

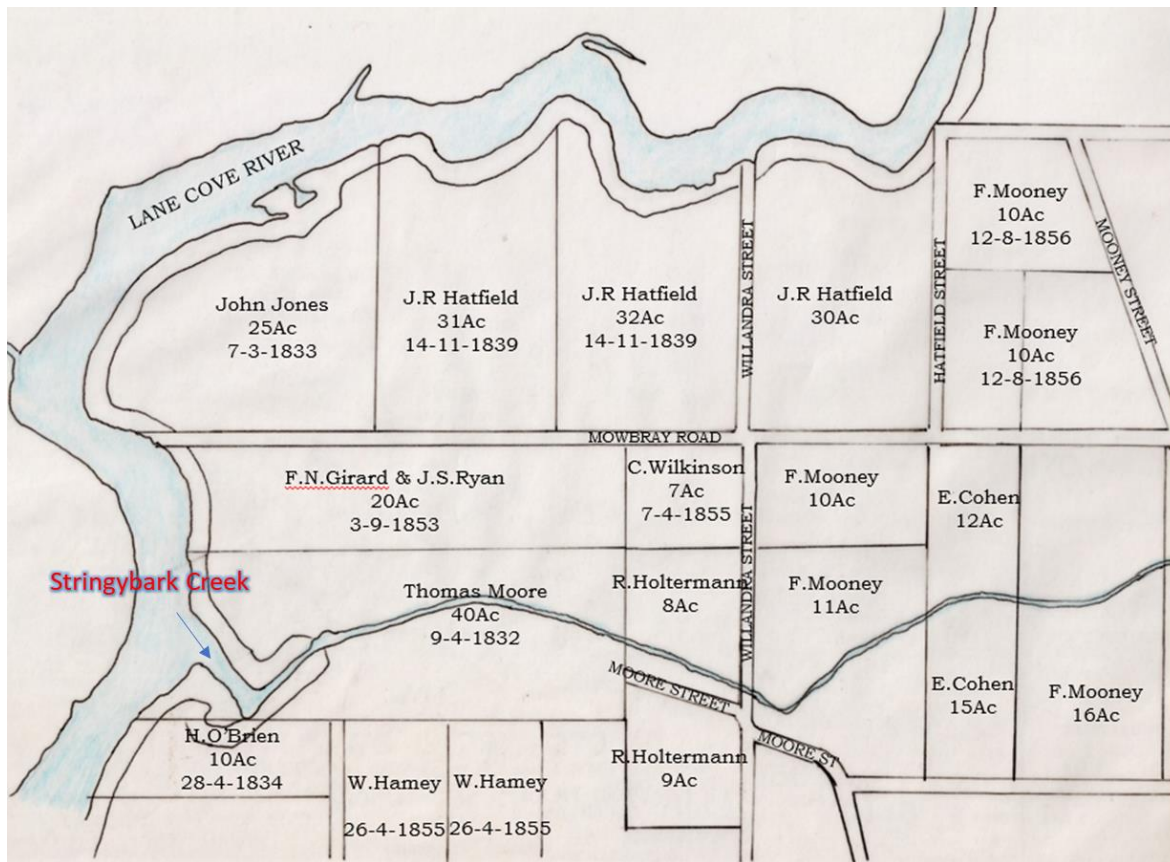
# Local History Research: Stringybark Creek – Part 1

Observant paddlers, when paddling downstream from the Footbridge might well have noticed a creek opening on the left hand side. Those who have contributed to our Clean Up Australia Day activities might well have ventured up there in the search for rich pickings of rubbish. This is Stringybark Creek (also known as Wilson’s Creek in the 1800’s) – and it has some stories to tell including the industrial mayhem that took place from ~1913

## 1832-1900

The map below (redrawn from various Parish Maps ex NSW Lands Department) shows the area as it stood in the mid 1800’s. For context - the LCRK shed (and Rotary Athletics Field) are within the John Jones 25 Acre allotment at top left.

Stringybark Creek and the subject of this research was part of a 1832 40 Acre Grant to Thomas Moore – and a series of grants in that area around that time.



The advertisement from SMH April 1865 suggests that by that stage, the site was being used for ‘Wool Washing’ no doubt aided by the fresh water flows from Stringybark creek.

It appears certain the purchaser was Henry Whatmore who in the 1860’s acquired around 80 acres (including the Moore grant, and also those of John Jones, Girard and Ryan in the map above).

Source: <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/>

**LANE COVE RIVER.**

**MOORE'S 40 ACRE GRANT**, with extensive frontage to the river, and having a never-failing stream of fresh water passing through it.

This property was formerly occupied as a **WOOL-WASHING ESTABLISHMENT**, for which, or any other trade requiring a constant flow of water, it is admirably adapted.

There is a Stone Cottage of 2 rooms, and a Wooden House of 2 rooms on the property.

A portion of the Land is laid out as a small orangery and orchard, now in bearing.

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

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

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

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

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

Inconveniently, Henry Whatmore died in 1885 leaving his widow Sidney Brodie Whatmore to carry on his affairs

In 1886 Hope's Wool Washing (assumed a leasehold) was established on Stringybark Creek – which included early damming of the creek (upstream from the site of the current dam, more on which later).

The article below is a couple of extracts from a long article in the Daily Telegraph Sep 1886 – (source: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/>)

### WOOLWASHING AT LANE COVE.

A public meeting of the residents of Hunter's-hill, Willoughby and Longueville was held in the Council-chambers, Hunter's-hill, on Tuesday, to consider the question of prohibiting Mr. Edgar Hope from erecting a woolwashing establishment at Wilson's Creek, on the Lane Cove River. The Mayor (Mr. James Brown) occupied the chair. About 100 persons were

Mr. Hope said the previous speakers were probably not aware that he was present at the meeting. He was not a speaker, and just now he was uncertain whether he should feel like a wolf among the lambs. Some of the speakers imagined he was going to kill all the inhabitants, whilst others thought he would poison the fish, and some described woolwashing as being worse than a bonemill. He could assure them they were entirely mistaken. Unless they actually visited the sheds they would not be aware of the existence of the establishments. The stench referred to arose from fell-mougering, not from woolwashing, and fell-mougering would not form part of his business. He had visited woolscouring factories in England and Scotland where thousands of people were employed, and never heard of diseases contracted from woolscouring, but there were cases where it occurred from the handling of

Activity during the remainder of the 1800's is not as yet clear – other than noting the building of the Clifford Love Flour Mills at Duck Corner – and the building of the first Pipe Bridge in 1890.

## 1912 – Cumberland Paper Board Mills construction

Activity seems to have picked up somewhat in the 1900's and in 1912 there was a survey completed of the lower reaches of Stringybark Creek (in anticipation it seems of new industry). The map below shows the mouth of Stringybark Creek (with Lane Cove River on the left)

- Note the creek mouth shows multiple channels and swampy ground – whereas today there is just the single straight channel marked by the blue arrow.
- The green shaded area shows the '100 foot reservation' – land owned by the Crown being 100ft inland of high tide
- The corresponding marked area not shaded green denotes 'rescission of the 100 foot reservation' where building would now be permitted



Source: Lane Cove Library - <https://www.aurorashore.com.au/Montage/Lanecove>

Below we see notification of the rescission – and the applicant: Cumberland Paper Board Mills..

[3456]

Department of Lands,  
Sydney, 11th December, 1912.

### APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO PURCHASE AFTER RESCISSION OF RESERVATION.

**NOTICE** is hereby given that application has been made, under the 63rd clause of the Crown Lands Act of 1884, by the person hereunder mentioned, for the rescission of reservation of certain land particularised in the annexed description, and permission to purchase the same. Any person feeling aggrieved may, before the expiration of four weeks from this date, lodge a caveat, as provided for by the 65th clause of the Act before mentioned; such caveat must be accompanied by a deposit of £10.

J. L. TREFLÉ.

Registration No.	Applicant.	Area.	Description.	With whom Caveats must be lodged.
Aln. 1912-16,117 S.P. 1912-195	Cumberland Paper Board Mills Limited.	a. r. p. 2 1 33	Parish of Willoughby, county of Cumberland, at Lane Cove River, Municipality of Lane Cove, being part of the 100 feet reservation above high-water mark within Thomas Moore's grant of 40 acres, portion 97 as shown on plan catalogued Ms. 3,874 Ny.	The Chairman, Local Land Board, Sydney.

Source: Government Gazette of NSW Dec 1912 - <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/>

The image below is a 1912 photo of Stringybark Creek before Cumberland Paper Mills construction commenced. Original workers Cottage at left of shot. Looking downstream (and probably taken around the location of the blue star on the map on preceding page)

The annotation to the image is that it is *“one in a part-album of photographs donated by Helen Taylor. The photographs were attributed to her grandfather, Johnstone Tait. Johnstone worked for paper mill machinery manufacturer Bertrams, Edinburgh... Bertrams asked him to consult for the proposed Cumberland Paper Board Mill at Stringy Bark Creek, Lane Cove West. The couple stayed in Australia permanently, with Johnstone working on paper mill construction projects in Sydney, New Guinea, Burnie (Tasmania) among others. The land for the site was acquired from the Whatmore family. Mrs Whatmore had raised and traded goats on the land.”*

Note there are a series of images taken at the same time – available from the source link shown below.



Source: Lane Cove Library - <https://www.aurorashore.com.au/Montage/Lanecove/>

1912 (a busy year!) also saw announcement in the press of the commencement of construction of the Cumberland Paper Board Mills

Of particular interest here is the use of hydraulic sluicing of the lower reaches of Stringybark Creek – creating a clearly defined channel (still visible to this day) and effectively reclaiming the marshy land evident in the survey shown on preceding pages.

And also specific mention of the new 20,000,000 gallon dam/reservoir at the back of the mill

## CUMBERLAND PAPER BOARD MILLS.

The second section of the **Cumberland Paper Board Mills**, in Blue Gum Creek, at the head of Lane Cove River, has been planned, and the work of construction has commenced. Messrs. Ross and Rowe, engineers and architects, who are carrying out the work, are now, as a preliminary step to providing access to the works, dredging a canal from the Lane Cove, by the novel method of hydraulic sluicing. A powerful jet of salt water is being projected into the soil, and the detritus lifted by means of centrifugal pumps and deposited to form banks of each side of the canal. In this manner a waterway half a mile long, 60ft. wide, and 10ft. deep will be opened to the river, so that the company will have the advantages of water carriage to its doors. The new mill will be built of brick and steel. Its length is 324ft., and extreme breadth 176ft., and it is partly two-storied. In this building will be accommodated the heavy machinery for reducing the wood pulp and waste fibre which constitute the raw material of the industry to a soft mass before it is converted into the finished article. At the back of the mill a reservoir to hold 20,000,000 gallons is being formed for the purpose of supplying the mills with water. On the other side of the canal from the mill is the company's large storage shed, which has just been completed. It measures 300ft. by 100ft.

Source: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/>

## 1913 – Cumberland Paper Board Mills Opening

The factory had a grand opening in 1913...

### PAPER BOARDS MADE FROM USELESS CLIPPINGS AND CUTTINGS

What happens to the tons of waste paper—cuttings, clippings, edges, etc.—which accumulate from week to week and from month to month in the factories and warehouses of the city and suburbs?

Until quite recently it was all burnt or conveyed out to sea, and thrown overboard from the barges engaged in disposing of the offal and garbage of the metropolis. To-day, however, it is put to a much better use. Generically, it is classified as "raw material"; that is, it is bought up in small quantities in the city, transported up the harbor on barges, and stored in a gigantic warehouse erected between a deep cleft in a low range of hills dipping rapidly into the shallowing reaches of the Upper Lane Cove River.

The spot is picturesque in the extreme. Somewhat removed, perhaps, from the madding city crowds. Still, the situation is ideal from a manufacturing point of view, inasmuch as land is cheap, and fuel abundant, whilst there is an abundant supply of fresh water, highly neces-

sary for the production of paper.

The shareholders of the **Cumberland Paper Board Mills, Ltd.**, have spent an enormous sum of money in installing here one of the finest **paper-making** plants south of the Equator. The opening ceremony was officially celebrated yesterday afternoon. There was a large assemblage of people representing all sections of the community. The political guests included the Prime Minister (Mr. Joseph Cook), Senator Sir Albert Gould, and Messrs. J. E. West and Edward Riley, M's.H.R.

After inspecting the 2500 tons of raw material collected from every quarter of the metropolis, the Prime Minister turned the steam into the cylinders, and the massive steel engine revolved, first slowly, then rapidly, and starting the mammoth macerators and cylinders which convert the wastage of the city into **paper-board** of a very fine quality.

Afterwards, a number of toasts were drunk, that of "The Company" being proposed by the Prime Minister, and replied to by Mr. Robert Sands (chairman of directors).

The speeches bore no particular political significance. They dealt largely with the future of the company.

Source: Sunday Times October 1913 - <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/>

## BUILDING & CONSTRUCTION.

### CUMBERLAND PAPER MILLS.

At the new **Cumberland Paper Board Mills**, opened on Saturday last by the Prime Minister at Lane Cove, there is some interesting and varied construction. The principal features comprise a great reservoir for the storage of water, the excavation of a salt water canal for the water freight of materials, and the construction of the mills and storage buildings and filter beds used in connection with the industry.

The location of the works is about half a mile away from the Lane Cove River, between the hills, and to gain access to the site chosen a canal had to be cut to the works. For this purpose Messrs. H. E. Ross and Rowe designed special machinery on a pontoon so as to utilise the tremendous destructive effect of a powerful hydraulic jet upon the comparatively soft strata in the valley. In this way the earth and gravel deposit was cut up and washed in a constant muddy stream down the gravel pumps which elevated it to be deposited on either side of the banks, which are being planted with trees. The dam, which stores a fine sheet containing some 22,000,000 gallons of water, was built largely by similar process. This reservoir dam is made of earth work with a compacted puddled clay core in the centre, and is pitched on the water side with sandstone to prevent erosion from wave action. The day following its completion the dam was filled to overflowing,

a proof of the considerable catchment which affords supply to the reservoir, and it has been twice filled since, the water being allowed to escape by the sluices to purify the bed of the reservoir.

Upon the hillside, high above the works, is constructed a second reservoir of the novel material—reinforced brickwork—probably the first of its kind in this State. It is circular, of 100ft. diameter, and is surrounded by a series of eight filter beds, wherein the water taken from the main dam is filtered at the rate of about 20,000 gallons per day, and thence gravitates to the mills. Reinforced concrete is already familiar to architects and builders, but the use of reinforced brickwork used under tension will, no doubt, be considered new.

The whole of the works were designed and carried out by Messrs. H. E. Ross and Rowe, the construction work being in the charge of Mr. William Brown, builder, of Parramatta, whose experience in reinforced concrete work was of much service in the construction. The general manager of the works is Mr. Tait, who ordered the machinery from Great Britain, and under whose immediate care the plant was erected so exactly as to start off without a hitch upon the first trial. The engine and boilers were supplied by the Austral Engineering Co., and are fine examples of the most modern type of power production; they were erected by that company under the direction of Mr. Kenway.

The architects have also prepared plans for a number of employees' cottages, to be erected upon the estate as from time to time they will be required.

Source: Daily Telegraph October 1913 - <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/>

Below is a depiction of the factory in operation – looking upstream to the dam & the Stringybark 'canal' in busy use.



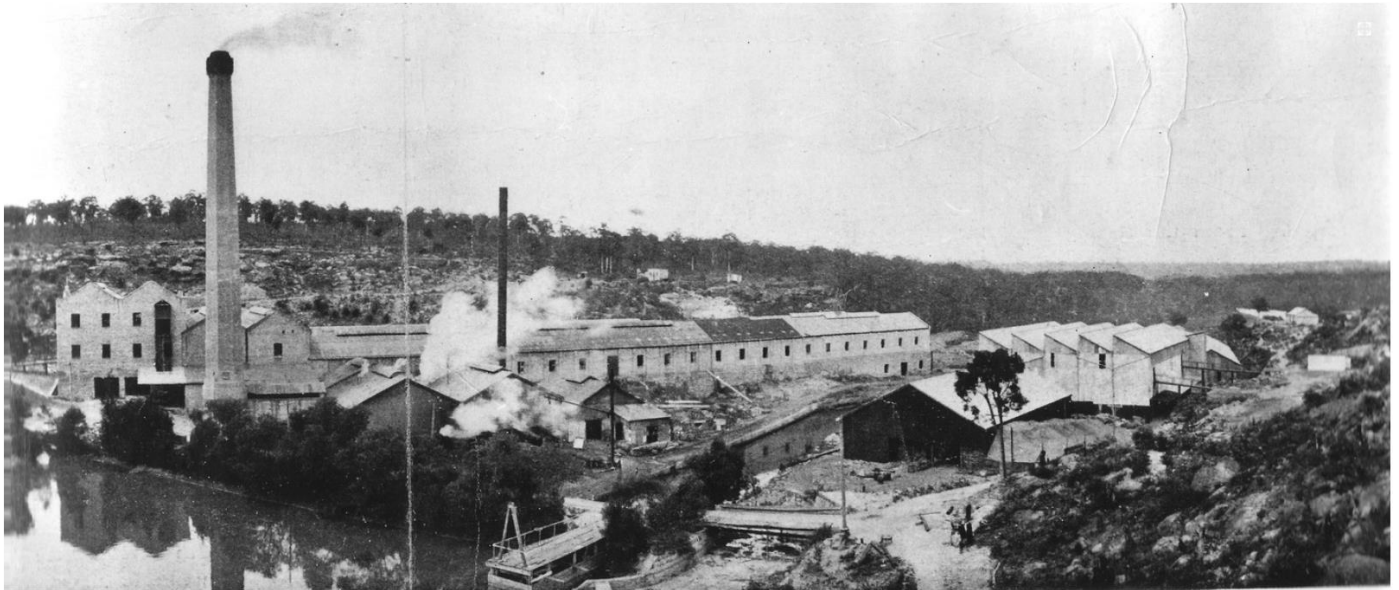
THE CUMBERLAND PAPER-BOARD MILLS.

SITUATED ON THE UPPER LANE COVE RIVER, THE MACHINERY OF WHICH WAS STARTED BY THE PRIME MINISTER ON SATURDAY AFTERNOON. THE IMMEDIATE OUTPUT OF THE MILLS WILL BE 3000 TONS PER ANNUM. THE WAGE SHEET WILL RUN INTO £10,000 PER ANNUM.

Source: Daily Telegraph October 1913 - <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/>

1920's

Below we see another view of the Cumberland Paper Board Mills site. Dam at bottom left. Stringybark Creek running downstream through centre. Lane Cove River out of shot other side of buildings on right of photo



Source: Lane Cove Library - <https://www.aurorashore.com.au/Montage/>

1928 Oct – Bushfire

In wild winds and an uncontrollable bushfire the Mill was wiped out in 1928.

## RAGING INFERNO WIPES OUT MILL, AND DOES £5 00,000 DAMAGE

Fears that Big Oil Tanks will be Ignited;  
Men Battle for Lives in Blazing Scrub;  
Heroism of Watchman

Wiping out the £500,000 Cumberland Paper Mills at Lane Cove yesterday, fire which grew in intensity, repelling repeated efforts to quell it, at an early hour this morning threatened to ignite a big oil store, part of the company's plant, containing deadly chlorine gas, kerosene and highly inflammable acids.

Such a wide-spread inferno the city has seldom known before. Driven by the steady cyclonic gale, the mills belched enormous clouds of gas-laden smoke, and men with bloodshot eyes, smoke-blackened and scorched bodies, trapped in blazing scrub, fought for their lives in the suffocating atmosphere.

Exhausted, a watchman at the mills, armed with a fire bucket, refused to leave his post, and was dragged away by volunteer rescuers. His was one of the many acts of heroism.

Source: Australasian October 1928 - <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/>

# CHIEF DEFENDS FIREMEN

## "Could Not Have Saved Cumberland Mill"

SPRINGING to the defence of the organisation he commands, the Chief Officer of the Fire Brigade, Mr. F. Jackson, has supplied a report to the Chief Secretary, Mr. Bruntnell, denying that anything could have been done to save the Cumberland Paper Mills, on the Lane Cove River, which was destroyed by fire on October 7.

The report followed a statement that if the mill engineer's calls for assistance to the fire brigade had not been ignored the mill portion of the buildings at least would have been saved.

In his report, Mr. Jackson said that the fire started in the dumps at the mill, which had been burning for years, and had extended to the bush from these dumps and from stacks of baled paper exposed on the punts.

The engineer (Mr. Bain) stated that the sprinkler installation held the fire for about 45 minutes.

Mr. Jackson pointed out that the

for about 45 minutes.

Mr. Jackson pointed out that the sprinklers first operated at 2.1 p.m., as recorded at Chatswood station. Upon Mr. Jackson's arrival at the fire at 3 o'clock the mill was gutted, the only portion remaining being the office near the gate.

"Had the sprinklers been able to hold the fire," said Mr. Jackson's report, "the damage would have been practically nil. The sprinkler heads would have discharged more water into the mill than could have been supplied by six or eight of our largest fire engines."

"For this reason I fail to see that the brigade could have done anything to save the mill at that stage."

### Details of Calls

Mr. Jackson detailed the calls received by the brigade as follows:—

At 1.10 Willoughby turned out to a grass fire on Lane Cove River.

At 1.30 Lane Cove responded to a call which mentioned that the fire was at the back of the mills.

At 2.1 the sprinklers at the mills rang the alarm at Chatswood.

At 2.5 the Chatswood District Officer, with three men and a motor engine, turned out.

At 2.28 a call from the local Exchange was received at Headquarters.

At 2.30 the Chief Officer and eight men responded, and a Hudson truck, with a station officer and five men, was despatched to Crow's Nest station as a stand-by.

Mr. Bruntnell yesterday tabled the report in the Legislative Assembly.



Chief Officer  
Jackson.