

# Farming

Early explorers condemned land around Wolli Creek as *'sandy, barren swampy country'*. Its reputation as such remained for many years, ensuring that it was among the last areas in Sydney's immediate vicinity to be settled.



The King family with livestock at King's Farm, on the north bank of Wolli Creek 1906. Courtesy Audrey Barnes.

In 1804, Hannah Laycock was granted 500 acres of good pasture and timbered land on either side of a *'run of ponds of fresh water'* (the upper reaches of Wolli Creek), which she named **Kings Grove**.

Between 1812 and 1821, Governor Macquarie promised all the productive land along

the creek to small farmers. Occupation took place soon after and the area became a convenient locality from which to *'furnish Sydney with split timber, shingles, firewood and charcoal.'*

## Farming life

During the 1890s more farming families moved into the Wolli Creek Valley. Small farms remained in the valley until the 1960s when the last of the dairies and market gardens finally closed. The best-known farming families were the Woods, King and Parry families. Audrey Barnes, granddaughter of the King family, provided an interesting account of farm life.

*'There were few made roads only bush tracks – no gas or electricity. Most farmers grew vegetables and fruit trees and kept a cow and poultry. To conserve rainwater, children were often bathed in the creek... washing was done on flat stones in the creek... cooking was done on a fuel stove with its simmering black iron pots.'*

During floods the gardens were often washed away. Water was pumped from the creek to water the crops. Many local families purchased their vegetables from the local gardeners.



## Country estates

In 1823, James Chandler established the first large estate, 'Bexley', on the upper reaches of **'the chain of ponds'**. Other gentlemen soon joined Chandler, including Lesslie Duiguid at Ballater on Wolli Creek and Joshua Thorp at his property, Juhan Munna near the junction of Cooks River and Wolli Creek. It was in the 1834 deed for the land adjoining Thorp's property that the name 'Wollar' appeared for the first time.

In 1836, Frederick Unwin built a large mansion, 'Wanstead' on land between the Cooks River and Wolli Creek. This house was demolished in 1922.

To the south at the junction of Cooks River and Wolli Creek, a Scottish merchant, Brodie Spark, purchased 110 acres. He engaged the colonial architect, John Verge, to design his country house 'Tempe'. Set in its green lawns, with orchards, scenic walks and fine gardens the Tempe estate formed *'a very pleasant landscape'*.

The depression of the 1840s plunged many owners of the big estates into bankruptcy, including Unwin, Spark and Duiguid. Estates were subdivided and land along the Wolli Creek was sold for small farms.

**“ I used to go down there and I was always very friendly with the Chinese, Jacky Lee...the garden used to have wells to irrigate shallots, cabbages... Jacky used to get a rake and get the eels out of the pond. ”**

John Schattiger recalls the Chinese gardens opposite his home in Jackson Place

Tempe House 1861  
Courtesy Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW.

Alexander Brodie Spark Courtesy Rockdale Library Local History Collection.

Frosty morning, Turrella Reserve 2010, once the location of Wood's dairy and market gardens Photo L Zusters