang. When the waterside workers first announced their refusal to load the ship, for example, the Illawarra Trades and Labour Council immediately declared its unanimous support and established a committee of nine members to organise support for the local branch of the WWF. As the dispute progressed it began to have implications beyond the labour movement. The strikers received wide-ranging support from the local petite bourgeoisie, local church leaders, the New South Wales Trades and Labour Council, some left-wing Labor politicians and intellectuals, thus creating a broad coalition of groups within the Illawarra and elsewhere united against Attorney-General Menzies and the imposition of the Transport Workers Act.

The regional mobilisation of the working class in the Illawarra replaced the politics of locality as the focus of politics at Port Kembla. Within unions and the Labour Council, the working class developed their own separate area of class politics away from the politics of locality. In conditions where local workers saw their interests as best served by their union and their main antagonists as 'the company' or the Federal Government, a political alliance based on locality was no longer tenable. Though they never completely dominated the labour movement in the Illawarra, communist influence in the Miners' Federation, the WWF and the FIA was considerable and their ideas

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97 This summary of the dispute is based on Lockwood, op.cit., especially Chapters 11—15 and Richardson, 'Dole Queue Patriots', 204—214.
98 For the details of these divisions see Richardson, The Bitter Years, 194—200.
99 Lockwood, op.cit., 141.
100 Lockwood, op.cit., 151—152 and 160.
presented people with new ways of analysing local politics and society. The communists argued that improvements in the standard of living could not be successfully achieved through local organisations lobbying Government, but through the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system. Local companies were seen as part of the problem, rather than allies, and the industrial workplace, rather than the town, became the focus of political activity.

Working-class mobilisation also aided the progress of regionalism as a replacement for localism. Despite town-based appeals for job protection, regional organisations such as the Labour Council and Labor politicians, such as State Member for Illawarra William Davies, highlighted the plight of unemployed men throughout the Illawarra. Some unions at Port Kembla such as the FIA had significant links with Lithgow men (their secretary, J. Ward and many of their active members were from Lithgow) and this moderated their position on local preference. As the labour market became more regionalised in the 1930s, calls for job protection more often assumed an Illawarra-wide focus, not only from unions, but also from the State Government. In 1936 the Minister for Labour and Industry, J.M. Dunningham, met with officials from AI&S to discuss the possibility of employing more 'south coast men.'

At Port Kembla the principle organisations promoting the politics of locality struggled in these conditions. This was partly because class politics and industrial conflict now dominated the political scene, but also the broad move to regionalism had undermined the political value of localism. At a meeting called to discuss the need for an ambulance at Port Kembla in March 1936 the aptly named J. Humble claimed that Port Kembla did not need its own ambulance: 'If Port Kembla's request had been successful then

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101See 'Summary of Interview between Minister for Labour and Industry (Mr Dunningham), Under Secretary of Department (Mr Bellmore) and Mr Burgess (Industrial Officer), 25 July 1936', AI&S Port Kembla, Correspondence Files—Department of Labour and Industry, BHPAW2/64/1.
Corrimal, Dapto and other places would want one. It was obvious the services would overlap.¹⁰² This concern for regional efficiency was a new feature of these usually parochial Associations. R.J. Craig, president of the Association and manager at Australian Fertilizers, supported Humble's comments: 'It seems to me that the Ambulance is giving satisfactory service and the superintendent's report is reasonable. You cannot expect anything better than that.'¹⁰³ There is a striking contrast between the loud demands for local services expressed by these organisations in the 1920s and their new modest tone. By the 1930s the political and structural move to region had infiltrated the very organisations at Port Kembla that had typically fought against regional involvement.

Yet in the 1930s there was only a tentative cultural change that mirrored this broad shift to region. Localism had suffered a severe setback during the depression, as a town-based identity was discredited, and some locals retreated to smaller social units for support such as the family, kin and workmates. But following the confluence and strengthening of the challenges to locality, and its gradual replacement by region in the 1930s, there was no immediate growth in regional loyalty. Despite some signs of new expectations on political leaders—in August 1940 a correspondent named 'Silent Worker' complained about the Central Illawarra Council in the Illawarra Mercury: 'To get men to act in a district rather than town sense seems utterly impossible'—there is little evidence of increasing regional loyalty, particularly in the oral record.¹⁰⁴

One explanation for the persistence of local identity is that it was political organisations dominated by men and a male labour market that was

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¹⁰²Illawarra Mercury, 27 March 1936.
¹⁰³ibid.
¹⁰⁴Illawarra Mercury, 9 August 1940.
being regionalised. Women were affected by these changes, but even in the late 1930s women were still active in a very localised informal economy. It was primarily men who travelled on trains and drove cars and trucks in and out of Port Kembla. If regionalisation had differential effects on women and men, it also did not completely overturn many of the characteristics of 1920s Port Kembla society. Daily interactions in the main street continued and links with neighbours and kin also remained town-centred, despite the challenges to the integrity of local society.

But given the extent of the attacks on locality and the comprehensive moves to region, a more important explanation hinges on the durability of the culture of localism. Loyalties that developed during the heyday of localism existed alongside the generation that grew up with Port Kembla. This was the generation who came to Port Kembla as children in the late 1900s and 1910s, like Edith Neaves, Morgan Simon and Ursula Lindsay, and, despite living through a period of tremendous historical change, they held onto their notions of identity and belonging forged in the 1910s and 1920s. This also accounts for the transference of memories of a united town in the 1920s onto an obviously divided town during the depression. The culture of localism, in fact, did not have a simple deterministic relationship to the changing material conditions of local society. As Morgan Simon recalled, the growth of the nearby suburb of Warrawong from the mid 1930s:

\[
\text{took a lot of people out of Port Kembla but it still was good old Port. Everyone seemed to know that they were part of Port Kembla even though you do your shopping over at Warrawong.}^{105}
\]

\[105\text{Interview with Morgan Simon, 14.}\]
While some challenges to locality diffused or undermined the boundaries of the Port Kembla locality, others encouraged new spatial boundaries based on the Illawarra region. Regionalisation was fostered by the growth of a regional labour market, regional political organisations, and improvements in transport. The structures and social relations of Port Kembla became porous and diffused, slowly merging with regional structures. The cultural effects of these changes were more ambivalent. A self-sufficient locality had been challenged at many levels—economic, political and social—but for many Port Kembla still retained its symbolic and cultural importance.
Conclusion

When Len Ewart, who grew up in Darcy Road and went on to work at AI&S, recalled that he did all his shopping in Port Kembla—'Port Kembla first, Port Kembla second, and if there was anything left it didn't matter'—he was expressing a depth of commitment not just to local stores, but to the idea that Port Kembla could provide for all his needs, and serve as the primary context within which to situate his life.¹

I have argued that such local commitment was widespread and powerful for two reasons. Firstly, it was grounded in the material conditions of local society. Once the industrial future of Port Kembla was assured by the 1920s, a town-centred labour market developed and formed the economic basis for local identity. Economic development also created a commercial centre that became an important focus for local society, demonstrated by loyalty to local stores and the establishment of town-based organisations and services in the 1910s and 1920s. These conditions of Port Kembla's development, along with the social relations and cultural practices of town life, provided the town's inhabitants with a locally-centred 'structure of feeling'.

Secondly, local identity was sustained by localism, an ideology of local development and progress which divided the political and social world of the Illawarra in such a way that conflict was presented in terms of locals versus outsiders. In Port Kembla's case, local political groups like the Progress Association, understood their principal rivals to be Wollongong political and economic interests, the Wentworth trustees, and the farmers who dominated

¹Transcript of Interview with Len Ewart, (Interviewed by Denise Preston, 1983?), Wollongong TAFE, 7.
the Central Illawarra Council. This interpretation of regional politics from the Port Kembla perspective was not illusory, for these groups had their own political and economic agendas that often differed from the dominant interests of Port Kembla, but the focus on outsiders obscured Port Kembla-based conflict and division, creating an image of an apparently united town.

Opposed to the structures of locality and notions of local unity, were divisions and conflicts based on the Port Kembla class structure. Industrialisation brought to the town a three-tiered class structure. Working conditions, wages and work patterns for the local middle class, petty bourgeoisie, and working class were worlds apart, and these three classes formed the major divisions in local society which flowed through into local politics, and in some cases local culture. Class conflict through class-based political organisations revealed the class loyalties which the politics of locality and localism glossed over.

Working-class mobilisations at Port Kembla originated in the industrial workplaces of the town. From 1910 to 1920 industrial conflict between ER&S workers and management was an important forum for local class politics, but class politics also tentatively embraced the town centre through the developing links between the working class and the petty bourgeoisie, and the activities of groups such as the Political Labor League. In the late 1930s there was a more spectacular mobilisation of the working class through unions such as the WWF and the FIA. Class, then, represented a major challenge to the idea of a united town, but as I have argued with respect to the forms of politics present at Port Kembla, allegiances were often co-existing and contingent, ready to be activated in different historical contexts. The politics of locality and class politics were not mutually exclusive political typologies, but rather interactive and related responses to industrialisation and its effects on local society.
The politics of locality did not imply the absence of class. Indeed, it was a particular way of organising or managing class divisions. In specific circumstances local identity was mobilised to gloss over class conflict, however, it is clear from my analysis that the power of local identity was not simply the result of a cynical manipulation of local society by Port Kembla companies, or their local representatives, the middle class. ER&S in particular managed to tap into a pre-existing feeling that was more the product of the conditions of Port Kembla's development and the experiences of town life, than the result of a company-constructed hegemony. After the late 1920s, localism was no longer politically valuable for Port Kembla industries, and AI&S and MM focused on the control and management of the workplace, paying little attention to the town itself.

Local allegiance was a powerful force among Port Kembla people, but not all sections of local society were equally imbued with localist sentiment. Itinerant labourers often suffered poor working and living conditions and were located on the fringes of town society, and such experiences hardly endeared the town to this group. Local Kooris too were isolated from the non-aboriginal society based on the town, largely excluded from the economic and social benefits that local development offered, although they developed their own forms of local identity and attachment, despite continued dislocations from different living places around Port Kembla.

I defined the locality of Port Kembla as a spatial expression of industrial development, and a major arena for social interaction and everyday life. Refining this definition, my analysis of the political forms grounded in this locality revealed two major sites within the locality of Port Kembla: the town centre, and the industrial workplaces. These two areas formed the structural and symbolic bases for the forms of politics present at Port Kembla, the politics of locality and class politics.
As well as this bifurcation of locality into town centre and industrial workplace, the three-tiered class structure and the exclusions that occurred in the construction of locality reveal the Port Kembla locality as an area that was also fractured by economic, social and racial divisions. The concept of locality provides both a starting point for an analysis of local identity and belonging, and exposes the conflicts and divisions in local society, its exclusions and marginalisations.

The literature on space and social relations highlights the spatial context of social history, and provides ways to link the spatial structures of capitalist society with its political and cultural forms. In Port Kembla's case, the momentum of economic and commercial growth from 1900 to the 1920s separated Port Kembla from its regional context and established a discrete social structure based around the town; locality became the primary site for social and political life. But the Illawarra region was a powerful adversary, which grew even stronger after the depression, in the context of a tradition of regional politics and economic and political changes in the region. This spatial reorganisation, from region to locality and to region again, had profound effects on Port Kembla, and was one of the distinguishing features of the period from 1900 to 1940.

Ultimately, industrialisation also facilitated the regionalisation of the Illawarra. The expanding industrial economy soon overflowed the town-centred labour market of the 1920s, to become part of a larger regional labour market in the 1930s. This had political consequences as the labour movement and labour leaders began calling for the protection of the jobs of 'Illawarra' or 'South Coast' workers, and organisations such as the Port Kembla Ratepayer's Association (formerly energetic promoters of localism), became less influential, or were themselves imbued with a more regional outlook.

This analysis of society, identity and politics at Port Kembla has charted the main currents of historical change in the town's social and political history.
By sensitising local history to issues of space and social geography, I have argued that politics and society at Port Kembla were significantly influenced by contemporary understandings of space, identity and belonging. The forty years from 1900 to 1940 at Port Kembla were characterised by competing notions of local and class identity, within the context of broader regionally-based political and economic forces. A tripartite analytical focus, using class, locality and region, represents an effective way to analyse this changing historical landscape.

The pervasiveness of local identity at Port Kembla also illuminates a key question within Australian labour history—the origins of reformism and the fate of radical working-class politics. Moving the focus to a local level reveals not 'labourism' or 'populism' as the defining feature of working-class ideology and politics, but a shifting terrain of loyalties significantly influenced by local conditions. From this local perspective non-class allegiances are not an anomaly that can be accounted for by notions of false consciousness, aspatial usages of hegemony (which don't do justice to the complexity of Gramsci's concept) or with overarching notions of a dominant 'labourism', but represent one result of the material conditions of regional capitalist development, and their attendant ideological features. The production and reproduction of allegiance and identity at a local and regional level, and the way these commitments relate to a class-divided society and class politics, make it vital that any analysis of working-class politics consider the spatial context of both the capitalist economy and working-class life.

The end point of this study, 1940, is in some ways an arbitrary date defined by constraints of time and word length, but it is historically important in one sense. The following decades brought new influences on Port Kembla, and for some locals this facilitated the 'end of Port Kembla'. For these white Anglo-Celtic residents what was ending was the Port Kembla they had grown up with in the 1920s and 1930s. From the early 1950s large numbers of
Yugoslav, Italian, Greek and other European migrants arrived in Port Kembla, many of them actively recruited by AI&S. In the 1960s the construction of Warrawong shopping centre and the direct road link from Wollongong to Warrawong bypassing Port Kembla, precipitated a commercial decline at Port Kembla. By the late 1960s town planners, economists and the Wollongong City Council were discussing ways of reviving Wentworth street, discussions which are still going on in the 1990s.²

Older residents of Port Kembla, imbued with localism and the rhetoric of local progress and development, accepted, though with some sadness, the results of these changes. As Mr M. Finch reflected on the fate of the Port Kembla he grew up with:

Port is not near the place it was when I first came. It's got heavily industrialised and the town is comparatively dead to what it used to be—ever since Warrawong shopping centre was built. It saddens you to think what Port used to be. The shops used to be busy, but now they're deserted. That's progress.³

These memories do suggest the loss of something (which I identified as a locally-centred 'structure of feeling'), but this should not be interpreted as the end or death-knell of the locality. Local histories commonly finish their narratives with a lament for the loss of 'community', but rather than signalling

²The most comprehensive report was prepared by local economist, Joseph Steinke, and was entitled, 'Future Prospects of Port Kembla Shopping Centre, A Report Prepared for the Illawarra Regional Development Committee', 1969. This, and other reports from the 1960s, can be found in Illawarra Regional Development Committee, D1 3/34, WUA.
³Mr Finch in Davis, op.cit., 95—96.
the end of 'community' the period after 1940 at Port Kembla represented both an end to a specific type of local identity constructed in the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s, and a turning point towards a different kind of town.⁴ The locality was re-made in ways in which the older generation of Port Kembla residents didn't always approve, with the town transformed by new ethnic influences, and a re-orientation around the idea of being a suburb of Wollongong rather than a distinct town. In the 1990s Kooris are also remaking their locality on the edges of Port Kembla by reclaiming Coomaditchie Lagoon and small parcels of land behind Perkin's Beach under State and Federal land rights legislation. This offers some hope of securing the land ownership which was denied them on Hill 60, and presents the basis for future consolidation and development of the Koori presence at Port Kembla.

In the 1990s Port Kembla's main street, Wentworth Street, contains a mix of struggling retail stores and second-hand dealers. The number of 'To Let' signs in empty premises announces the continuing decline of the town despite plans for street beautification and commercial revival by the Wollongong City Council and local community groups. A deserted Wentworth street is as powerful a symbol as it was in its busier days of the 1920s and 1930s, this time signalling not the centrality of town life, but the deleterious effects of regionalisation and new centralised methods of consumption on the smaller towns of the Illawarra. The 'steel town' of Port Kembla is now the 'steel city' of Wollongong, and Port Kembla's identity, along with its trade and prosperity, has now been largely subsumed by its old rival Wollongong, and other newer suburbs of the Illawarra region. Despite this Port Kembla still has a presence, not only in the memories of older residents, but in the new relationships and understandings of locality developed by later generations of locals.

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