SIMSVILLE AND THE JARRAH MILL:

A History of the Timber Industry at Simsville, New South Wales

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1. AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

The site of Simsville, up in the forests near Stroud, is less than an hour's drive from my home. So when a friend made a chance mention of this almost-forgotten sawmill village, it seemed like an interesting place to go for a family picnic one weekend. Simsville wasn't on any map, but the family was quite patient driving up and down forest roads on the promise that "I'm sure it's just round the next bend!"

We had our picnic, and that is when this story started. There seemed to be an air of mystery attached to the picturesque setting with the remains of the village and the Jarrah Sawmill, and the old timber tramway formations disappearing off into the surrounding forests. It sparked off an interest that turned into a five year search for the history of Simsville.

Changes of ownership and sawmill fires meant that very few complete records of Simsville survived. Searching out what remained called for many journeys through old newspapers, library archives, company records and Government files. Letters, phone calls and long car trips helped track down ex-Simsvillites and others who could contribute memories, information or old photographs.

Oral sources played a significant role in the recording of this history. The many priceless experiences told to me helped to turn a dry collection of facts and dates into a living story. To my regret, some of the interviewees have since passed away, before getting to see the fruits of their labors.

The few maps showing the old timber tramways soon proved unreliable or just plain wrong. A sense of urgency became attached to exploring and recording them, as rural development and modern forestry operations were steadily encroaching upon the remains. As the size and scope of the tramway network unfolded during these mapping expeditions, it wasn't hard to develop a respect and admiration for the skill and determination of the timber men who built it.

Ian McNeil
Metford, NSW

Cover: View of Millars' horse tramway in 1913. Jarrah mill and Simsville village is in the background, across Alderly Creek.

Photo: Stroud Historical Society

2. INTRODUCTION

Thick forests covered the NSW coastal districts between Port Stephens and the Manning River prior to the arrival of white settlers. Generally the soils in this region were not fertile enough to attract large-scale settlement so little of the original forest was cleared for agriculture. What settlement there was tended to be concentrated on the coast adjacent to the region's lakes and rivers.

Historically the whole area was originally part of the million acre Port Stephens Estate granted to the pioneering Australian Agricultural Company in 1847. However, this forest country soon proved unsuitable for either grazing or agriculture. The Company relinquished it back to the State, well before the turn of the century, as well as all the coastal land between Port Stephens and Taree. In exchange they were granted lands more suitable for grazing and agriculture further inland. Recognising the value of the timber reserves in the area, the NSW State Government established a series of Forest Reserves between 1891 and 1902. These were absorbed into the Myall River State Forest when it was created in 1917.

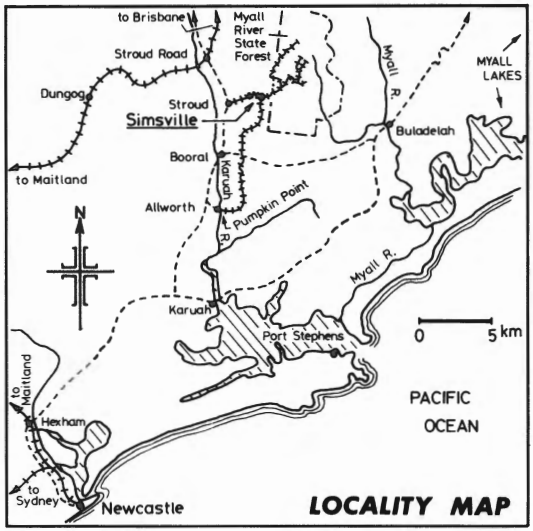
The Myall River State Forest is situated about 20 km inland from the Myall Lakes, and lies between Bulahdelah and Stroud. It is part of a belt of State Forests stretching north from Port Stephens up to the Manning River and beyond. The State Forest contains over 18,000 hectares of mountainous country with many gorge-like valleys and steep ridges. The main ridge runs the length of the Forest in a NW to SE direction, reaching a height of 600 metres to the north. The headwaters of the Crawford River and many tributary creeks of the Myall, Williams and Karuah Rivers drain out from the Myall River State Forest.

The district's sub-tropical climate and generous rainfall supported a thick forest cover of hardwood eucalypts. On the ridges spotted gum, grey gum, tallowwood, blackbutt, white and red mahogany, and ironbark were the dominant species. Blue gum, brush box and turpentine were found in the gullies, and in areas of richer soils grew pockets of rainforest, called *brushes* or *scrubs*.

The first timber getters concentrated their efforts on areas close to the lakes and rivers in this area. A thriving timber trade developed last century around the shores of the Myall Lakes and navigable tributary rivers and creeks. However away from these waterways, timber stands remained relatively untouched as roads were non-existent and access was very difficult. The early saw millers of the last century followed this pattern, and located their small saw mills around these same lakes and rivers. They were wholly dependent on water transport to ship their timber to markets. By the turn of the century however, the more accessible forests were being cut out, and attention was being turned to the virgin forests covering the rugged coastal ranges.

Within the Myall River State Forest was an area known as the *Purgatory Scrub*, a dense and thickly tangled hardwood forest that covered the rugged head waters of the Crawford River. Some early attempts were made to establish sawmills to exploit the Purgatory forests, but the difficult terrain and bush tracks which turned into quagmires in wet weather defeated these first initiatives. The Australian Timber Export Company surveyed tramway routes from the Upper Myall River, north of Bulahdelah, into the Crawford River forests in 1906/7 but could not raise the necessary capital to go any further. Probably the most expensive failure was that of the Port Stephens Hardwood Company. They installed a modern mill on the Crawford River and a steam operated outlet tramway in 1903, but poor planning and high transport costs forced them into liquidation after less than 18 months of intermittent operation.

Sawmillers and timber-getters were always faced with this difficult problem of getting their timber to a navigable waterway where it could be loaded aboard shallow drafted steamers and, usually, taken to Sydney. By the turn of the century the village of Bulahdelah, on the Upper Myall River, was an established timber loading port. The village of Booral Wharf, or Allworth, on the Karuah River was also a timber port. Both these places, however, were over 16 km from the main timber belts of the Purgatory forests.



2. THE MILLARS ERA: 1911 — 1922

Millars Timber & Trading Company

Millars Karri & Jarrah Company (1902) Limited was one of the largest timber companies in Australia in the early years of this century. It was formed in 1902 through the amalgamation of several timber firms working the rich karri and jarrah forests in Western Australia[1]. The company pursued a successful policy of exporting Australian hardwood timbers to England and Europe in the early years, which were much in demand as paving blocks for streets, railway sleepers and the like. They expanded their interests into NSW and in 1905 established a waterfront depot in the Sydney suburb of Balmain. The company name was changed in 1912 to Millars Timber and Trading Company Limited.

Millars Simsville Purchase

The lucrative nature of the hardwood export trade and increasing competition from other Australian suppliers led Millars to take steps to control their own supply of hardwoods in NSW. They decided to establish their own sawmill and, in 1911, turned their attention to the untouched forests of the Purgatory Scrub, between Stroud and Bulahdelah. The best access routes were from the eastern or Bulahdelah side, but these were blocked by rival interests and unsympathetic land-holders. So Millars cast around for an alternative means of access to the resource.

At this time the Australian Agricultural Company was selling off the last of its Port Stephens Estate lands in the Stroud district. One of the last blocks sold was a 10,000 acre (4050 hectares) lot 8 km east of Stroud, going to local grazier John Edwin Fenwick for £3483 in 1910[2]. This was to become the site of Simsville.

Making a calculated decision, Millars purchased this block from Fenwick in early 1911. Although it was rough country and had attracted little attention in the past, the Simsville block did contain good timber up in the north-east and eastern sections. But more importantly, it provided Millars with a means of access into the western reaches of the Purgatory Scrub around Winns Creek, a large area with immense reserves of good hardwood timber. Modern topographic maps show that the Simsville block adjoined the only negotiable saddle in the high ridge separating Stroud from the Purgatory forests. To the north and south lay a mountainous jumble of steep sided ridges and valleys.

To Millars, their new purchase was also conveniently situated to established transport routes over which they could ship out their timber. The busy river port of Allworth, on the Karuah River, was only 16 km south of Stroud and could be reached via the main North Coast Road. Allworth had a regular passenger and freight service to Newcastle and Sydney. Numerous other small ships brought in general freight for the Stroud and Gloucester districts, and shipped out cargoes of timber, maize and livestock.

The North Coast Railway was then under construction. This line was surveyed to pass 6 km north of Stroud with a station at Stroud Road. The first section of this railway, from Maitland to Dungog, was opened in August 1911, and the rest of the line to Taree was opened in February 1913.

The Move to Stroud

The small country town of Stroud was galvanized in June 1911 when the news broke that Millars had purchased Fenwick's Estate, and were planning to establish large sawmills and an extensive timber industry[3]. Millars did not disappoint them. They wasted no time in securing permission from Stroud Shire Council to construct a tramway from their property to Stroud, and began to move large quantities of sawmill machinery from the Karuah River port of Allworth up to the mill site. The chosen mill site was located 8 km east of Stroud on the east bank of Alderly Creek. It was a pleasant location, in a picturesque valley nestling amongst the surrounding hills with Stroud Mountain to the north, and the loom of Sour Ridge to the east. Here for the next 36 years was to be the village of Simsville and its Jarrah sawmill.

The First Jarrah Mill

Millar's constructed a steam-powered sawmill capable of producing 12,000 super feet (28 cubic metres) of sawn timber a day, which was quite a large mill in those days. The sawmill quickly became known as The Jarrah and it is still remembered by that name even today.

Construction of the sawmill, the access tramway to Stroud, and the logging tramways began simultaneously in February 1912[4]. Contemporary newspaper reports claimed that hundreds of men were employed on the works, providing a considerable economic boon to Stroud. By April 1912 advertisements for a First Class Sawyer and for Mill Hands had appeared in the local papers, and in July 1912, the mill was in full operation[5]. Millars also constructed a small concrete walled dam to supply the sawmill's boilers. This was sited on a tributary of Alderly Creek, about 200 metres north of the mill.

Mr Jack O'Keeffe, who started work there as a tally boy in 1912, when interviewed in 1987, gave the following description of the Jarrah Mill:

> The mill was powered by two 16 hp (12 kW) Garrett portable steam engines, which stood side by side on a concrete foundation and drove a counter shaft which drove the rest of the mill machinery. There were several saws. The log saw was a vertical frame saw, containing four blades, which was used to break down the logs into large flitches. They had to be hauled out by steam winch. This frame saw was well suited to the big logs Millars were cutting from the virgin forest during the first years.

There were two saw benches ... which cut the flitches into marketable sizes. (There was) a docking saw ... and a paling sawbench which was used to cut up flitches too small for the other saw benches into fence palings, or firewood for the boiler.

The first mill foreman was Mr McFarland. He didn't last long and was replaced by Mr Liddell. After the War, Bill Marsh was the foreman.

During the first couple of years, over 150 men were employed at the mill and in the bush. The wages bill came to between £2,000 and £2,500 a month, and each month the paymaster had an armed escort out to the mill and to the bush camps. Stroud experienced a big economic boost, as much of this money was spent in the town.

Millars also purchased 3 acres (1.2 ha) of land in Stroud, and established a timber depot on the corner of the present day Simsville Road and the Bucketts Way. This was the terminus of the Ducks Hill tramway, and here a fine residence was built in 1913 for the mill manager. As befitting the largest industry and biggest employer in Stroud, Jarrah Mill managers enjoyed a high social standing. They presided over numerous sporting and charitable committees, and played an active role in the town's many social activities.

The first manager was William Pitt Sims, a sawmiller from the Otway Ranges in Victoria. He was in charge of the construction of the sawmill, tramways and the village. After two years, he was succeeded by another Victorian, John Graves, who remained in the position until 1921 when his health began to fail. Sydney Smith was Millars last manager, staying until they sold out in 1922.

Millars' Jarrah Sawmill, Simsville c.1913 *Stroud Historical Society Photo*

Timber Tramways
Winns Creek Tramway (1912)

Millars biggest and most expensive undertaking at Simsville was the construction of their 3ft 6in (1067 mm) gauge logging tramway system. Right from the outset they had their sights set on the virgin blackbutt and tallowwood forests of the Purgatory Scrub in the Winns Creek catchment area. They secured 2000 acres (810 ha) of these Crown Land forests in 1912 under Annual Leases, later expanding this to 8,000 acres (3240 ha)[6].

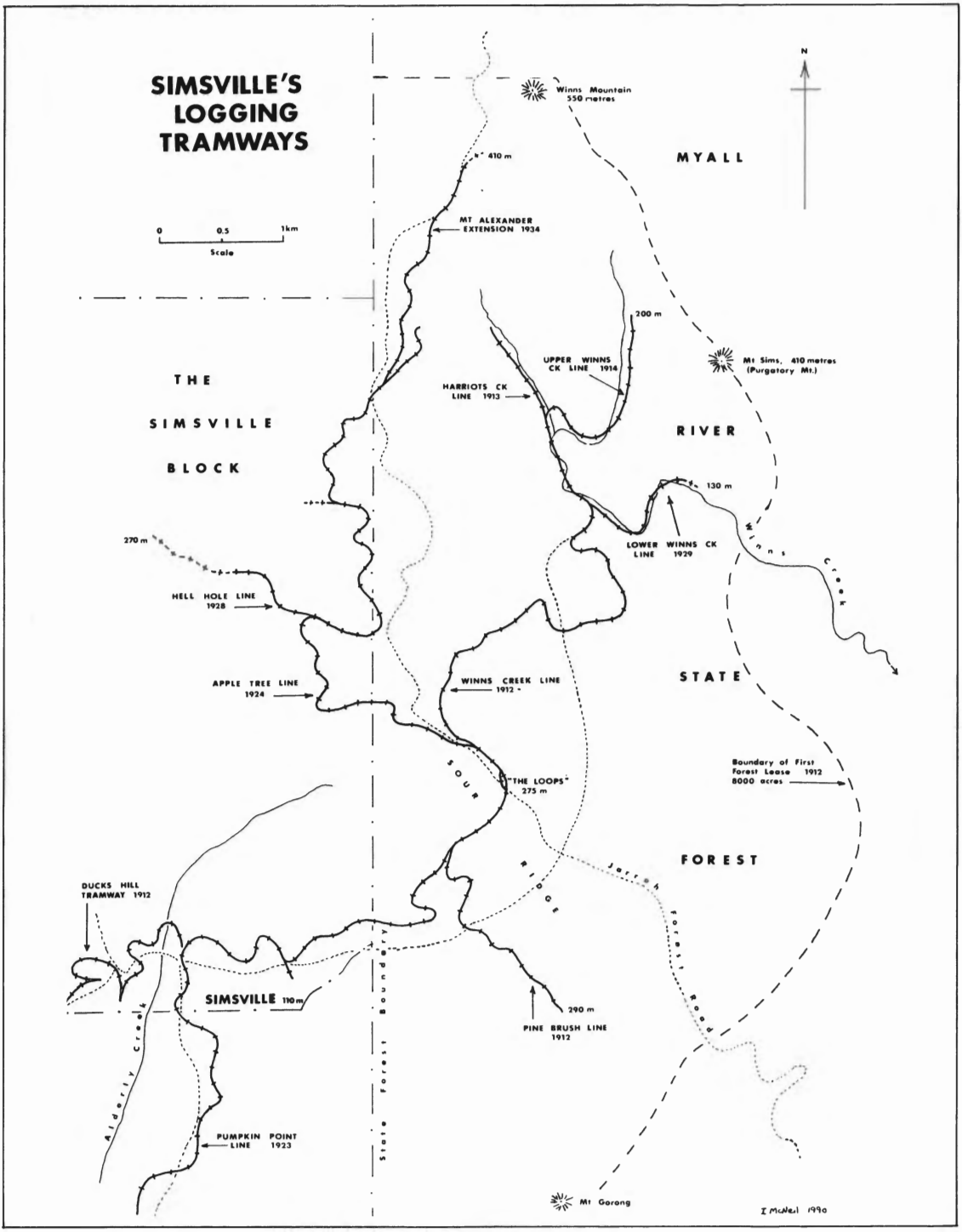
To reach this timber Millars constructed a well engineered timber tramway up and over the intervening saddle — Sour Ridge — and then down into the valley of Winns Creek. The main line was 10km long, terminating near the head of Harriet's Creek, a tributary of Winns Creek. Two short branch lines have been found, the 2km Pine Brush line near Mount Gorong, and the 1.5km Upper Winns Creek line. It is possible there were other temporary branches, though nothing positive was found while mapping the old formations.

Work commenced in March 1912. It was an extended project which occupied a workforce of scores of men over a two year period. It seems that once Sour Ridge had been crossed, the line was extended section by section along a presurveyed route, keeping pace with timber extraction.

Many of the men were navvies who had worked on the recently completed Maitland to Dungog section of the North coast Railway, and the Stroud hotelkeepers experienced some lively times following paydays. Some tragedy was associated with the work too. Jeremiah Savage, just out from Ireland, was killed when a tree fell on him during formation clearing. Another distraught navvy tried to shoot his mate when his sweetheart, the daughter of the boarding house keeper at Simsville, turned her attentions to his mate instead.

Heavy earthworks in the form of cuttings, embankments and hillside ledges were necessary to carry the tramway through rugged terrain. Substantial trestle bridges were built at many locations to carry the tramway over creeks and deep gullies.

A small trestle bridge near the Jarrah Mill on Millars' horse tramway, c.1913 *Stroud Historical Society Photo*



The main line from the mill climbed 3.5 km on an average gradient of 1:21 to reach the 275 metre summit of Sour Ridge, where a passing loop siding called *The Loops* was built. Just before this, at the 3 km mark, the short Pine Brush branch left the main line to tap a good stand of timber near Mt Gorong to the South.

Now descending on a gentler grade, the main line began a 4 km descent down towards Winns Creek, describing a large letter "S" in the process to avoid steep climbs against the load. Long cuttings cut through solid rock were a feature on this section, and the highest bridge on the tramway, 30 m high, was built on this line at a point 500 m short of Winns Creek.

Reaching Winns Creek, the main line turned north to follow the creek upstream, crossing it three times in the process. The original line departed Winns Creek at the 8.5km mark, and terminated 1.5km up a tributary creek, Harriets Creek. After the timber in this area was cut out, the Upper Winns Creek branch was constructed, leaving the main line via a trailing junction near the 9 km mark, and following Winns Creek upstream for a further 1km or so. Millars early plans called for a sawmill to be built out here, but this never came about.

There were 20 timber trestle bridges on the main line alone. Some were quite large; up to 20 metres high and over 50 metres long. They were simply but strongly built from locally cut timber, all to the one design. Suitable trees were felled and either cut to length as 30 cm diameter bridge piles, or squared off to form 30 cm x 30 cm girders and bridge timbers. Triple-pile trestle sets were bolted together by 25 mm diameter iron bolts up to one metre long, and lifted into place using horses and block and tackle. The trestle sets were sited 3 to 4 metres apart, supporting pairs of horizontal bridge girders set a metre apart. The tramway sleepers were spiked directly onto the girders and the rails dogspiked onto the sleepers.

Remains of a trestle bridge 3km north of the mill in 1991. Note the characteristic triple pile arrangement, topped by a double horizontal corbels bolted through the tops of the piles. Bridge girders rested directed on the corbels.
Photo Ian McNeil

One of the bridge builders was a young apprentice, Harry Green. He later became Allen Taylor & Company's chief civil engineer at Wooton, and was responsible for constructing and maintaining the Mayer's Point steam tramway, as well as a lot of construction work in that Company's sawmills.

The tramway was built to high standards. The well engineered formation, with its moderate curves, even grades, and deep trackside drains, is still very much in evidence today, some 50 years after it was abandoned. Unfortunately modern logging methods and caterpillar tractors are changing all this.

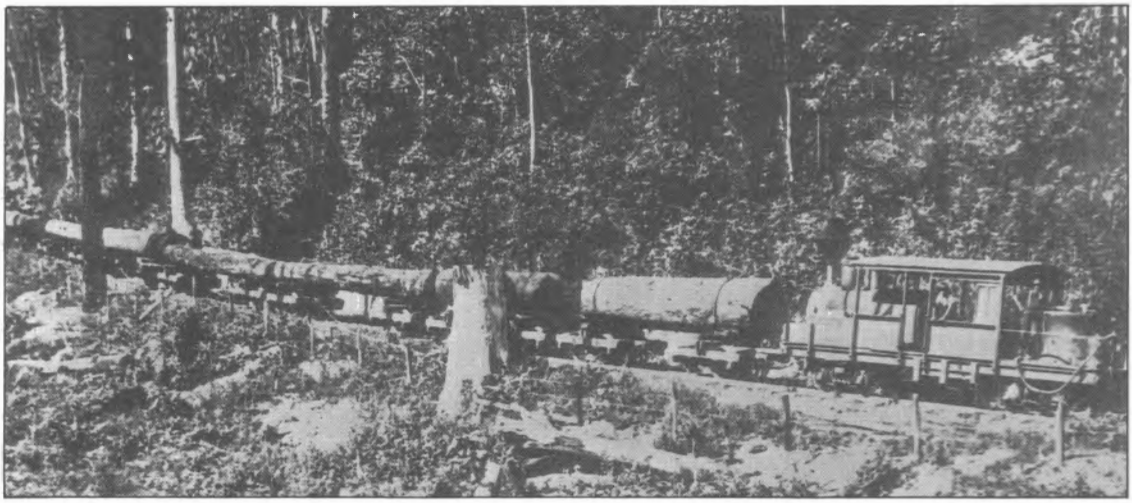
Millars Climax Locomotive

The logging tramway was first built with wooden rails and operated by horse teams. It was rebuilt with steel rails for steam traction within the first two years of operations at Simsville. It is not certain if the original logging tramway was lightly built like the Ducks Hill horse-powered outlet tramway to Stroud. Local tradition maintains that the changeover was a big job. If this is right, then a large amount of re-engineering was necessary, making this a very expensive change of mind. It is believed that Millars did not convert the Ducks Hill tramway because they planned to replace it with a steam tramway direct to the Karuah River near Allworth.

Millars brought in a 3ft 6in (1067 mm) gauge steam locomotive for their logging tramway before the First World War, probably in early 1914. This was most likely the 15 tonne A-Class Climax loco (B/N 1265 of circa 1913), built by the Climax Manufacturing Company in Pennsylvania, USA.

Climax locomotives were mainly designed for hauling timber over lightly built narrow-gauge railways. Their weight was supported by two 4-wheel bogies, with each of the axles being driven by bevel gears from a central under-floor shaft. The gear ratios gave a slow turn of speed, but enabled the locos to haul heavy loads over uneven track and up steep grades.

The smallest Climax locomotives were the A-class. They were generally lightweight machines and had a two speed gear arrangement with a potential top speed of 5 mph (8 km/h) in low range and 10 mph (16 km/h) in high range. The practical top speeds were more like 3 mph (5 km/h) and 6 mph (10 km/h); any faster and the wear and tear on the gears became excessive. In low range they were capable of moving very heavy loads. They were well suited to rough logging tramways and were very popular with timber companies.



A-class Climax locomotive and log train near Smithton, Tasmania in the 1940s. This locomotive is believed to be the Simsville A-class Climax, B/N 1265 of 1913. *Photo: Winter's Studio Burnie*

Millars Climax had at least two nicknames at Simsville; *COFFEE POT* and in later years *SLIPPERY SAM.* Apparently the loco was not fitted with sanders, which are used to apply sand to wet or slippery rails for better traction. Consequently the locomotive had a tendency to slip on the steeper sections of the logging tramways, requiring the fireman to get down off the footplate and hand sand the rails ahead of the loco.
Jack O'Keeffe recalled when he was a tally boy at the mill before the War, he was given a ride on the loco during one wet day when the mill was stopped. His recollections of the event were that the loco was very noisy, with gears that spun round very quickly but drove the engine quite slowly.

SLIPPERY SAM was used on the logging tramway to haul logs to the mill, and could bring in five rakes of logs, about 14,000 super feet (33 cu m), per trip. During World War 1, when the Jarrah Mill was shut down, Allen Taylor and Company briefly considered trying to buy or lease the loco for use on their Wootton — Meyers Point line[7].

The Ducks Hill Tramway (1912)

To transport their sawn timber from the sawmill to their Stroud Depot, Millars constructed a 8 km wooden-railed tramway. This was completed in June 1912, about the same time as the mill was being finished[8]. It was also 3ft 6in (1067 mm) gauge, with 4in x 3.5in (100 x 90 mm) brushbox rails. Horse teams provided the motive power.

Leaving the mill, this tramway crossed a wooden trestle bridge over Alderly Creek and began to climb the steep ridge called Ducks Hill which lay immediately to the west of Alderly Creek and the Jarrah Mill. This was the major difficulty facing the tramway builders. They overcame it by building in two switch-backs, or reversing stations, to keep the tramway gradients low enough for horse teams to handle. There was one switchback on each side of the hill. On the Stroud side, the line was laid in almost a complete circle during the descent. Sharp curves and steep grades featured on this section.

Once clear of Ducks Hill, the tramway traversed generally flat country, following the course of Lamans Creek into Stroud. There were five or six small trestle bridges on the line, much more lightly built than those on the steam powered logging tramways. Some of the wooden railed sections of the tramway over Ducks Hill were soon replaced with light steel rails to cut maintenance costs.

Teams of four light draft horses were used to haul single trolley loads of sawn timber from the mill to the Depot, as well as the mail to and from Stroud, and most likely many other goods and supplies too. It appears that on return journeys back to the mill, drivers would often unharness the horses at the top of Ducks Hill and coast the trolleys down the 1.5 km grade nearly all the way to the mill. Judging by the steep grades on this part of the line, the more daring drivers probably got up to some hair-raising speeds. Les Neville, Theo Neville and John Galvin were some of the regular drivers on this line.

The Ducks Hill Tramway was the Jarrah Mill's lifeline, there being no reliable alternate road to use. Along the Lamans Creek flats the private bush road from the mill to Stroud became a quagmire at the first sign of rain, and the local Shire Council showed little enthusiasm in maintaining its portion of the road solely for the benefit of the company. The tramway remained in use until 1923, when the steam line to the Karuah River was constructed.

Logging Operations

Millars had an "army" of men in the bush before the War. There were timber getters, horse and bullock team drivers, laborers, swampers (men who cleared paths for tramlines and roads), platelayers and bridge builders.

The timber in the Winns Creek area of the Purgatory Scrub was virgin forest, very much better than the timber on the Simsville side of Sour Ridge. The timbermen cut mainly hardwoods; blackbutt, tallow-wood, brushbox and blue gum. Very little softwood was taken. All the cutting was done by axe and by crosscut saw. Many of these trees were bigger in diameter than the length of a crosscut saw, and they were felled by two-man teams, a left-handed axeman and a right-hander. They could cut through logs up to 26 feet (8 m) girth in this manner.

A load of timber at the first reversing station on the Duck's Hill tramway in 1913.

Stroud Historical Society Photo

Some of the timber getters cut enormous amounts of timber from Winns Creek in those days. An axeman was expected to cut up to 10,000 super feet (30 cu m) a day. One champion axeman, Gig Gossop, was reputed to have cut one and a quarter million super feet (3700 cu m) of timber two years running[9].

During the first two or three years, about half a dozen bullock teams were contracted by Millars to haul logs off the Simsville block directly to the mill. However, the use of bullock teams was never widespread as there was very little natural feed for them up in the forests. On the other hand, horses were widely used, as they could be hand-fed chaff and did not need green feed.

Horse teams were contracted to haul logs to the logging tramway where they were loaded onto tramway trucks. The Company's horse teams then hauled them to the mill, one or two logs each being supported by a pair of 4-wheel bogey trucks. There were three teams of four to five draft horses each used on tramway haulage. The extensive stables at the mill housed about 30 draft horses which were used on both the logging and sawn timber tramways.

After the Climax steam locomotive was purchased, it took over the job of hauling logs to the mill. As previously mentioned, the Climax had a slow turn of speed. It would seem that to speed things up during the early years of operations, it was not uncommon to "free wheel" the locomotive plus log train down the long 3 km descent to the mill in neutral gear. Brakemen riding the logs helped to control the speed by hauling on the brake ropes attached to the brakes on each log bogey.

Transport of Sawn Timber

The transport of sawn timber from Simsville to their Sydney Depot was a problem for Millars which they never satisfactorily solved. Their initial plan was quite straightforward. Timber from the mill was to be hauled to their Stroud Depot over the 8 km horse tramway. Here traction engines were to take over for the 16 km road haul down to Allworth, a small village at the head of navigation of the Karuah River. Finally, small coastal vessels would ship the timber to Sydney.

Millars brought in two large steam traction engines in 1912 to road haul their timber from Stroud to Allworth[10]. Each engine could haul up to three trailers fully laden with timber. Large cleats, or claws, on the huge rear wheels gave added traction in wet conditions. Firewood cutters were contracted to stack fuel for the engines along the roadside, and boiler water was drawn from the creeks and rivers along the way.

However, wet weather and the local Councils were the real problem. The heavy timber traffic operating over this road turned sections of it into impassable morasses. The first two winters of Millars' operations — 1913 and 1914

A horse team at Stroud Road railway station in the 1920s.

— were exceptionally wet and their traction engines were unable to move for weeks at a time. Small mountains of stacked timber accumulated at their Stroud Depot, while their chartered ships sailed away empty from Allworth.

Control of the road was vested in the neighboring Stroud and Wallarobba Shire Councils, who were reluctant to sink all their meager road maintenance funds into the bottomless Allworth Road. There were complaints from all quarters leveled against the damage the traction engines did to roads and bridges. Millars in turn complained to the Councils for allowing the roads to get into such a state in the first place, and petitioned the Government of the day for grants to put the road in order.

The wet winter of 1914 was so bad that Millars decided they had to find an alternative means of getting their timber to Allworth. In July 1914, they announced plans to build a 20 km light railway from Simsville to Pumpkin Point, a location on the Karuah River opposite Allworth, and to establish a sawmill there too[11].

A team of surveyors made trial route surveys in early August, setting Allworth and district alight with rumors of impending prosperity. Alas it was not to be. Two weeks later World War 1 was declared, the Jarrah Mill was shut, and the project was abruptly halted.

Allworth Wharf

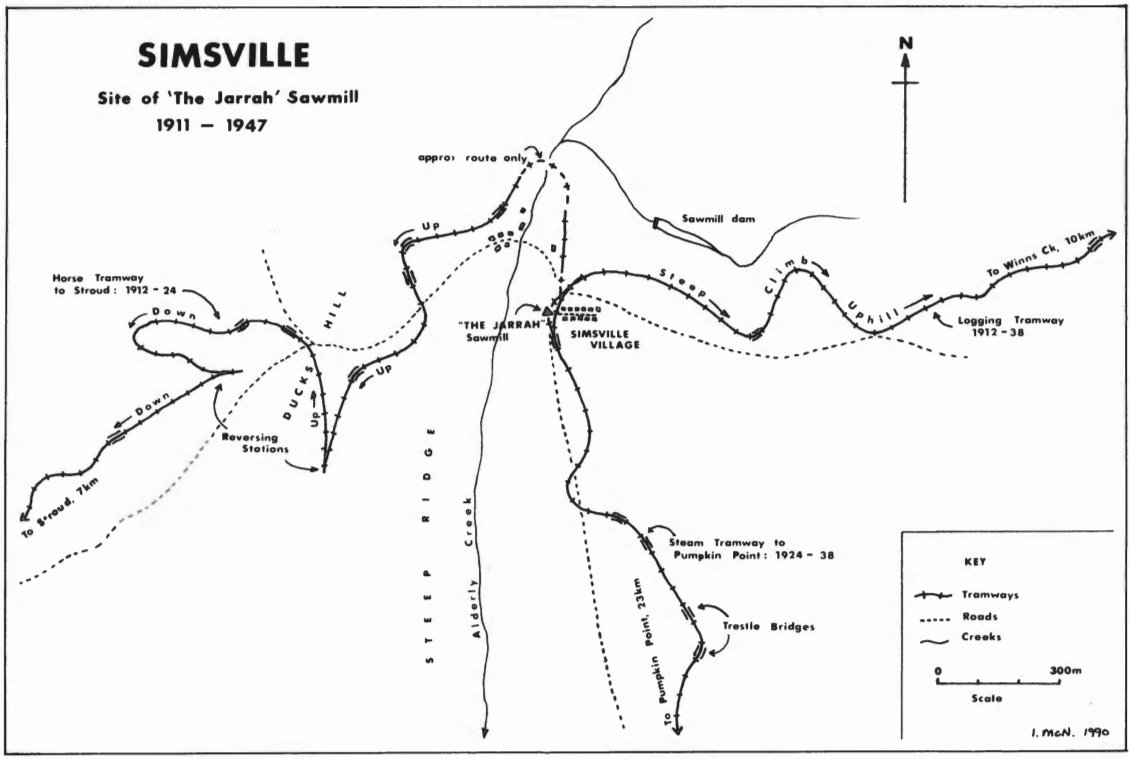
At Allworth's public wharf, Millars loaded their timber on board small chartered coasting vessels of up to 150 tonnes burden. The auxiliary ketch Forbes Bros was a frequent weekly visitor to Allworth before the war, together with the ketch Doris. Timber cargoes were dispatched down the Karuah River to the broad expanse of Port Stephens, out through the heads and down the coast for the short run to Sydney.

Though Millars were granted permission to build their own private wharf at Allworth in 1913, they did not proceed with it due to the problems they were having with the road haulage. It seems that the wharf was not built until the latter stages of the war, after Millars had given up the idea of building their own light railway to Allworth. The wharf lease expired in 1923 and was not renewed.

The First Simsville Village

The company constructed 40 clapboard houses adjacent to the sawmill for the mill workers. There were four-room cottages for married men and two-room huts for single men. There was also a large boarding house supplying meals (but not accommodation) for single men. The company's mill office also doubled as a post office and a polling booth. As the company owned all the land, no hotel was allowed in the village, a factor which led to lively nights at the Stroud hotels following each monthly pay.

About 100 people lived at Simsville during this period, which was about as large as the village ever became. Not all employees lived in the village however. Many of the bushworkers camped out amongst the timber during the week, and went home to their families living in other



villages on weekends. In later years, Stroud mill hands tended to commute the 8 km to the mill each day on horseback or bicycle. Some of the families living at Simsville during this time were: Allen, Brindley, Cox, Crook, Ford, Galvin, James, Marsh, Morgan, Murrell, O'Keeffe, and Shepherd.

The name of Simsville was bestowed upon the village in 1912, when the Post Office asked Millars to supply a name for the village's post office. The origin of the name is unclear. The official version is that it was named after the Reverend Samuel Simm who ministered in Stroud during the 1850's and 1860's. However, some old hands state that it was named after Millars' construction manager, William Pitt Sims, who built the sawmill, tramways, and the village. The name was also given to a hill out in the Purgatory Scrub — Mount Sims — which can still be found on the old maps.

Though the official name of the village was Simsville, it was nearly always referred to as *The Jarrah,* a tradition that still lingers on today.

There was no school at the village before the First World War. The Education Authorities of the day would not sanction a school at Simsville, even though Millars offered land and timber for one, and their employees offered to donate their labor to build it. It was claimed that 20 to 30 children at Simsville were running wild for the lack of an education, and the Department was roundly criticised by all. Some parents struggled to board their children in Stroud so that they could attend school there. This course was beyond the resources of workmen with large families, and some left Simsville because of the lack of a school there.

After the War, a subsidised school was started at Simsville, taught by a young lady, Miss Ivy Gorton, from Stroud. The parents had to pay so much per child and the Education Department paid the rest. There were 12 children enrolled initially.

The Post Office[12]

A "non-official receiving post office" was opened in Millars' sawmill office at Simsville in November 1912. The first receiving officer was paid £1 a year for his services. The mail was carried to and from Stroud three times a week over the sawmill's horse-drawn tramway, for which service Millars received £5 a year. The office closed down when War was declared and did not open again during Millars tenure.

Village Sports.

Simsville fielded enthusiastic football and cricket teams during the first years. The football team was reckoned to play a tough game, opposing players having to seek medical aid after some games. The cricket team was said to be at a bit of a disadvantage though, having only a sawdust pitch to practice on at Simsville. After the war the Jarrah Tennis Club was popular.

World War 1 (1914 — 1918)

Operations at Simsville came to an abrupt halt in August 1914. World War 1 was declared in that month and the export timber trade stopped virtually overnight. One week later Millars closed the Jarrah Mill down and dismissed all 145 men employed there[13]. Many of the men enlisted in the Army, while others went elsewhere in the district to find work. Some of the wives and children remained at Simsville, their menfolk remitting their wages back to keep them going. The loss of so many jobs also hurt the neighboring town of Stroud, where local businesses had come to depend on the Jarrah Mill's pay packets.

Millars other five saw mills in Australia and three in New Zealand did not fare much better. Only two mills in West Australia remained open, at Yarradale and at Wellington.

The 1915 Electoral Roll shows only three adult males still at Simsville, perhaps as caretakers. They were too few to stop the bad bushfires in December 1915 from causing considerable damage to the logging tramway system. The debris left over from tramline and bridge construction intensified the fires, and some of the large bridges were destroyed.

Manager John Graves stayed on in charge, and also ran cattle on the lands nearer to Stroud. From time to time one or other of Millars' West Australian managers visited Stroud, events which would spark off hopeful optimism in the district that the Jarrah Mill was going to start up again. Towards the end of the War a few men were rehired to cut railway sleepers, piles and poles.

Millars Postwar Period, 1919 — 1922

Finally, in September 1919, Millars began preparations to restart the Jarrah Mill at Simsville[14]. Over £1,000 was spent in repairing the tramways and bridges, and in overhauling the sawmill and traction engines. Advertisements were placed in the local papers for mill hands and steam engine drivers in November 1919 and the mill started up in December. Many of the men who had gone off to war were rehired, and Simsville village came back to life.

The Steam Log Haulers

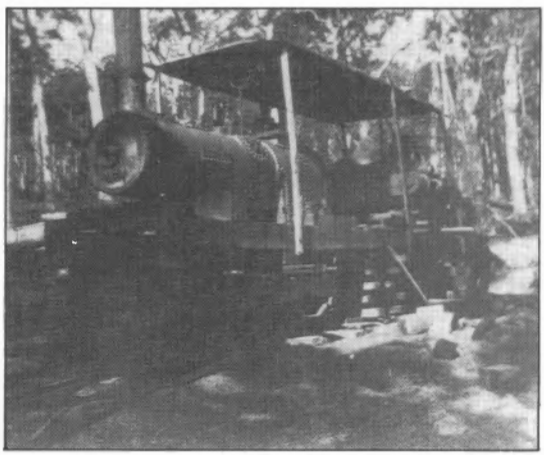
Two steam log haulers, or winches, were brought across from West Australia in November 1919, and installed up in the forest to haul felled logs to the tramway[15]. An experienced hauler man, Ted Slavin, was also brought across from West Australia to serve as bush foreman. Each hauler had a half mile of wire rope, enabling logs to be pulled in quickly, and also from difficult locations that the bullock teams could not work. As they only had single drum winches, horses were used to pull the wire rope back out into the forest after each pull.

In April 1922 the boiler of the smaller log hauler blew up, killing the relief driver Albert Schultz instantly[16]. The reason for the fatality was never established. Mrs Jessie Dumbrell, who was a schoolgirl at the time, recalled that her father, Tom Richards, was the regular driver of this hauler. Albert asked him on that day if they could swap haulers, because he was unfamiliar with the larger machine. Tom agreed, and reckoned afterwards this decision probably saved his life.

The Holt Caterpillar Tractor

The local Shire Councils were successful in having traction engines banned from the roads in 1917. Millars purchased a 60 hp Holt Caterpillar oil tractor in late 1920 to replace the horse teams on road haulage. The tractor weighed 10 tonnes and could haul 7 tonnes of sawn timber per trip down to Allworth. They felt that the Shire Councils would allow its operation because the machine's weight was spread evenly over the length of its tracks and therefore it would not damage the roads. Stroud residents of the period say it was not really a success, it used to shed odd pieces of track over the road. However the Councils still banned it, on the grounds that it exceeded bridge weight limits, damaged roads, and scared horse teams[17].

From then on, Millars had to rely on horse teams until they sold out in 1922. Most timber was shipped out from Allworth, but some was hauled the 6 km north by road to



A steam logging winch mounted on temporary bogies being delivered to a new site, c.1928.

Photo, Mrs L. Marsh

Stroud Road railway station. This usually was only done for Government timber purchases, as rail transport of timber was more expensive than shipping in those days.

The Myall River State Forest

Before World War I, most logging activities were uncontrolled and whole areas were being cut out indiscriminately. The then Forestry Department's main role was to collect timber royalties for the State Government. The 1916 Forestry Act established the basis of the NSW Forestry Commission, and emphasis slowly began to change towards sustained yield logging and forest management.

The Myall River State Forest was dedicated in January 1917. It covered the Crown Land forests to the east of Millars' Simsville lands, including the 8,000 acres (3240 ha) of forest leased to Millars in 1912. Subsequent additions over the years expanded the Forest to 46,000 acres (18630 ha). An assessment survey of the forest was carried out in 1921, followed by the first Forest Working Plan in the same year. Creation of the State Forest marked the beginning of a new era in the timber industry. However, it did not have an immediate effect on Millars.

The Sydney City Council Proposal

The Sydney City Council used large quantities of hardwood for city street paving blocks and wooden poles for street lighting and electricity supply. In November 1920 they began an inquiry to see if they could acquire cheaper blocks and poles by purchasing their own sawmill and forest property.

In September 1921, City Surveyor Mr H Briggs completed a detailed list of some 22 timber companies who were willing to sell to the Council[18]. Council's Works Committee drew up a short list of four companies and asked Mr J N Shedden, manager of the NSW State Sawmills at Gloucester, to prepare a report on them. Millars Timber & Trading Co's Simsville property and William Langley & Sons' Langley Vale property headed up the list.

Surveyor Briggs reported that Millars were asking £42,000 for their Simsville land, sawmill, tramways, and cutting rights in the adjoining Myall River State Forest. The mill put out 52,800 superfeet of sawn timber per week, and timber reserves were estimated to be 93,000,000 superfeet. Tramway equipment consisted of one Climax locomotive and 40 tramway trucks. There were five miles (8 km) of wooden-railed tramway (to Stroud) and 9 miles (14 km) of steel railed line (to Winns Creek).

However before anything further could be done, the old Council was voted out of office in the December 1921 election. The incoming Council firmly believed in free enterprise and promptly cancelled this project, as well as other proposals to purchase a blue metal quarry and a cement plant.

Millars Simsville Finale (1922)

After the War there was increasing competition from imports of cheaper oregon (douglas fir) timber from the West Coast of America. In 1920 nearly £2,000,000 worth of oregon was imported into NSW; in 1921 it was over £4,000,000. Customers also found oregon an easier timber to use than Australian hardwoods, and hardwood producers began to feel the pinch.

In 1922 matters came to a head. Faced with cut-throat competition, Millars closed down three of their large West Australian sawmills and again put their Simsville operation up for sale[19].

In May 1922, Millars sold all their Simsville assets to Queensland Pines Limited for £40,000. Under the terms of the sale Millars continued to operate the Jarrah Mill at Simsville until late 1922, and opened negotiations with neighboring landholders and Stroud Shire Council for permission to build the long-planned light railway to Pumpkin Point. These necessary leases, rights and agreements were concluded in June 1922[20].

Millars ceased operations at Simsville in October 1922 and pulled out, bringing Simsville's "West Australian" era to a close. The new owners took over in early 1923, although the NSW Lands Department records show the actual property transfer did not take place until July 1923. Millars assisted the purchase with a £20,000 mortgage loan[21].

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3. PINES AND HARDWOODS: 1922-1927

Queensland Pine Company

The Queensland Pine Company was registered in Queensland in 1909 with an authorized capital of £75,000[1]. The Chairman was Mr George Klewitz Soward, an Adelaide architect and one-time South Australian state politician[2]. Prior to World War I the company established a sawmill and wood pulping plant at Yarraman in Queensland, some 50 km west of Brisbane. It was planned to use mill pine waste and pine tops to feed the pulp mill and produce a range of paper, cellulose products and artificial silks. While the company did quite well out of sawmilling, the pulp mill was unsuccessful. It lost substantial amounts of money and attempts to sell it off met with no success.

After the war, the Queensland Pine Company won a lucrative contract with the War Services Homes Commission. For a three year period commencing in January 1920, the Commission undertook to purchase the entire sawn timber output from the Yarraman sawmill. The company did extremely well out of this contract, but by early 1922 it was apparent that their good fortunes were not going to continue. They were given to understand that the War Service Homes Commission contract would not be renewed in 1923. Worse, their cutting rights on Government land were to expire in August 1922 and would not be renewed. In response to this gloomy news the directors decided on a bold course of action.

Pines & Hardwoods of Australia Limited

An extraordinary general meeting of the Queensland Pine Company was called in April 1922. The meeting resolved to change the company name to "Pines & Hardwoods of Australia Limited", and to double the capital to £200,000. With the profits from the War Service's contract the directors were authorized to purchase a large timber property in the Port Stephens, area of New South Wales and to construct a 13 mile (21 km) light railway from there to the nearby harbour[3].

This property turned out to be Millars Timber & Trading Company's Simsville Estate, and the light railway referred to was the long-planned Simsville to Pumpkin Point tramway. The official transfer of the Simsville assets was confirmed in July 1923 for the sum of £40,000. Millars assisted the Pines & Hardwoods purchase by granting a £20,000 mortgage.

The Second Jarrah Mill (1923-1933)

After Millars finished up in October 1922, the Jarrah sawmill ceased operations and most of the male employees left the village to seek work elsewhere. However this was only a temporary stoppage, as the new owners were busy behind the scenes.

Commencing in March 1923, Pines & Hardwoods radically altered and enlarged the Jarrah sawmill. They brought in a large 150 psi (1030 kPa) locomotive-type steam boiler and a large twin cylinder *Tangye* steam mill engine. This engine had a massive flywheel, some 18 inches (0.5 m) thick and over 12 feet (3.7 m) in diameter. Hemp ropes of one inch (25 mm) diameter were used to drive the long counter shaft running under the sawmill's floor and the various saw benches and other mill machinery. The use of ropes instead of leather belts to drive the mill was considered unusual in those days.

The two Garrett portable steam boilers inherited from Millars were relocated to the back of the sawmill, and were used only to drive one of the smaller saw benches and a docking saw when pressure of work required.

In the enlarged mill building a modern double Canadian log saw was installed, comprising of a travelling saw bench and twin circular saws. The bottom saw was the largest, while the smaller top saw was mounted on an adjustable shaft to cater for different log diameters. There were also two large saw bench centres, two small saw bench centres, and a planing machine for finishing off floor boards. The old vertical frame log saw was discarded. Even the log yard was remodelled, allowing logs to be rolled directly off the tramway trucks down to the waiting log yard saw.

This was a somewhat unusual device, being a steam driven cross cut saw, which was used to saw whole logs up into the lengths required to fill the current orders. A steam winch then hauled the cut logs along to the waiting Canadian log saw.

The Jarrah Mill now had a capacity to produce well over 20,000 super feet (47 cu m) of sawn timber per day. The powerful boiler and engine combination did not spin the massive flywheel very quickly, but did give it a huge momentum. No matter how big a log was fed into the log saw, or how many saw benches were working at full pressure, the big Tangye engine never stalled. When the mill closed down for the day, the big flywheel would take several minutes to slow down to a stop.

The mill reconstruction was a major task, and the mill did not commence cutting until February 1924, 10 months after reconstruction started. Apparently the remodeled mill was not satisfactory, because the 1924 Shareholders Report notes that "considerable additional alterations have had to be made to the mill..."[4]. This would have been a serious setback for the Company which was becoming concerned at the large amount of money being invested in Simsville for no return. Although their mill at Yarraman was still operating, the cash flow from this operation was not enough to keep Simsville going.

View of the south-west end of the Pines & Hardwoods sawmill at Simsville, c.1924

Photo: Mrs L. Marsh, Newcastle

The Queenslanders

To staff their modernized sawmill, Pines & Hardwoods brought a key group of skilled men with their families from Yarraman to Simsville. There were over 30 people in all, including mill foreman George Watts, wharf foreman John Dallas, head sawyer Malcom MacGregor, mill fitter Roger Hughes, mill engineer Charlie Cooper, and mill hands Bill Dunn, Wilhelm Homann, Alex and Chris Ponton, and Sid Cooper.

The Yarraman sawmill manager was John McDaniell, a West Australian timber man. He came down from Queensland with his wife in February 1924 to take over the Simsville mill. The influx of so many "foreigners" from Queensland did not go unremarked in a small village the size of Simsville, and there were many good natured remarks about *pineapple-tops* and *banana-suckers* during the first year or two.

About 100 men were employed by Pines & Hardwoods, with nearly 40 in the mill alone. Among the local men working in the mill were the mill clerk Ted Grey, blacksmith Jack Penfold, sawyer George Naylor, engineer Edward Middleton, boilerman Richard "Perce" Hill, and mill hands Les Allen, Eric Brock, Augustus "Gus" Gusse, Dave Jones, Jack McPherson, Bill Steele and Jack Woods, to name a few.

PUMPKIN POINT TRAMWAY

Construction

Pines & Hardwoods commenced the detailed survey for the tramway from Simsville to the Karuah River in early 1923, closely following the route selected by Millars. In this way they could make use of the legal rights to build the tramway across private properties previously negotiated by Millars.

Newcastle surveyor George B Jones was commissioned for the task, and amongst his party was a young student surveyor called Astley Pulver. During an interview in 1986, Astley's recollections of the survey gave an insight into how the survey was carried out:

> We started from the Mill at Simsville and worked down southwards. Our first camp was at Simsville, next to the boarding house where we took our meals. The second and main camp was near Booral, about 7 miles south, and the final camp was on The Branch River, not far from the Armstrong & Royse Sawmill.
> Surveying was done mostly by walking; you would start off at dawn and go as far as you could, then walk back just on dark. There was no 8 hour day for us, though we would have a week off every now and again.
> The ruling gradient was kept down to 1:35 maximum. Earthworks were deliberately minimized, both to keep costs down and to interfere as little as possible with the natural drainage. Because timber was cheap and readily accessible, wooden culverts and trestle bridges were extensively used. They were all fitted with a timber adze. Piles and girders were lifted into place with nothing more than a block and tackle and a draught horse. There was nothing to it. Bridges were constructed to a standard design; spans between piles were short enabling curves to be worked in where required.

Pines and Hardwoods called for tenders for the construction of 15 miles (24 km) of tramway, in sections

of between 2 and 6 miles in length in March 1923[5]. Carl Brock was a successful contractor, being responsible for clearing the formation and constructing the earthworks for the first section below the mill. The progress of his gang was noted by a correspondent to the *Dungog Chronicle* in July 1923:

> The village wears quite a busy appearance these days. On the southern side of the mill, the famous "Brock's Gang" are camped with approximately 40 men engaged. They have worked from 5 miles beyond the mill, clearing the line, and it is to be expected that excavations will be shortly in progress. A rather novel sound to some of the villagers is the navvy's war whoop which rings out at intervals during the frosty hours of the morning and evening.

Other contractors were responsible for sleeper cutting, bridge building and platelaying. All timber for the line, sleepers, bridge piles and girders, etc., was "bush" timber cut from suitable trees in the area, squared and cut to length on the spot. Bridge timbers were usually one foot (0.3 m) square, and were held together by one inch (25 mm) diameter iron bolts up to three feet long. The holes for these bolts were all drilled by hand.
The tramway was completed by the end of 1923. It was 3ft 6in (1067 mm) gauge, the same as the other Simsville lines, and was laid with a mixture of 40lb/yard and 45lb/yard (20 and 22 kg/m) steel rails.

Description

The route of the tramway followed Alderly Creek downstream for the first 5 km, crossing it twice. Leaving Alderly Creek the line headed due south across low relief country and tributary creeks of the Karuah River, crossing the Booral-Bulahdelah main road at the 11 km mark. Once across this road the line climbed the only hill of any note — a spur off Renwick's Sugarloaf Mountain called Lockeys Hill — which marked the divide between the Karuah River basin and that of The Branch River. Lockeys Hill involved climbing over a rise of 75 metres, and the two largest bridges on the line were built on its flanks.

The Simsville bridge gang circa 1928, with Tom Richards in charge. *Mrs L. Marsh*

Once clear of Lockeys Hill, the line took the path of least resistance across the undulating country between The Branch and Karuah rivers. At the 19 km mark the line swung west and climbed a low ridge, back over into the Karuah River valley and descended steeply down to the river. This locality was called Pumpkin Point, and was just across the river from Allworth. To get down the steep hillside here to water level, a reversing station was put in and the line terminated in two parallel dead end sidings alongside the river. The length of the line as built was 22.5 km.

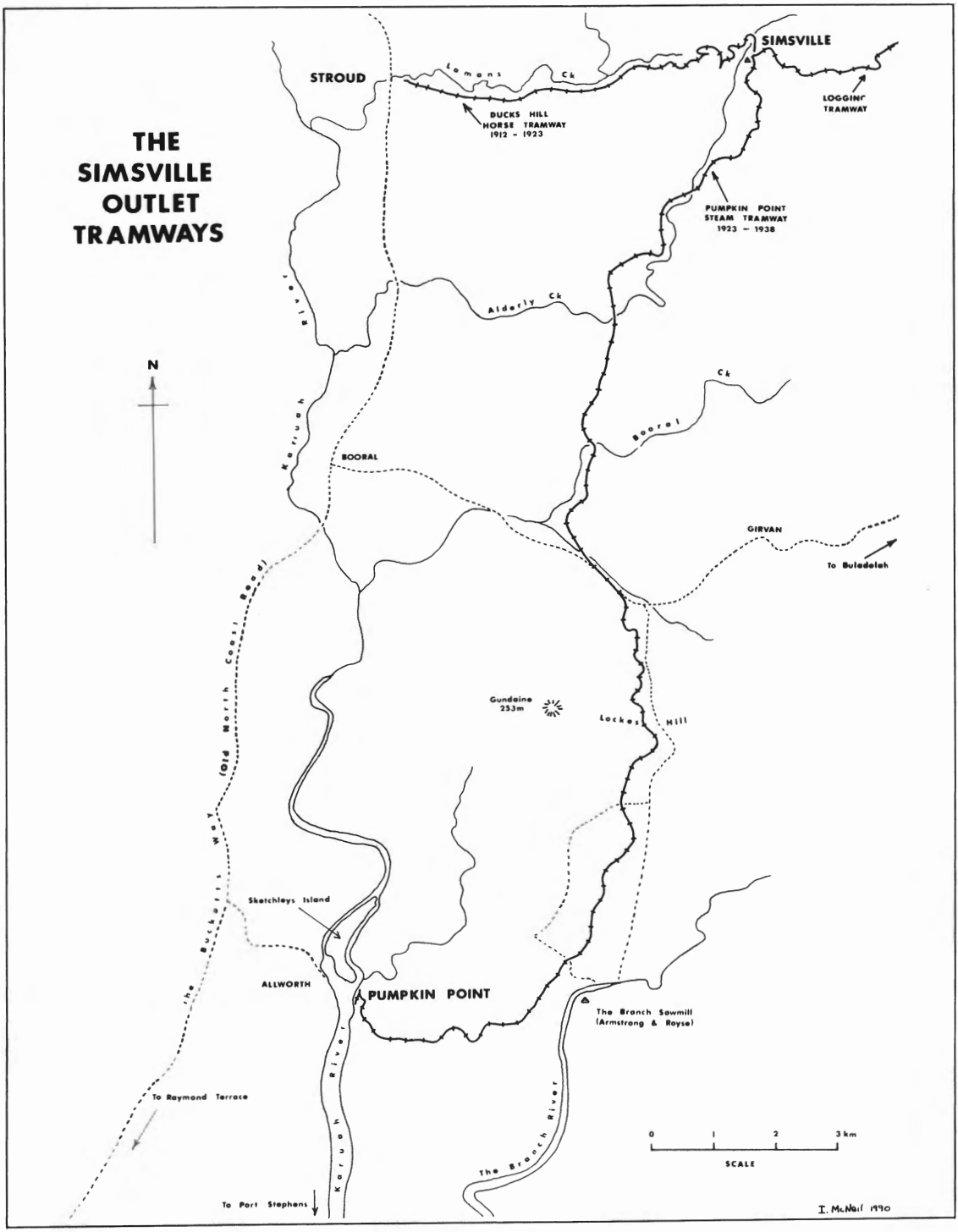
Apple Tree Brush Logging Tramway

At the beginning of 1924, Pines & Hardwoods had completed the new tramway to Pumpkin Point on the Karuah River, and had nearly finished reconstruction of the Jarrah sawmill. They had also secured another 8,000 acre timber lease from the Forestry Commission, giving them cutting rights over 16,000 acres (6480 ha) within the Myall River State Forest. This extended their timber leases into mountainous country beyond Winns Hill.

By now the Company had invested nearly £100,000 in Simsville and was anxious to begin operations without delay. Millars had cut out most of the good timber tapped by their own tramways, so Surveyor George Jones and his team were commissioned to survey new logging tramway routes into the Company's untouched forest reserves to the north.

The route chosen followed the line of Sour Ridge northwards, and construction began in early 1924. Branching off from the main Winns Creek line just past "The Loops" on the summit of Sour Ridge, the new line climbed steadily upwards. The terrain was steep and rugged, and the line curved from one side of the ridge to the other, to avoid rocky summits and also to give the log haulers access to the thick forests growing down each side of Sour Ridge.

Earthworks in the shape of cuttings and ledges were heavy, and large bridges were necessary to carry the line over the deep gullies scoring the flanks of Sour Ridge. Construction costs were heavy too, the first 6 km of the line costing nearly £20,000. Steel rails, about 40lb/yd (20 kg/m), were laid throughout. There were some very steep uphill sections put in, which must have given locomotive drivers some anxious times in later years when descending these sections with a full load of logs behind.



Pines & Hardwoods initially employed a 10 man track gang to maintain the logging lines, bridges and the Pumpkin Point tramway. However, as the Company's fortunes dwindled fewer men were employed on maintenance. By 1930 only the most essential maintenance was being carried out.

Locomotives

Pines & Hardwoods purchased another two Climax locomotives to join the small 15 tonne A-class Slippery Sam (B/N 1265 of circa 1913) bought from Millars in 1922. The first of these was a small 17 tonne B-class Climax locomotive built in 1899. The builder's number of this locomotive is not known. Taber & Casler assigned it a code number: 2225[7].

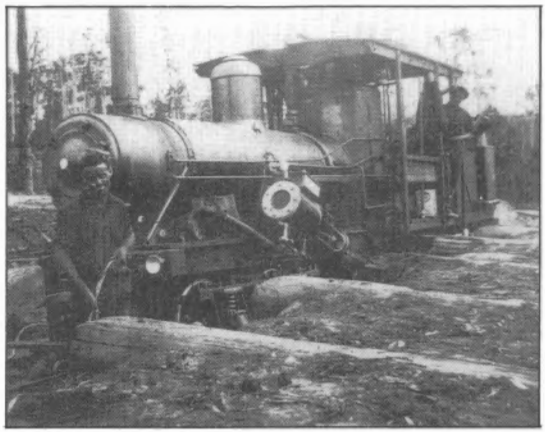
B-class Climaxes were generally larger than the A-class with a single gear ratio which gave them a practical top speed of 8-10 mph (13-16 km/h), though Climax advertising brochures of the time claimed 15 mph. They were faster than A-class locos and were better suited to hauling loads over longer distances. However, their heavier weight required a more substantial line to run on, and they were less suited to rough and steep tracks.

Climax locomotive 2225 was purchased new in 1900 by a Queensland timber firm, Lahey's Limited, for their tramway at Canungra[8]. The locomotive was modified sometime around 1906 to improve its steaming performance. In the process the boiler was lengthened and a large upright firebox installed which poked up through the cab roof. Lahey's subsequently purchased two Shay geared steam locomotives. After Lahey's second Shay arrived in 1910, the Climax was relegated to standby status, and was reported as being out of use in 1912.

Pines & Hardwoods purchased this Climax in about 1922 to haul sawn timber over the 22 km Pumpkin Point tramway to the Karuah River wharf. The locomotive's long spindly boiler immediately earned it the nickname of *Daddy Long Legs*. The author has also heard it referred to as *Rosella*, though the reason for this is not known.

It would appear that *Daddy Long Legs* was not entirely successful at Simsville, being slow, somewhat unreliable, and having insufficient power to cope with the loads of sawn timber the Company wanted hauled to Pumpkin Point. After 1925, *Daddy Long Legs* was assigned to the logging tramways. Daniel Brown was the regular driver.

The third Climax was the best known and the largest of the Simsville locomotives, *Soward*, named after Pines & Hardwoods' chairman, George Klewitz Soward. It was a 30 tonne B-class Climax, Builder's Number 1653, built in October 1923. It is not known just when *Soward* arrived at Simsville. The March 1925 Director's report to shareholders advises that "another locomotive is to be brought into service in the next three months"[9], so the loco may not have arrived at Simsville until 1925.



B-class Climax locomotive No. 2225 of 1899 at Simsville, c.1928. Paddy Mason is on the footplate and Tom Griffiths in front.

Photo: Mrs L. Marsh, Newcastle

Soward was imported to replace *Daddy-Long-Legs* for the job of hauling timber products over the 22 km of line from Simsville sawmill to Pumpkin Point wharf, and spent most of its working life doing just that. It was also used on the main logging tramways from time to time, but its higher gearing and greater weight meant it could not be used on some of the steeply graded temporary branch lines. Henry Seddon drove Soward during the first few years.

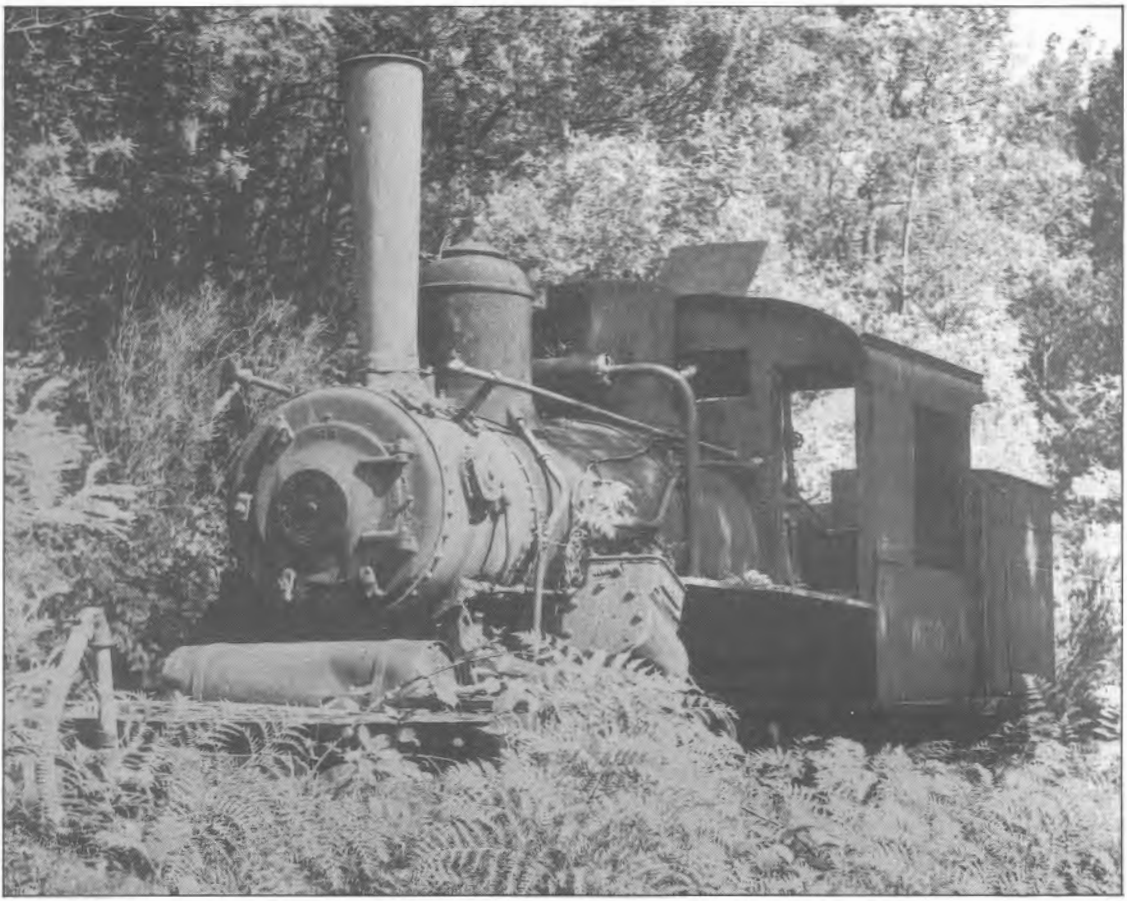
Under Pines & Hardwoods ownership, *Slippery Sam's* main duty was to haul logs to the Jarrah Mill over the logging tramway, where her regular driver was Arthur "Bart" Madden. The loco's light weight and high tractive effort was a real asset on some of the steeper branch lines.

Locomotive Facilities

There was a two road engine shed at the sawmill, served by a siding coming off the main logging line about 100 metres north of the mill. The engine shed had an inspection pit, and an adjacent storeroom. Here maintenance and most repairs were carried out by the mill's engineer. In later years this was done by Jack Penfold, the blacksmith, and by all accounts a very capable man.

Near "Top Points", where the loco siding left the main line, was an elevated tank stand supporting two 4,500 litre water tanks. Water was pumped up from the nearby dam to these for locomotive use. Each locomotive also carried a water hose connected to the lifting injector. The hose could be dropped into any convenient creek out on the lines to fill up the loco's water tank.

All the locomotives burned wood. At the sawmill there was no shortage of off-cuts for loco fuel, but at Pumpkin Point and up in the forests firewood was cut and stacked along the line.



Pines & Hardwood B-Class Climax locomotive SOWARD (B/N 1653/1923) out of use at Australian Newsprint Mills, Maydena, Tasmania in 1956. *Photo: A.R. Lyell*

Logging Operations

The Company began their timber operations on a large scale early in 1924, as soon as the first section of the line had been put in. At one stage they had four steam winches at work up in the forests hauling logs to the tramway, and the sawmill was operating at full capacity. The regular winch drivers were Oscar Hansom, who came from Western Australia, Tom Griffiths and Tom Richards.

The Company's bush foreman was a local man, Allen Wilson, who had moved up from nearby Booral. His daughters, Mrs M Chadban and Mrs L Marsh, when interviewed in 1988, told of their father's duties during those days:

As bush foreman Dad got £8 a week, house, sanitary service and free rent. Each morning the stable boy used to saddle his horse for him, and all he had to do was walk over to the stables . . . get on his horse and go off to work.

He went around the bush work sites, seeing the haulers were alright, and the men felling the trees were getting them off the right spot. They were paid piecework, and after felling Dad would measure the log and estimate the length and diameter of the hollow or pipe down the centre of the log.

Dad would ride miles every day in this way, getting home sometimes just before the loco. If Dad was required again after he got home, if the haulers or the locos got into trouble or they had a problem up there, they blew 3 whistles and he would have to go out again.

We used to do his book for him at nights. All the men were named in it and the hours they worked (8¾ hours a day), the logs they felled, their measurements, where they felled them, everything like that.

Mr Eric Brock started work at Simsville as a youngster in 1924. He gave this account, in 1987, of working on the log haulers up along the Winns Hill logging tramway:

I started work when I was 14 years old. My first job was as a whistle boy on the steam hauler up in the Apple Tree Brush at Simsville. I lived at Stroud and camped out in the bush with a week's tucker, and came back home on weekends. There were no roads there then. We worked a 48 hour week with Saturday mornings. I got £2 a week as whistle boy. There were bullock teams drawing logs to the mill in the early part, when I first started there, but none in later years.

There were four haulers at that time, all spaced out along the tramline. They just put in a little piece of track of the main line and shunted the hauler off on that. The hauler sat on a log truck and was chained to a handy stump or a tree in the new position. They moved each hauler every two or three months as they cut out the timber. They pulled it with the loco along the main line. The line was generally put in ahead of time. The first stand was about a mile out from the mill, the last would be about two to three miles out. There was very good timber in those days, it was maiden brush. They hauled in all hardwoods, no softwoods in those days.

The hauler had a single drum with ¾ mile of rope, and it could pull in anything up to 7,000 to 8,000 super feet (about 22 cu m) at a time. It had an ordinary long boiler with a steam pressure of over 100 pounds. They started up supplying water for the haulers with locos and tanks, then they put in a couple of concrete dams in up on Apple Tree and pumped up from them. Horses were used to pull the main rope back in to the bush after each haul.

There were six of us on each hauler: the driver and his offsider who cut the wood for the boiler and kept the water up; a swamper who cut tracks through the bush to haul the logs in on, and a bloke to drive the horse. There was the ropeman, he had to hook on to the logs, tell the whistle boy when to signal, follow the logs in, and come back out with the horse. And there was the whistle boy.

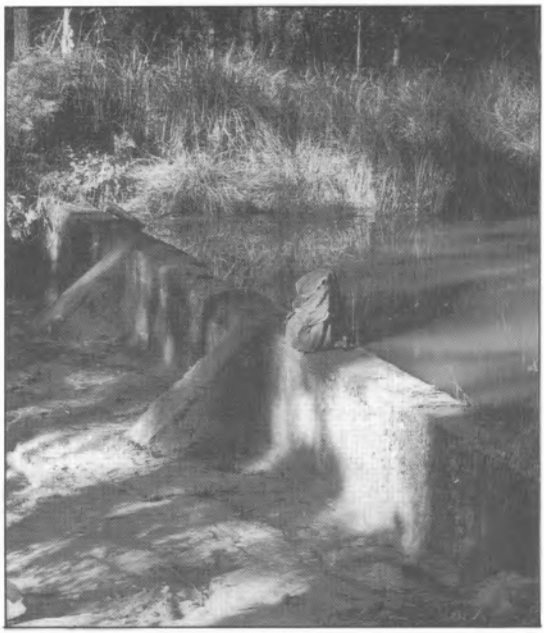
As whistle boy I had to signal the hauler driver when to start and when to stop. They had a run of wire out along the track of the main rope, attached to the hauler whistle. The signals were one whistle to start, one to stop, and two for a short pull. The main rope didn't always go out straight from the hauler: they put in pulley blocks where they wanted to turn corners and the like. Each time a log came to a pulley block, you had to stop the hauler, unhook the log, signal the hauler for a short pull to get the choker chain through the block, hook up the log and get going again.

On the hauler I was on, Tom Richards was the driver with Jim Bowden as his offsider, Jack Sweeney was the ropeman, Alf Stokes was the horseman and George Titcombe the swamper. The bush boss in those days was Ted Slavin from West Australia. There were also log cutters who worked in pairs on contract.

We used to load the logs onto the tramway trucks using the main rope off the hauler to roll them on. The loco made about one trip a day hauling about seven trucks of logs to the mill. We would pull in about 20,000 feet (60 cu m) a day.

Simsville Village: 1923-1933

The Company built more houses at Simsville for their new employees. Ordinary employees had to pay rent but the foremen were given theirs rent free. The Company also arranged for the local Council to provide a sanitary pan service for Simsville, a most unusual luxury for a sawmill village!

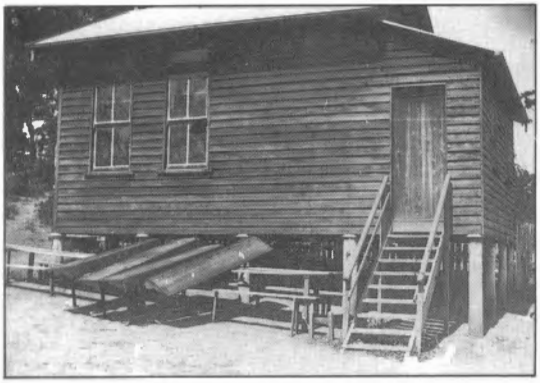


A small concrete dam built by Pines & Hardwoods below the Apple Tree brush line. It held water for the steam log haulers and, in emergency, the locomotives.
I. McNeil (1988)

The New School

In June 1925, the Education Department granted permission for a Provisional School at Simsville, this being a school where the Department provided the teacher and teaching materials, but the parents had to provide a schoolroom, desks and chairs. Pines & Hardwoods built a one-room school and provided furnishings. The school was opened in October 1925 with quite a celebration. This school replaced the subsidised classes previously run by Miss Ivy Gorton, from Stroud. As an added inducement to teachers to stay in a small and somewhat isolated community like Simsville, the teacher was guaranteed board and lodging with one or other of the foremans' families.

Between 1925 and 1930, four different teachers served at Simsville: Arthur Finlay, Les Wilson, Bruce Dick and Ken Field. The school room also served as a church, and at various times the different ministers of religion would travel out from Stroud to hold church services. Early in 1924, Simsville was again declared an Electoral Polling Place, though it did not regain its Postal Agency.



Simsville schoolhouse, c.1926 *Mrs L. Wilson*

Boarding

It was quite usual for households to supplement their incomes by taking in "boarders". This involved supplying evening meals for £1 or so a week to single men or to married men whose families lived away from Simsville. One lady recalled how her mother "boarded" several mill workers in this way:

> It was hard work for my mother. There were a lot of working men to be fed, and they didn't all come in for their meal at the same time. And after eating they would much prefer to sit around the fire yarning till all hours, rather than going back to sleep in the barracks, a row of single huts down by Alderly Creek that they used to call *Wooloomooloo*[9].

Village Life

Groceries, meat and fruit were brought out to Simsville by travelling carts sent out by the Stroud shop keepers, and the villagers could buy their food and other supplies from them. During lean years a delivery boy would come out once a week, collect their orders, then bring back the goods in the next day or so. Most households kept a few chickens, and there were two or three milking cows around too.

As Simsville was on Company owned land, no hotels were permitted there. However the thirstier workers apparently managed to get their regular supplies of beer and sometimes spirits out from Stroud without too much trouble. Pay weekends were also very lively times for the Stroud hotel keepers.

Several children were born at Simsville including twin girls. It was quite usual to call the local midwife over from Alderly Creek, a few miles away, when a birth was due.

The *Dungog Chronicle* Correspondent

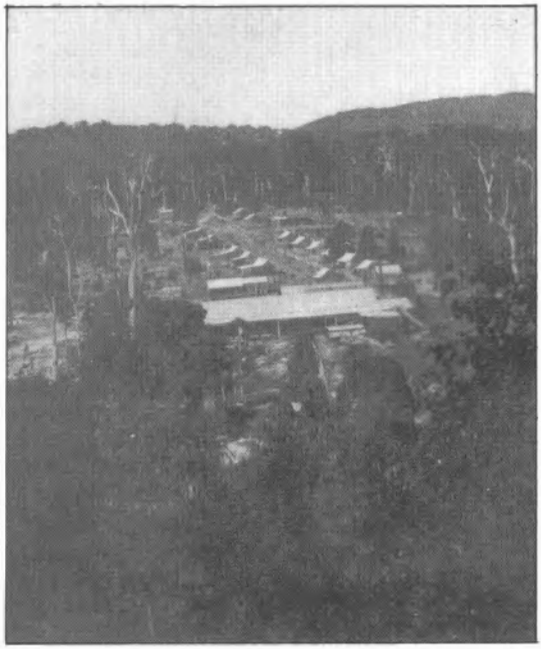
One of the *Dungog Chronicle's* regular correspondents lived at Simsville during the Pines & Hardwoods era, and over a five year period, from 1923 to 1927, wrote a series of newsletters to the newspaper faithfully detailing the happenings in the village. These newsletters presented a picture of a small close-knit community, proud of the village and with a firm belief in its future.

There was a full round of social events; dances, plain and fancy dress balls, concerts, euchre parties, farewell nights for those leaving the village, and welcoming parties for the newcomers. Music and songs for such evenings were all supplied by the villagers themselves, several of whom were quite accomplished on the button accordion, fiddle, mouth organ or piano.

There was a Progress Association and a School Parents & Citizen's Association taking care of the civic duties of the village, while cricket, football and tennis clubs looked after the sporting side of things.

The Pumpkin Point Wharf

At the Pumpkin Point end of the tramway, just across the Karuah River from Allworth, the Company built a timber wharf in the lee of Sketchley's Island which gave protection against the floods which occasionally surged down the river. A Mr Page was in charge of the construction works at Pumpkin Point. Here sawn timber from the mill was unloaded off the tramway trucks, sorted and stacked ready for shipment. A private telephone line was put in from Simsville to Pumpkin Point to coordinate transport and shipping.



A view of Simsville village in 1928, looking east across the Jarrah sawmill up "Stump Street'. The schoolhouse is top centre and the locomotive watering tank right centre.
Photo: Mrs L. Marsh, Newcastle

Three houses were built here for the wharf gang, which consisted of a foreman and two full-time laborers. They were assisted by casual laborers hired from Allworth during busy periods. Apart from unloading and stacking timber, the gang was responsible for the maintenance of the last 11 km of the tramway, from the Bulahdelah Road crossing to Pumpkin Point.

The first wharf foreman was a Queenslander, John Dallas. He transferred to Simsville in 1928 to work at the mill. A Mr Edgar succeeded him for a short while, then Harry Mulder took over as the last wharf foreman. Harry had been employed on the construction of the line, and had stayed on to work on the wharf. He remained there right until operations finished at Pumpkin Point in 1938.

Generally one trainload of sawn timber was sent to the wharf each day, between four and five trips each week. This job was reserved for the big Climax locomotive *Soward,* because it could haul more than the smaller ones. Besides mill logs they also cut wharf piles and railway sleepers. They would send these to Pumpkin Point and wait until they had enough for a cargo before bringing up a boat for them. The Public Works Department took quite a lot of sleepers, and they would send up one of their sleeper passers to check them before they could be loaded.

By the 1920s the ships calling for cargoes were small shallow draught coastal steamers, displacing the prewar sailing vessels and auxiliary engined craft. Ships such as the *Idant* (121 tonnes), *Allyn River* (143 tonnes), and the *Coweambah* (76 tonnes), were frequent visitors up the Karuah River.

The Mill Office

Mrs M Chadban started work in the Simsville sawmill office after leaving school. Her account (1988) gives another view of operations during those years:

> When I was 14, Mr McDaniell, the mill manager, came over to see if Mum would let me go and work in the mill office, which was agreed to. His first words to me were — "You know everything that's going on in here, but when you go outside, you know nothing!" I got £1.1.8 a fortnight, started at nine in the morning and finished at five in the afternoon.
> I had to get all the slips off the logs that came into the log yard, write down their measurements, make it up into superficial feet and subtract the pipe out of them, that's how the tree fellers got paid. I'd get Dad's (the bush foreman) report of a night, together with mill sheets with the timber they'd cut up during the day. We had big ledgers in which I had to enter all this up very neatly.

A load of timber leaving the Jarrah Mill for Pumpkin Point in 1928. The regular locomotive, SOWARD, is in charge.
Photo: Mrs L. Wilson, Newcastle

All the timber was loaded into the railway trucks for Pumpkin Point, so many 2 x 1's, 3 x 1's and so on, had to be entered up too. Then there was all the timber loaded onto the boats there, how many pieces consigned, to whom and which boat took them. I remember the firm of Armstrong & Royse in Newcastle took a lot of timber in those days.

There were two telephones in the office. One went to the exchange at Stroud, the other was the private line to the wharf at Pumpkin Point. The man in charge of the wharf in those days was Harry Mulder, an impatient quick-tempered sort of a fellow. I remember one day just after I started one of the phones rang and I forgot which was which, so I just picked it up and said, "Hello, Hello, who's there?" There was a moment's silence on the other end and then this gruff voice said, "Its Mulder from the bloody wharf here, who the hell did you think it would be?"

The paymaster was Jack Grant. He would come out unescorted every fortnight from Stroud with the mill men's pays. Once a month though, he would come out with a policeman riding escort to pay the bush workers at the mill office. They got very big pay packets then.

The Demise of Pines & Hardwoods[10]

Pines and Hardwoods began to experience financial difficulties towards the end of 1924, their first year of operations at Simsville. By then they had sunk nearly £120,000 into the sawmill and the tramways, and had gone into debt. They needed to keep the mill cutting at full pressure and generate the badly needed cash flow to keep their creditors and shareholders at bay.

Very wet winter weather during 1924 and 1925 hindered logging operations and reduced the supply of logs to the mill. The costs of extending the logging tramways were high, and the company sustained consecutive annual losses of £13,036 and £14,655. During 1925 their Yarraman sawmill was sold, at a loss of £6466 to the Queensland Government[11].

By making strenuous efforts to contain operating costs in 1926, Pines & Hardwoods managed to reduce the loss in that year to £1956. But by then other factors combined to compound the Company's woes. The introduction of the 44-hour week and the passing of the NSW Worker's Compensation Act added to the costs of production, while keen competition from other producers and from imports kept the selling prices down.

Victorian sawmiller Mr J Ingram was commissioned in 1926 to make an independent report on the company's operations and recommend ways to increase output and reduce production costs. At the same time the Board of Directors were trying sell off their remaining Yarraman assets and to find a way to write off their mounting debts. They were unable though to find buyers for the remaining Yarraman lands nor the paper pulp plant, ironically due to a bad drought in southern Queensland.

The Company was unable to fund the extension of the logging tramways any further into the forests, and began to run short of mill logs. The output of the mill fell to about 10,000 super feet (24 cu m) per day, less than half capacity. Dogged by bad luck to the last, the final straw came in April 1927, when local floods caused severe damage to the tramways and bridges, and swept away large quantities of sawn timber off the Pumpkin Point wharf. The sawmill was stopped for a considerable period while the damage was repaired.

Hamstrung by their accumulated debts and losses, Pines & Hardwoods formally went into liquidation in November 1927, thereby ending the second chapter of Simsville's eventful history. The Liquidator advertised the Company's assets for sale by tender in March 1928[12], and the creditors managed to recover 12 shillings in the pound after the wind-up.

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4. STROUD TIMBER COMPANY LIMITED

The outcome of the liquidation sale of Pines & Hardwoods' Simsville assets in March 1928 is not known for certain, but out of the ashes a new company, Stroud Timber Limited, was formed in May 1928 to take over the business[1].

Stroud Timber Limited was a private company with a nominal share capital of £75,000 of which 20,000 £1 shares were taken up by a small group of shareholders. The new directors included James Dunstan, a Sydney timber merchant; Julius Moxon, a Brisbane timber merchant, and John McDaniell, Pines & Hardwoods' Simsville sawmill manager.

Without the heavy debt burden which had crippled Pines & Hardwoods, Stroud Timber Limited found themselves in a relatively sound position. They had inherited a well-equipped sawmill and log hauling plant, an extensive system of logging tramways plus their own light railway outlet to the Karuah River. As well as owning the 9,000 acre (3640 ha) Simsville block, they also retained the cutting rights over 20,000 acres (6480 ha) of timber within the adjoining Myall River State Forest. They were also assured of markets for their sawn timber output through the established Brisbane and Sydney timber businesses of their own Directors.

TRANSPORT IMPROVEMENTS
The Lower Winns Creek Branch

Through their initial share issue Stroud Timber Limited raised sufficient funds to extend the logging tramway and open up more of their timber reserves. This was essential as Pines & Hardwoods had cut out most of the timber within reach of the main tramlines.

The first extension was built about early 1929. It was a 1.5 km branch line which left the main Winns Creek line at the 8 km mark, and turned south to follow Winns Creek downstream to give access to the timber within Compartment 8. Like the other Simsville tramways it was 3 ft 6 in (1067 mm) gauge and was steel railed. The rails were obtained by pulling up parts of the Upper Winns Creek and Harrietts Creek branch lines.

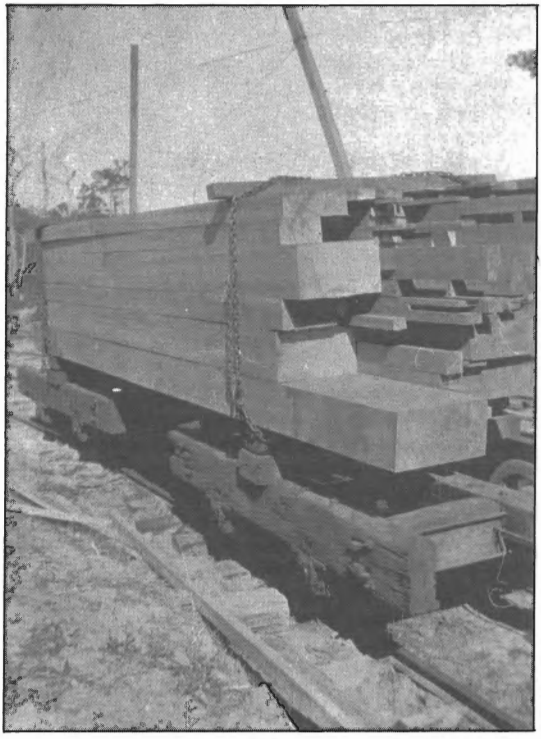
It was an economy branch line. Earthworks (and costs) were minimized by laying the track directly along the creek bank wherever possible. Three bridges, one of them over 100 m long, were put in for the line to cross and recross Winns Creek, taking the easiest path and avoiding places where the steep hillsides came right down to water level. Though following the rapidly descending Winns Creek through some fairly rugged country, the line was evenly graded and the choice of route showed that considerable forethought and expertise had gone into its selection.

Ezzie Maytom (interviewed 1987), a bush worker at The Jarrah during the 1920's and 1930's, recalled putting this line in:

> This was the last bit of tramline that I worked on. There was only one real cutting but it was a big one. It was about 35 to 40 yards (32 to 36 m) long and about 10 feet (3 m) deep, and we had to blast it out of solid rock. The rock was too hard to hand drill the holes for dynamite charges, so they hired an air compressor to do them. They put it on the back of a log truck and brought it out behind the loco. That's the way they took the line through to a very good stand of virgin timber, mostly blackbutt.

The Hell Hole Branchline

By 1930 the Great Depression was beginning to be felt. The downturn in world trade and in commodity prices affected the timber trade and the company took steps to reduce their operating costs. They had to pay royalties to the NSW Forestry Commission for every log cut within the Myall River State Forest. However no royalties were payable for logs they cut on their own property, and so logging operations were concentrated within their Simsville Block.



A truck load of sawn timber from the Jarrah mill ready for shipment over the Pumpkin Point railway.
Photo: Gordon Robinson

To gain access to more of their own timber within the Simsville Block, Stroud Timber Limited built their final tramway extension in 1930. It was a 3 km line branching off the main Winns Hill line on Sour Ridge, 8 km out from the mill, heading west to gain access to the timber on the southern flanks of Stroud Mountain. It was very much an economy branch line, put down with almost no earthworks. It was apparently called Hell Hole due to a notoriously steep hill where the fireman would have to get off the locomotive and sand the rails by hand all the way up. Even in low gear Slippery Sam, the A-class Climax, could only manage one log at a time up this line, and it was a very unpopular line with the loco crew.

The Second Pumpkin Point Wharf (1932 — 1938)

Harry Mulder stayed on as wharf foreman at Pumpkin Point for Stroud Timber Limited. His eldest son Carl (interviewed 1986) recalled that the original Pumpkin Point wharf collapsed dramatically about 1932. Apparently the front piles of the wharf had been riddled by borers, and the whole structure just collapsed into the river!

The Company built a new wharf about 300 m upstream, near the mouth of Snapes Creek and better sheltered by Sketchleys Island from the occasional Karuah River floods. The Pole Wharf, as it was known, was a low structure consisting of logs laid directly on the flat low-lying river bank and supported by a row of piles sunk about 3 m out into the river. The wharf was about 50 m long.

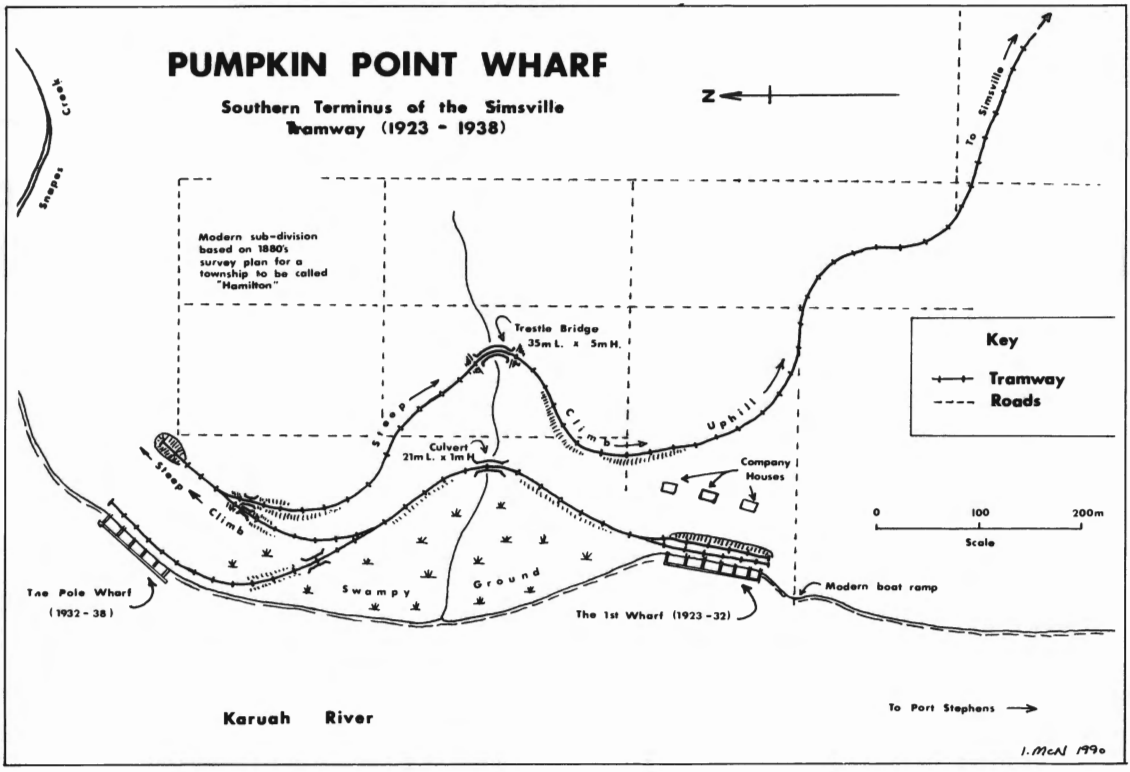
A new 300 m long railway siding was put in to service the Pole Wharf. The points for this siding formed a second reversing station in the main line, which complicated the shunting operations at Pumpkin Point somewhat.

The Great Depression (1930-1932)

Declining demand for timber caused Stroud Timber Limited to reduce the output of the mill. Forestry Records show the amount of timber cut from the Myall River State Forest by the Company decreased dramatically during this period:

1928	....	470,000 s ft of logs cut (1109 cu m)
1929	....	830,000 s ft (1958 cu m)
1930	....	360,000 s ft (850 cu m)
1931	....	60,000 s ft (141 cu m)
1932	....	20,000 s ft (47 cu m)

The number of men employed fell from around 50 down to 23, and families began to leave Simsville. In October 1930 the Education Department closed the school, and in the same year Stroud Shire Council withdrew the sanitary



pan service because it was losing money. The school house was turned into an administration cottage where the out-of-town company directors, James Dunstan, John Edwards and Clive Woodman would stay when they were visiting Simsville.

Road and Railway Transport

Stroud Timber Limited began moving some of their sawn timber out to local and Newcastle customers by motor lorry. This worked well in dry weather, but in wet weather stretches of the 8 km of road between Simsville and Stroud became impassable. At times the company had to hire bullock teams to pull their lorries through, adding to their costs.

As a result of road transport and with diminishing orders for sawn timber, the Climax locomotive *Soward* made fewer and fewer trips to Pumpkin Point wharf, sometimes only one a fortnight. The Company did not require three locomotives to work their tramways, and in 1930 sold the oldest one, the 1899 B-class Climax called *Daddy Long Legs*, to the Coffs Harbour Timber Company to use on their tramway at Crosma Glen, NSW. This was a short lived home as the venture went into liquidation in the following year[2]. The Climax was advertised for sale at £400 by the liquidators, but there were no takers. It was abandoned at Mahratta and slowly fell to pieces as time and scrap merchants took their toll.

Mill Closure

In 1932 the sawmill closed for several months and the remaining 23 employees were laid off. All but half a dozen families left the village to seek work elsewhere. Later that year, Stroud Shire Council managed to get an Unemployment Relief Grant and decided to spend £500 of it on remaking Simsville Road. This move suited Stroud Timber Limited; they maintained that one of the main reasons they could not reopen the mill was the dreadful state of Simsville Road. Other interests within the Shire though claimed it was a criminal waste of money, and the next couple of Council meetings, fueled by hostile articles in the local newspaper, were lively affairs.

Nevertheless, the Council stuck to its decision and repaired the road, finishing it by March 1933. It would seem that the sawmill duly reopened also, as the local newspaper had nothing further to say on that issue.

The 1933 Jarrah Mill Fire

The sawmill had only been restarted for a few months when fire broke out during the night of 16th August 1933, and the mill was destroyed[3]. Very little escaped the flames, though the Company was fortunate that its two locomotives were away from the mill that night, and both the steam boiler and the big Tangye twin-cylinder mill engine were relatively untouched.

This was a severe blow for Stroud Timber Limited, and it marked the end of their active participation in the saw milling business. They had weathered the Depression years and the timber trade was just beginning to pick up again. They did not rebuild the mill and apparently put their Simsville operation up for sale.

The Allen Taylor Inspection

In September 1933, the month following the mill fire, Allen Taylor & Company Ltd sent two representatives, Bill Ringland and Harry Green, over to Simsville to inspect the remaining assets, evidently in response to a Stroud Timber Limited offer to sell out. Bill Ringland was Allen Taylor's Port Stephens Superintendent while Harry Green, an experienced bushman, had not only put in most of Taylor's Wootton tramline but had also helped construct many of the tramway bridges at Simsville for Millars Timber & Trading Company before the first World War!

Both men wrote reports of their inspection[4]. They concluded there wasn't enough good timber remaining near the tramlines to warrant investing much money in Simsville. At the mill, the only items to have escaped fire damage were the boilers. The engine was slightly damaged but could be repaired. The rest of the plant, other than a steam cross cut saw, were judged as only fit for scrap. Ringland concluded the tramline would require a fair deal of attention to put it in first class order, while Green felt it was mostly in "fair order". Ringland noted some fine timber remaining on the area (with barrels 60 to 70 feet high, 8 feet and over in girth), but felt they would cut up very pipey. Considering that this would have to be railed approximately 22 miles (35 km), he stated:

> it might not pay to handle. Anyhow I do not think there is sufficient timber remaining to warrant a very large expenditure . . .

Allen Taylor & Company decided against purchasing the Simsville operation. No other buyers were forthcoming and so, for the next 12 months or so, Stroud Timber continued to cut logs in the Myall River State Forest and sold them to Allen Taylors. The logs were hauled to Pumpkin Point by locomotive and loaded onto one of the Allen Taylor punts, usually the steam punt *Ability*, for the short trip down the Karuah River and across Port Stephens to Taylor's Windy Whoppa sawmill at Tea Gardens.

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5. SMITH & ELLIS LIMITED (1934 — 1941)

Company Background

The private company of Smith & Ellis Limited was registered in Sydney on 25th May 1932, with an authorized capital of £10,000[1]. The Sydney-based founders of the Company were Henry W Smith, an importer, and Sydney L Ellis, a timber merchant. Within two years the Company had joined forces with the South Coast sawmilling firm, Mitchell Bros of Narooma, and both Carl C Mitchell and Henry GW Mitchell joined the Board of Directors of Smith & Ellis Limited.

This was a fruitful association, and the Company began a series of successful expansions within the timber industry. In November 1933, Smith & Ellis purchased the long established sawmill, private village and logging tramway at Langley Vale, NSW, from William Langley & Sons Ltd[2]. They also purchased three more mills north of Coffs Harbour on the NSW North Coast, at Nana Glen, Orara Creek, and at Bark Hut near Woolgoolga.

To transport their timber products to Sydney, the firm bought the steamship Gunbar from Richardson & Company Ltd of Napier, New Zealand, in 1935[3]. The Gunbar was originally built in Ardrossan, Scotland in 1911 for the North Coast Steam Navigation Company. She was a steel hulled, twin screw, cargo vessel of 490 tons displacement designed for navigating the shallow bars and twisting channels of the NSW northern coastal rivers.

The Simsville Purchase

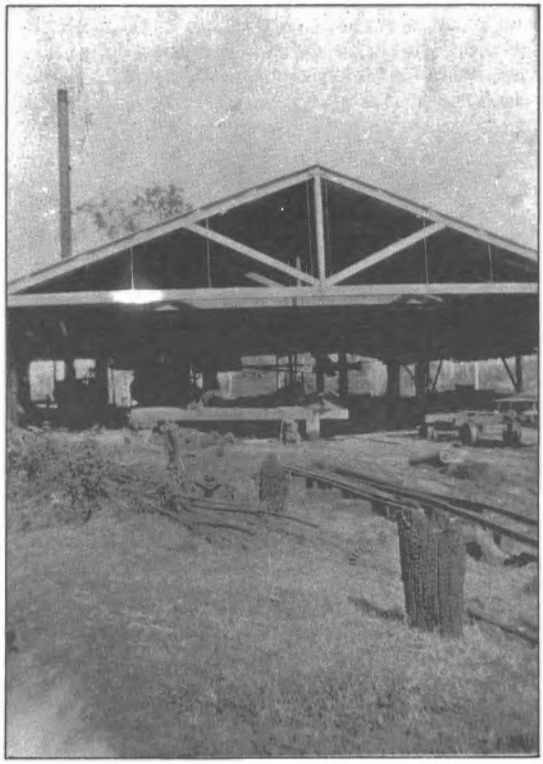
On 11th June 1934, 12 months after the Jarrah Mill at Simsville was destroyed by fire, Smith & Ellis Limited signed an agreement with Stroud Timber Limited to take over the saw milling business at Simsville[4]. Under the terms of this agreement Smith & Ellis took out a 15 year lease of the mill site, at £1 per year, and agreed to pay £7750 over 5 years for the surviving mill machinery, workmen's cottages, tramline, two locomotives, and the bush hauling plant. Further they agreed to construct a sawmill and recommence milling within 12 months of signing.

Smith & Ellis regarded this as a good investment, even though the sawmill had been burnt down and a lot of the easily accessible timber had been cut out. They had outlaid very little money and gained control of the cutting rights to 16,000 acres (6480 ha) of State Forest attached to the sawmill licence, of which the northern half had hardly been touched. The logging and timber hauling plant was in good condition and there were 40 km of well engineered tramways, built at great expense by Millars and by Pines & Hardwoods. To these assets Smith & Ellis planned to introduce modern logging methods to profitably exploit the remaining timber.

The Third Jarrah Mill (1935-1947)

By May 1935 Smith & Ellis had finished building a new two-bench sawmill on the same site as the Pines & Hardwoods mill. They were able to reuse the original mill boiler, and the minor fire damage to the big Tangye twin cylinder mill engine was repaired by the Simsville blacksmith, Jack Penfold. The mill engine drove an underfloor shaft which in turn powered a double Canadian log saw, and two circular saw benches. The No. 1 bench cut the larger sizes, and the No. 2 bench cut small sizes. Docking saws at the end of each saw bench were used to cut the sawn timber to the required lengths. The capacity of the mill was about 11,000 super feet (26 cubic metres) of sawn timber a day.

The new sawmill manager was James Johnson, an experienced timber man from Kyogle, NSW. He retired in 1939 and was succeeded by Mervyn Carson, the mill clerk. John McDaniell, Stroud Timber's director and mill



The new Smith & Ellis Jarrah *mill at Simsville in 1936. Charred posts in the foreground may be part of the fire-destroyed Pines & Hardwoods mill.*

Photo: Gordon Robinson, Sydney

Clyde Robinson (1899-1960), saw doctor and mill foreman at Simsville c.1936.

Photo: Gordon Robinson

manager, stayed on in Stroud for a couple of years before retiring to his home state of Western Australia in October 1936. Other staff at the new sawmill included mill foreman and saw doctor Clyde Robinson, head sawyer Roy Bogie, blacksmith Jack Penfold, boilerman Perce Hill, bush foreman Bob Isaacs, and mill hands Bill Dunn, Ted Carroll, George Newton, Tom Gusse, Bill French, Mark Dallas, Bruce and Wallace Bowden.

The Third Simsville Village

With the recommencement of operations the mill hands were reemployed, families moved back to Simsville and the village came to life again. The population rose to about 100 people.

The Education Department was petitioned to reopen the village school, and after a visit from a Department Inspector this was agreed to. William Renton was appointed teacher for the 20 odd children of school age, and the school reopened in May 1935. The Post Office reopened in June 1936 with Robert Isaac, the bush foreman, as postmaster. Once more Simsville was declared an electoral polling station.

The Mount Alexander Tramway

When Smith & Ellis took over, the tramways were in fair condition only. The bridges had been adequately looked after, but only the most essential maintenance had been carried out elsewhere. Consequently many stretches of track were sunken and rough. The new Company spent £2184 10s 8d on reconditioning work, a considerable sum of money in those days.

The Mount Alexander line was built to open up the timber reserves around Mt. Alexander (Winns Hill) in the northern section of the forestry lease to enable the rebuilt mill to start up. It was a 3 km northerly extension of the main Winns Hill line, climbing steeply along the precipitous eastern side of Sour Ridge. Construction involved very heavy excavation through rough country. For most of the distance a ledge had to be blasted out of the steep mountain side using dynamite. There was one large cutting on this line that cost £1,000 alone. It was the last logging tramway extension to be built at Simsville.

The navvies employed on this section were pushed hard to finish it as fast as possible. Carl Brock was the contractor in charge of the clearing the formation and doing the earthworks. Dan Morgan was the bush foreman and ganger in charge. He had a long experience of the Simsville forests, having started with Millars before World War I. One of the men in this gang was Andy Thompson. During an interview in 1988 he recalled the construction of this extension as follows:

> We camped out up there. I used to ride up from Alderly Creek by horse mostly on Sunday evenings, but sometimes very early on Monday mornings, 9 or 10 miles (14 to 16 km) to where we were working. We had to take our bread, beef, butter, enough for a week, out there with us slung over the back of the saddle. We used to get our water out by loco up from Simsville. For a meat safe we used to hang up a corn bag, open the mouth and put in a flat board in the bottom to stand the meat on, and tie up the mouth. If the flies got in you'd pour some boiling water over it and kill them!
>
> Dan Morgan was the boss. By God, he was a hard man. Because they were pushing him to get the line in because they were getting short of logs for the mill, and he was pushing us. He had this saying; "Bend your backs and cover the maker's name!", meaning the maker's name stamped on the handles of picks and shovels. Perce Maytom used to say that you daren't lift your head or straighten your back when you were working for him. I heard he once sent five men on ahead to do some clearing work. As soon as they got out of sight they stopped for a smoko. But they didn't know he was right behind them, and they got sacked on the spot.

Allen Maytom (interviewed 1986) also recalled working on this extension:

When we started first we had the mill hands and all up there, you know, till they got to the site for the first hauler and the mill started up again. But at first there was 32 of us up there.

We were doing the formation work, cutting the side cuttings out. It took us quite a few weeks. There was a fair bit of shooting (blasting) at one part of it. There was only about one big cutting about 100 yards (90 m) long, but plenty of side cuttings. There were no big bridges, only a couple of very small ones. We didn't cut the sleepers, they let those out on contract. There was always a couple of bush men cutting those all the time.

It was just about 5 weeks before Christmas, and we had laid a bit of rail down when the tubes in the mill boiler all blew. They laid us navvies off then, and they brought the mill men back up to lay the plates, lay the line you know. This was right out near the end of the line, just short of Winns Hill.

The old ganger, Dan Morgan, he left too when the mill hands came up, he wouldn't stop on with them. He said "If you sack my men, you sack me!" And so he walked off, and never came back. Dan was very firm, but he was all right.

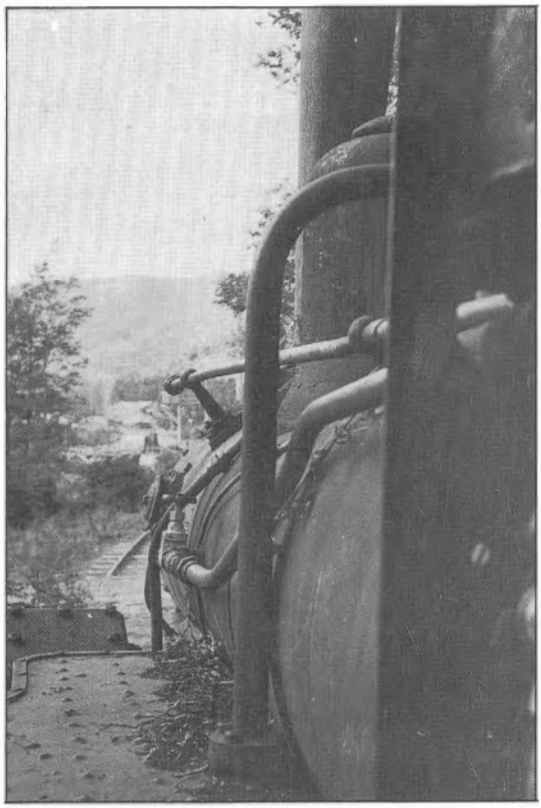
The line finished just short of Mt. Alexander, at a locality called *The Forestry.* This was also the highest point on the tramway, being some 1000 feet (300 m) above sea level. The blackbutt forest around here kept the mill cutting for the next three years.
An insurance policy for £3,700 was taken out with Mercantile Mutual Insurance to insure the bridges and culverts on the tramway against fire and accident damage. The premium was £32 a year. At the same time the property owners south of the Booral-Buladelah Road increased the rents for the tramway crossing rights, raising the total to over £200 a year.

Locomotive Operations

When Smith & Ellis took over in June 1934, there were only locomotives left at Simsville[8]: the B-class Climax locomotive *Soward* (B/N 1653 of 1923) and the A-class *Slippery Sam* (B/N 1265 of c.1913). Soward was used mostly on the sawn timber runs to Pumpkin Point: Slippery Sam spent most of her time on the logging tramways. Of the two locos, Soward was the most "visible", and many people remember this engine.

Paddy Mason was *Soward's* regular driver, and Tom Gusse the fireman, although quite a few men offsided on the footplate from time to time. The loco was reputed to have quite an appetite for wood when she was working hard, and kept firemen busy heaving wood into the firebox. Part of the wharf crew's job was to cut firewood for the locos on the wharf run, and stack it alongside the line ready for pickup.

Soward had a very loud twin chime whistle, which was used to good effect, especially when crossing the main Booral-Bulahdelah Road. Residents of the period speak of having to dismount and hold their horses' heads when the train crossed the road. The combination of spurting steam, the fast beat of the exhaust, and shrieking whistle was apparently guaranteed to upset the calmest horse.



Footplate view on the locomotive Soward. *Photo taken c.1956 when the loco was out of use at Maydena, Tasmania.*

A.R. Lyell

Ted Mulder (interviewed 1987), Harry Mulder's son, used to ride the loco up to Simsville to stay with the Masons, friends of the family, when he was a boy. He always reckoned that the best place to sit was on top of *Soward's* water tank, it was a comfortable seat and you got a good view. The engine used to sway a lot, especially when it went over sunken bits of line. The bogey trucks used to derail occasionally. If they were empty it was no trouble to rerail them; but if they were loaded with sawn timber and the load spilt, then it was a long job to get it all back on the line.

At Simsville Paddy Mason was *Slippery Sam's* driver, so Ted often rode the bush lines with him. Normal procedure was for the loco to head off in the morning hauling a string of empty log bogies to wherever logging operations were being conducted. The loads were always

hauled back to the mill, it being considered too dangerous to propel loaded log bogies back down the long grades to the mill. There was a passing loop on top of Sour Ridge, and there may have been others; at the head of the Winns Hill line, and down on Winns Creek.

Log bogey handbrakes had to be pinned down when coming downhill. This was especially true on the steep grades coming off Winns Hill, and on the long 3km downhill run to the mill from Sour Ridge. At night the log train made a spectacular sight coming down to the mill, with catherine wheels of sparks around the wheels coming from the brake blocks. Although against the rules, it seems that drivers would sometimes put the loco in neutral gear going downhill. This let the whole train go quite a bit faster, which was useful if they were running late on the last trip of the day.

One story told to the author concerned *Slippery Sam* coming back to the mill with a load after dark one evening. Unknown to the driver, the rear log bogey had partially derailed, and the wheels crippled over a kilometre of sleepers. They closed the mill, and put everyone on cutting sleepers up in the bush and resleepering the damaged section. The engine driver wasn't too popular over this, but it was conceded it wasn't his fault as he thought the handbrakes had been pinned down a bit more tightly than usual!

Ready to depart Simsville with another load of timber from Pumpkin Point, c.1936.

Photo: Gordon Robinson

Pumpkin Point Operations

During the Smith & Ellis era, *Soward* made one or two trips a week to Pumpkin Point, hauling seven to eight trucks of sawn timber, about 28,000 super feet (66 cu m). At the wharf the loco would drop off the full trucks and collect empty ones from the previous trip. The wharf gang would put skids on the sides of each truck and slide the timber off. They would then sort it according to customer and by length and stack it on the wharf. There were up to 30 different stacks at times.

If the mill was short of trucks, greased skids were laid against the sides of the trucks, and a sling was tied around each load. The loco hauled on this sling and heaved the timber off in one go. When *Soward* was out for repairs, they used *Slippery Sam* on the wharf run, although she could only take half the load that *Soward* could.

The sawn timber was carried on pairs of log bogies chained together, with the loads chained down onto the bogey bolsters. Each truck was coupled to the next by a hook and pin arrangement. Each log bogey had a handbrake which was operated by a lever, and before a loaded train could start down any of the steeper grades, a few of these handbrakes had to be pinned down to prevent a runaway.

A return trip from the mill to Pumpkin Point could normally be done in a day. The cost of tramway haulage was calculated at 4 pence per 100 super feet, as against 2 shillings by lorry to Allworth. However, if there was a bad derailment, the trip could take two days, and the costs went up accordingly.

Sawn timber was the main product shipped out, mostly hardwoods such as tallowwood, brushbox and bluegum. The standard sizes were 4in x 3in, 5in x 5in (100 x 75 mm, 125 x 125 mm), and "Junk" — any size that made 27 when you multiplied the dimensions together, such as 9in by 3in (225 x 75 mm). Junk was first class timber shipped for customers to cut into their own smaller sizes. Other sizes were called scantling. The sawmill only shipped logs when the big Pines & Hardwoods mill burned down, and these went to Allen Taylor's mill at Windy Whoppa.

There was a phone line between the mill and the wharf, but it was not always reliable with falling trees and branches breaking the line, or wet conditions shorting it out. When a steamer or a train was coming, the mill would often phone the Allworth Post Office, and leave a

message for the next rail pickup. If it was urgent, someone from the Post Office would come down to the water's edge and *coo-ee* across the river to attract attention.

During the 1930s there were five men in the wharf crew; Carl and Ted Mulder, Allan Russell, Rob Walters and the foreman Harry Mulder. The Company had two houses at Pumpkin Point, and the Mulder family initially had theirs rent free. The Company Directors also included Pumpkin Point in their tours of inspection; Carl Mitchell, Henry Smith and Sydney Ellis were often seen there.

Karuah River Shipping[6]

After a couple of years the steamer *Gunbar* was taken off the Karuah River run, and sold to a subsidiary company, Freighters Ltd. She was replaced by the smaller *Bopple,* registered at the Queensland Port of Maryborough for owners WR Carpenter Ltd. The *Bopple* was a narrower, single engined steamship of 271 tons displacement, built in Ardrossan, Scotland in 1911[7].

The *Bopple* called once a fortnight to load about 300 tons of sawn timber from Pumpkin Point, equal to four train loads. About 16 km downstream at the mouth of the Karuah River, was the township of Karuah and a vehicle ferry across the river. Approaching Karuah, steamers used to sound their whistles to signal the ferry to get over to one side and loosen the cables, so the steamers wouldn't hook them. New captains also picked up a river pilot at Karuah. On a still day the whistle could be heard all the way to Pumpkin Point, a handy early warning to the wharf crew, and an hour later the ship would hove into view.

The *Bopple* would arrive on a rising tide, and aim to sail on the next high tide. She sat on the bottom of the river at Pumpkin Point at low tide. If loading was delayed and the ship looked like missing the high tide, the captain would start pacing the deck anxiously and urge his crew on to greater efforts.

There were seven crew: Captain Lucy, the first mate who also drove the winch, second mate, cook and three deckhands. On arriving at the wharf, the crew would first unload a big basket of wire slings onto the wharf. They would put slings around each stack of timber, attach the winch hook, lift it into the ship's hold, and unhook leaving the slings in place ready for unloading. The winch could lift about 1000 super feet (2.5 cu m), about 3 tons, at a time. The two holds had to be completely full, with no gaps or holes that could start the cargo shifting in heavy seas. The ship's crew did all the loading, only under special circumstances would the wharf crew be asked to assist.

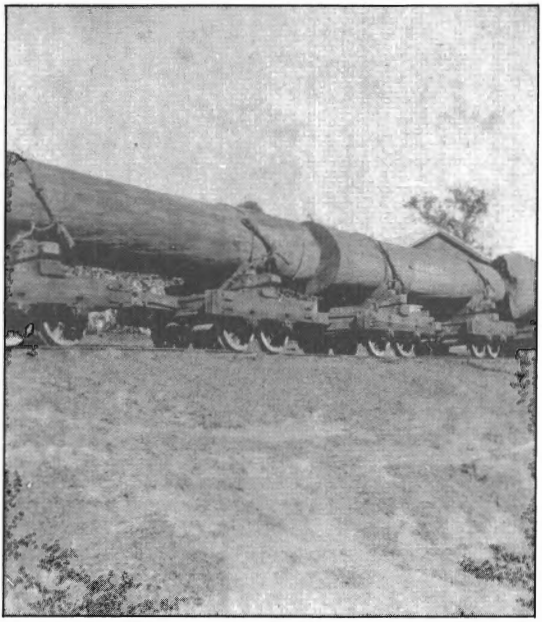
A lot of the timber went down to Hudson Bros' timber yards at Rozelle, Sydney. Smith & Ellis also had their timber yards at Rozelle. The *Bopple* also used to backload silica from Banister Point, Wollongong for the BHP steelworks at Newcastle.

Allen Taylor's wooden hulled steamer, the *Allenwood* (398 tons), was an occasional visitor to Pumpkin Point. As Carl Mulder said, "She was a fair lump of a boat, a bit too big really for the river, she was just about at her limit". Another occasional visitor was the *Boambee,* a wooden steamer of 240 tons in the service of the Port Stephens Steamhip Company Ltd.

Logging Operations

The high cost of tramway construction meant that no more lines were built at Simsville after the Mount Alexander line in 1935. However there were still many stands of timber left which could not be reached by the tramway-based steam winches. Among the innovations that Smith & Ellis introduced was the mounting of winches on the back of a couple of motor trucks. By this means a lot more timber could be reached from the existing tramlines. An ex-timber worker, Ezzie Maytom (interviewed 1987) explained how it was done:

> I drove a truck mounted hauler for about 6 or 7 years. The winch had half a mile of wire on a single drum, which a horse used to drag out into the bush. It was mounted on an old Leyland truck with a 4-cylinder petrol engine. You had to crank start the thing, and it could be a fair cow of a thing to start too.
> The winch drove off the back axle so you could use all four gears. I could haul in 1,000 feet, about three tons, of timber in top gear. The back axle had a fly clutch so you didn't have to jack up the back of the truck to start winching. This made it easy to get in position and it was a lot more stable.



Logs arriving at Simsville on the tramway, c.1936.
Photo: Gordon Robinson

They put the truck haulers in where the country was too rough for anything else, out at the end of the steam hauler's reach. pulled in logs the cutters felled and the steam hauler took over and pulled them up to the tramline. Sometimes if I got too far ahead of the steam hauler, I'd knock off and go and offside on the hauler until they caught up. In other areas I pulled in logs for the tractor to pick up.
I've hauled off the east side of Mt. Gorong, up around Winns Hill, and down on the Waterfall, near the Crawford. This was where they had *Slippery Sam* on the branch line. I pulled in one monster log the cutters had left till last. It was 110 ft long and 8 ft in girth, and they had to cut it into 3 pieces before the steam hauler could bring it in.

In 1936 Smith & Ellis purchased a *Cletrac* crawler tractor to assist logging operations at Simsville. This ushered in the modern era of logging methods and spelt the beginning of the end for the Simsville tramways. It was fitted with a 'dozer blade in front and a winch mounted on the back. Cutting tracks through rough country to stands of timber, and then hauling the logs back out suddenly became easier and cheaper. The *Cletrac* enabled the Company to access the forests north of Winns Hill, hauling heavily laden log trailers south to the terminus of the Winns Hill tramway. A second Cletrac Model DD crawler tractor was purchased for Simsville's logging operations in June 1938.

Forestry records show that Smith & ELlis cut a lot of timber from their forestry lease during their first four years:

1934	136,000 s ft (320 cu m)
1935	1,012,000 s ft (2388 cu m)
1936	484,000 s ft (1142 cu m) (6 months)
1936/7	1,928,000 s ft (4550 cu m)
1937/8	1,726,000 s ft (4073 cu m)
1938/9	1,419,000 s ft (3349 cu m)

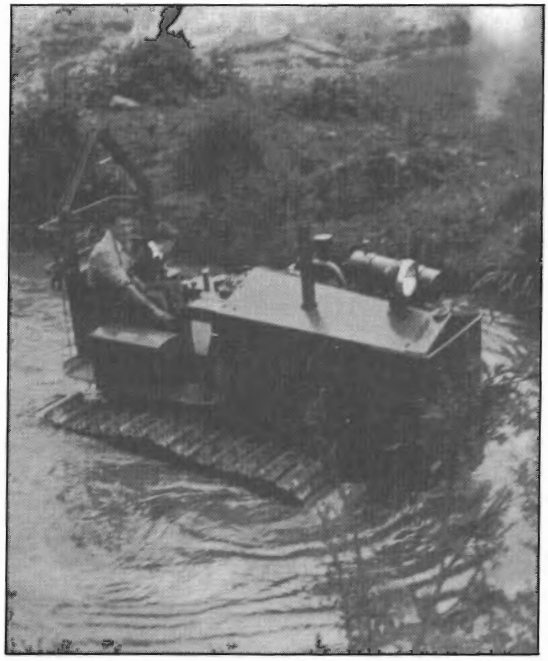
The bulk of this came from the Mt. Alexander area, but after the end of 1937, operations were resumed down on lower Winns Creek. By this time however caterpillar tractors and lorry mounted winches were being used.

The 1937 Tramway Fatality

During the last two months of logging tramway operations, the Simsville tramway claimed its first and only victim. In November 1937[5] 27-year-old Pearie Roy Mason of Simsville was killed while loading logs onto a tramway truck. The fatal accident occurred as a second log was being loaded onto the truck, and the first log suddenly rolled back on top of Mason. He left a widow and five young children. The tragedy left a lasting mark on the small community.

Fire Patrolling

The Climax locomotives were all originally fitted with spark arrestors. *Soward* was a poor steamer at first so its spark arrestor was removed in an effort to improve



Washing the Celtrac logging tractor in Alderley Creek, c.1936. The young boy is Gordon Robinson.
Photo: Gordon Robinson

performance. This made the locomotive notorious for throwing sparks and embers. It was wood fired and when working hard at night *Soward* looked like a miniature volcano. Residents at Allworth, across the river from Pumpkin Point, recall being able to follow *Soward's* progress up the steep climb away from the river for nearly a mile by the fountains of sparks the loco emitted.

Because of this habit, each of *Soward's* trips to Pumpkin Point wharf had to be followed by a fire patrol in dry weather. Half an hour after the locomotive left the mill, one of the men would start walking after the locomotive to check for fires. If the fire danger wasn't too bad though, the fire patroller would ride the loco down to the half way point at the Booral-Bulahdelah Road crossing. Here he had to wait for his opposite number from the wharf to arrive, then both would turn around and walk the line back to the mill or wharf, watching out for smoke or fire.

Carl Mulder, the son of wharf foreman Harry Mulder, had just left school at this time and often walked the fire patrol. In 1986 he give this account of what this involved:

We had to carry a rope and a watering can with us on fire patrol. It was important to check all the trestle bridges for signs of smoke. The sapwood on the outside of the girders and piles got like tinder when it was old, and if a spark got in there it would keep smoldering

until the whole thing caught fire. So you had to walk across each bridge to check it properly. Some of the big bridges would sway a bit as you went across. There were some men who could only get across by going on their hands and knees. Sleepers were placed 18 inches (0.5 m) apart but sometimes they would work even further apart. It was rough if you couldn't take heights.
Sometimes I didn't get back home until midnight, but I didn't get paid overtime or anything. I remember once I was in a hurry and I missed a spark on Jack Wilson's bridge, one of the big ones on Lockeys Hill. Two spans burned out, and they had to get Les Masters down from the mill to repair it. He cut the timbers on the spot, squared them with an adze, and we lifted them into place with a block and tackle.

Tall Timbers

Simsville experienced perhaps its only claim to fame when Cinesound Pictures shot many outdoor scnes for the film *Tall Timbers* there in early 1937. The sawmill, village, locomotives and tramways all appeared as scene-setting backdrops in the film. Directed by Ken Hall, the film was based on a script by Captain Frank Hurley and starred well-known Australian actors Frank Leighton and Shirley Ann Richards.

First, the film crew travelled to the Craven Plateau, near Gloucester, to film a timber drive on Mr Archer Whitford's *Bungulla Estate*[9]. Here 20 acres (8 ha) of trees on a steep hillside had been cut part way through, and were supposed to fall in one climactic rush when the back row of "killer trees" were dynamited. There were red faces all round when the trees refused to fall, and subsequently some clever modelling of the timber drive back in the studio was needed for this scene. Ken Hall gave a good account of this to David Burke in 1982[10], as well as to the author in 1989.

The film crew then spent a couple of weeks based in Stroud, traveling out to Simsville each day to film on location. People from just about the whole district were invited out to Simsville one weekend to see the filming and act as crowd extras "witnessing" the timber drive. Everyone brought lunch with them and Cinesound supplied the liquid refreshments. It was a huge success, and is still remembered to this day by those who were there.

Andy Thompson was one of the Jarrah Mill's bushmen assigned to the film crew to keep them out of trouble up in the bush. He gave this humorous behind the scenes account of some of the bush shots:

My mate Bill Meade and I were working out at the Forestry (Winns Hill) log cutting when they were taking *Tall Timbers*. We had to cut this tree almost through, the one that Frank Leighton was supposed to fell in the film. Well, you never saw anything so funny in all your life! It was all faked up.

He was on a board only about 18 inches off the ground. He was a bit nervous about the tree going sudden like so after each swing with the axe he'd back away from the tree and bounce up and down on the board. My mate Bill Meade gave him instructions that when the tree started to go, Frank was to get off the board smartly and run towards him and nowhere else or he could get hurt. Well there was a bit of a gust of wind and the tree swayed and creaked. Well, Leighton was off like a shot and completely forgot what Bill told him and ran in the wrong direction. If the tree had fallen it would have got him for sure.

There were also these two young blokes who had to carry around the cans of film for the cameras. Well, all the actors and the film crew had been told never to stand near a rope of a cable in the bush. It might be a winch rope and jerk tight without warning. Well these young blokes didn't take much notice, and when the hauler whistle blew for a pull one of them was standing over the rope. Just as he was looking round to see where the whistle was coming from, the rope forked him 8 or 9 foot off the ground, turned him over twice in mid-air. He wasn't hurt much, but all the bush workers there laughed themselves silly!"

That bridge they blew up in the film. It was a little decked bridge across Alderly Creek on the old line to Stroud, near Woolloomooloo. The loco was never anywhere near it. It was faked up too. Another place, a big rock was supposed to roll down this hill and knock the loco off the line. They used wire netting and paper mache on that one.

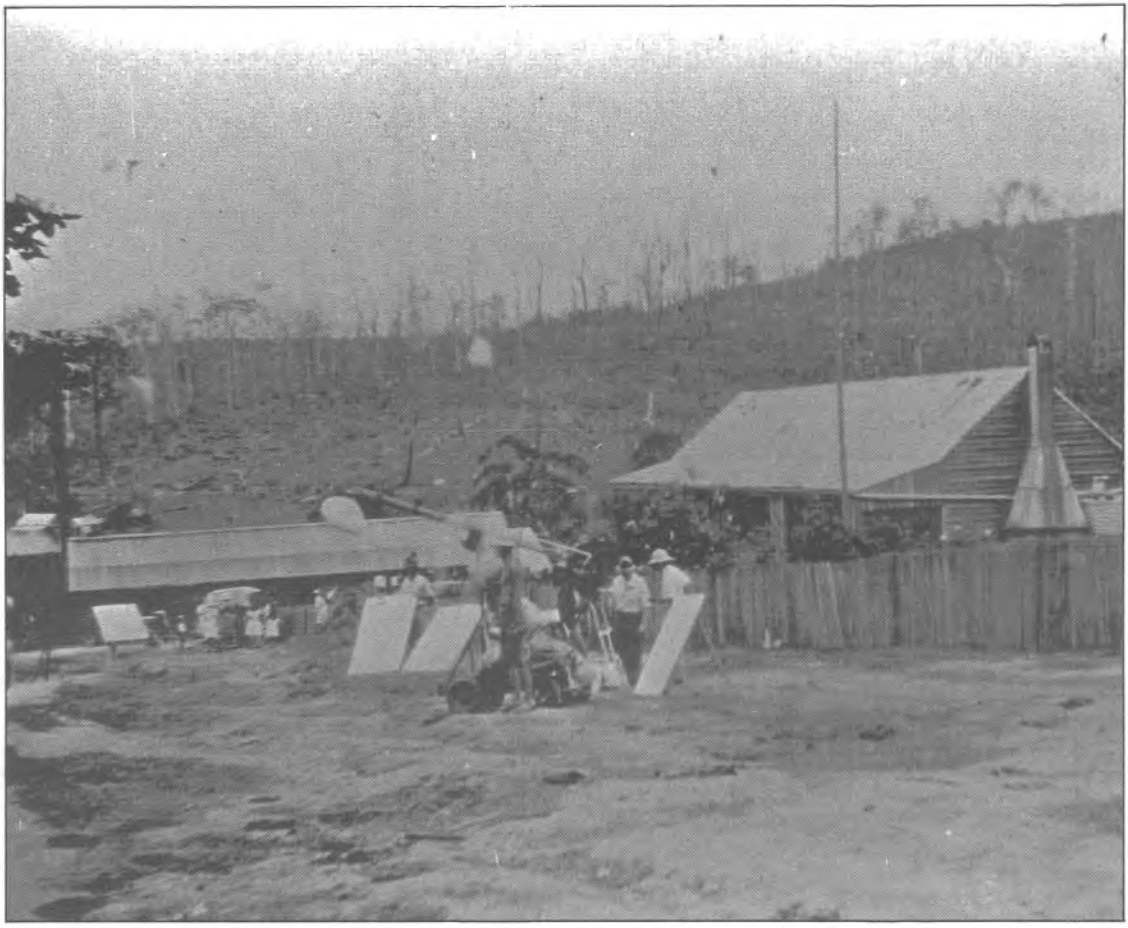
Tall Timbers had its "world premiere release" in Brisbane in August 1938, and as a special gesture of thanks to the people of Stroud and Simsville, was given a special showing in Stroud later that month.
The film provides a most unusual aid in researching the history of Simsville's tramways. The locomotive *Soward* played a leading role in several scenes, and there are also a few frames right at the beginning showing the A-class Climax locomotive *Slippery Sam* at the mill. The sawmill, village and a steam log hauler also appear in other scenes.

The End of the Tramways

By mid 1937 it was clear that the era of the Simsville tramways was coming to an end. Up in the forest, there was now very little uncut timber remaining within reach of the logging tramways, and any tramway extensions would have been prohibitively expensive. Tramway operating costs — line and bridge maintenance, insurance premiums, fire watches during the bushfire seasons and wages — were increasing each year. Crawler tractors and motor lorries had become a reliable and more economical alternative in getting logs to the mill.

The tramway to Pumpkin Point was subject to the same economics. The rents for the tramway crossing rights across private property were increasing, and one of the key leases was due to expire in mid-1938. Roads had improved out of sight since 1923 when the tramway was built, and motor lorries could deliver sawn timber to many more destinations than just Pumpkin Point.

Accordingly, Smith & Ellis approached Stroud Shire Council in September 1937 with a proposal to purchase the Council's wharf at Allworth, across the river from Pumpkin Point. An agreement was reached whereby Smith & Ellis would refurbish the wharf, which had fallen



The Tall Timbers film crew at Simsville in January 1937. The photo is taken looking down Stump Street towards the sawmill. Photo: Gordon Robinson.

into disrepair, in return for the right to use it for stacking and shipping timber.

The Company's ceased using their private wharf at Pumpkin Point in 1938 and shifted operations across the Karuah River to Allworth wharf. Foreman Harry Mulder remained in charge, but moved across the river to live in Allworth.

Dismantling the Simsville Tramways

Early in 1938, Smith & Ellis commenced dismantling the tramway system. Starting at the outer end of the logging tramway, a gang pulled up the rails and the B-class Climax loco *Soward* hauled them down to Pumpkin Point wharf, two truck loads at a time.

Andy Thompson was the ganger in charge of this operation[11]:

We pulled the line up in summer, I remember it quite well. Going down through Capp's there (not far from Pumpkin Point) the mosquitoes were so bad we had to carry a kerosine rag and keep rubbing it over and arms and necks to keep them off. That was getting down near the salt water near the Branch River, it was thick with ti tree and scrubby stuff, not cleared like it is today.

What we used to have to do, we had a little hand trolley sort of thing, and we put so many rails on the trolley and go back down the line to where we thought would make a good load for the loco with two or three trucks. Then we'd go back up to the head of the line, pull up some more rails, take them back to the dump, and so on.

We started right out in the bush. The Apple Tree Line was still down, Dan's Camp and out to the Forestry when we pulled it up. They had some branch lines leading off here and there, these were all pulled up too. The Pine Brush Line to Mt Gorong was pulled up before my time.

All the rails were packed down to Pumpkin Point. They didn't waste any, crowed the bent ones straight and all that. They sold them, I don't know who they sold them to. There used to be a lot of truck wheels down there for a long time.

The rails were piled on the wharf in large stacks, and taken away by ship. Just who bought them is still a mystery — New Zealand, Fiji, Queensland sugar mills and the Captains Flat mine near Canberra have all been suggested.

Locomotive Disposal

After all the rails had been retrieved, it was *Soward's* turn. Carl Mulder and the mill blacksmith Jack Penfold spent a week at the wharf, overhauling, cleaning and packing up the locomotive. Rails were spiked onto the Pole Wharf so that a ship's crane would reach over them, and *Soward* was hoisted aboard a steamer and shipped away.

Ex-employees could not say what happened to the A-class Climax *Slippery Sam*. It seems likely though that she was moved to Pumpkin Point, together with the log bogies, some time before the dismantling began, and was shipped away by coastal steamer before *Soward*. Smith & Ellis used the good offices of the Victorian timber company, Alstergren Pty Limited, to find buyers for the two engines[12].

Both locomotives subsequently went to Tasmania. I am indebted to Wayne Chynoweth of Tasmania (letter June 1990) who supplied me the following information on the subsequent careers of the last two Simsville Climax locomotives:

Climax 1265 circa 1912: A-class 15 ton, *Slippery Sam*. Arrived in NW Tasmania in 1941 for use by the Circular Head Amalgamated Timber Company. First inspected by the boiler inspector at Smithton on 4/8/1941, owned by EH Fenton Pty Ltd, before being transferred to the Salmon River operations branching off the Marrawah tramway, where it was known as *Weasel*. Used until 1949 when the company was taken over by the Kauri Timber Co, and steam operation was replaced by internal combustion on the tramways. It, along with the other Climax locomotive owned by the firm, lay derelict at Welcome Swamp until circa 1960 when both locos were partially dismantled to obtain parts including the bogies for the construction of a diesel rail tractor by Messrs Britton Bros of nearby Christmas Hills. Removal of more parts by scrap merchants in 1970 including the bogies from Britton's swamp left little of significance apart from a wooden frame of one of the locomotives.

Climax 1653/1923. B-class 30 ton *Soward*. Arrived in Tasmania in 1942 having been purchased by the Australian Newsprint Mills for their 3ft 6in gauge logging railway at Risby's Basin, near Maydena in Southern Tasmania. It was landed at Burnie and taken to the Emu Bay Railway Co's workshops for overhaul and re-erection, receiving its initial boiler inspection on 20/11/1942, before being taken to Maydena. The locomotive, with *Soward* still clearly to be seen on its side, began operating about mid 1943 and continued until the Risby's basin operations closed down in 1949. As road transport was now company policy, the locomotive remained at the ANM logging depot at Florentine Junction. Its boiler was last inspected on 15/6/1951, and it remained stored in the open but with preservation in mind. In May 1977 the locomotive was transported to the Tasmanian Transport Museum at Glenorchy for overhaul and restoration. Presently the locomotive is awaiting further restoration.

Post Tramway Logging

After the logging tramway was pulled up, Smith & Ellis converted parts of the tramway formations as the main logging road up into the forest. Deviations were cut around obstacles such as trestle bridges and embankments. The disadvantages of not having the logging tramways became evident the next winter, which was very wet. The motor lorries couldn't get out of the mill up the steep slopes of Sour Ridge for weeks, and the mill hands had to be laid off.

The Second World War brought many changes to the timber industry. In 1940 the Commonwealth Government began to requisition ships to help the war effort. Among the coastal vessels to be requisitioned were the *Allenwood, Gunbar, Bopple* and the *Boambee*. This spelt the end of the Karuah River shipping trade and the port of Allworth.

After the war, road transport was too well established, and the river trade never resumed. Allworth sank back into relative obscurity as a small but picturesque river village. The wharves were demolished after the war, and the channel marker piles in the Karuah River fell victims to the periodic floods which came down the river.

Sawn timber from the Simsville sawmill now had to be sent by lorry to Stroud Road railway station for shipment. The wharf gang at Allworth was disbanded for the last time, and the men were given new duties stacking timber and loading railway trucks at Stroud Road, or working at the Simsville mill.

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6. ALLEN TAYLOR & COMPANY LIMITED

Allen Taylor & Company Limited was a very successful and long lived NSW timber company. For many years it was a dominant force in the NSW hardwood timber trade and a large exporter of Australian hardwoods. The Company owned sawmills, tramlines, timber depots and wharves, and a fleet of ships.

Soon after forming into a public company in 1906, Allen Taylor & Company Ltd, took steps to control their own supplies of timber, rather than continuing to rely on independent sawmillers. The Port Stephens area was one of their first ventures, and ended up as the largest. Starting in 1908 they purchased Justin MacSweeney's Bulahdelah sawmill; Frederick Phillip's Markwell sawmill and tramline; and the Australian Timber Export Company's Wootton sawmill, with its tramline to Mayer's Point on the Myall Lakes.

Included in the last two purchases were tramway rights into the Crawford River area of the Myall River State Forest. It was these rights which blocked Millars Timber & Trading Company in 1911, forcing them to purchase the Simsville block on the western side and construct their expensive Winns Creek Tramway to gain access to the Forest.

During the First World War, Allen Taylor's built their famous Birdwood sawmill at *Windy Whoppa*, a location at the mouth of the Myall River where it empties into Port Stephens. They also built the smaller Beresford sawmill at Mayers Point on the Myall Lakes, the terminus of their Wootton timber tramway. The company's four steam droghers were constantly busy transporting logs down the Myall River to the Birdwood mill, and sawn timber, railway sleepers, piles and girders to the deeper waters of Port Stephens. Here they were transferred to ocean steamers to be shipped to Australian or overseas markets.

Allen Taylor & Company maintained a policy of expansion, and over the years acquired shares in other timber businesses, bought them out or took them over. Their control over all aspects of their timber business —cutting rights, sawmills, transport, shipping and marketing — made them profitable and a tough competitor. They were one of the few timber firms to survive the 1930's Great Depression relatively intact.

Takeover of Smith & Ellis (1941)

In December 1940, the directors of Smith & Ellis and Allen Taylor & Company met to discuss a possible takeover of Smith & Ellis. An earlier approach in 1936 had come to nothing and the two companies had continued as rivals for several years. Now during the tough wartime conditions it was obvious that cooperation would be more profitable than competition. An agreement was reached and the conditions of the takeover were negotiated over the next couple of months. The Australian wartime authorities approved the takeover, which was formalized in October 1941. Smith & Ellis became a subsidiary company of Allen Taylor & Company Limited, with Henry Smith and Carl Mitchell joining the Board of Directors.

The Stroud Road Mill (1943)

After 30 years of more or less continuous logging, the remaining timber reserves available to Simsville were becoming depleted. Logging trucks had to travel longer distances over rough roads into the Myall River State Forest for saw logs, a process often interrupted by wet weather. With wartime demand running high, Allen Taylor & Company purchased the timber rights to a large property east of Stroud Road, and purchased a small sawmill adjacent to Stroud Road railway station from a local sawmiller, WD Woods, in February 1943. This move ensured a good supply of saw logs and reduced their timber transport costs considerably.

After they overhauled the mill the company transferred many of their Simsville employees to Stroud Road. This really marked the end of Simsville as a village in its own right. For the last time, the village lost its school, post office and polling station. Several of the mill houses were dismantled and moved to Stroud Road also.

The 1947 Jarrah Mill Fire

After the War ended, the Jarrah mill was being worked at reduced capacity, cutting second class timbers. They were producing about 4,000 super feet (9.5 cu m) of sawn timber a day, a far cry from the 20,000 feet (47 cu m) a day being cut by Pines & Hardwoods in the 1920's. There were 10 men employed at the mill, including foreman Fred Masters, sawyer Roy Bogie, bench middleman Jack Penfold jr, dockerman Ted Mulder, Arnold Schultz on the breaking down saw, and boilerman Barney Carroll. Only one saw bench was in operation. Only three families still lived at Simsville, the rest of the employees commuted from Stroud each day.

On Sunday 9th November 1947, the Jarrah Mill caught fire for the last time, destroying the sawmill, office, storeroom, workshop, a logging truck and also one of the remaining mill cottages[2]. Local residents and people from Stroud rushed out to the mill once the alarm was raised, but could do little more than save some of the stacks of sawn timber and logs waiting to be cut.

Allen Taylor's Board of Directors decided not to rebuild the sawmill. Simsville had become a high cost operation and was losing money. Hauling logs from the Myall River State Forest in wet weather had always been a big problem and the Forestry Commission was charging high royalties on logs cut there. The Commission did not regard Simsville as the logical mill site for this timber, and

their royalty rates made no allowance for the private access roads Allen Taylor's were obliged to maintain up and over Sour Ridge.

Finally, the 15 year lease of the Jarrah Mill site from Stroud Timber Company was due to expire in 1949. This Company had sold their remaining Simsville lands to the Masonite Corporation (now CRA) in 1946, and there was little chance of the lease being renewed.

The remaining employees were relocated to the Stroud Road mill. The Jarrah Mill boiler and the big Tangye mill engine were among the few things to escape the fire. Later, in 1949, Allen Taylor's dispatched them by road to power one of their mills in the Coffs Harbour area. Thus ended 36 years of sawmilling at Simsville.

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7. SIMSVILLE TODAY

Simsville Village and Mill

Over 40 years have passed since The Jarrah Mill burned down and Simsville was abandoned. In that time the site of the village and the sawmill have changed almost beyond recognition. All the houses and buildings have long gone. Most of what was spared by the 1947 fire were purchased by local residents and removed to other towns and villages. The few that were left gradually disintegrated until the owners of the Simsville site had them demolished as fire, vermin and vandal risks. Trees have come back to Simsville. All the hillsides that used to be kept cleared to reduce the bushfire risk are covered in trees and shrubs again.

But areas where the old mill houses stood still remain as grassy clearings with here and there an old ornamental tree or ancient fruit tree marking the site of a garden. Nearby, the old mill site is well over-grown. The smoke box from the mill's locomotive type boiler still marks the site of the engine house. Foundation pits and bed logs outline the site of the mill.

Tramway Formations

It is over 50 years since the last Climax locomotive steamed down to Pumpkin Point, and the tramways were pulled up. But there is a lot to see, with many kilometres of tramway formations easy to find and to follow. Old sleepers and dogspikes are numerous in many areas, and at two locations in the Myall River State Forest several hundred metres of rails are still in place. At other places small stacks of a rail lengths can be found; perhaps rail that wasn't worth reclaiming back in 1938?

The most impressive earthworks are to be found in the deeper reaches of the forests and on the steeper sections of the old lines. The bushwalker will find many deep cuttings, rock-faced ledges cut across steep hillsides, and bridge abutments staring across deep valleys in these areas. Some of the formations make for good bush-walking, others are difficult to follow through thick vines and scrub.

None of the many wooden trestle bridges have survived the bushfires, falling trees or simple old age. At quite a few bridge sites though, distinctive Simsville bridge timbers can be seen lying in the gullies; girders and triple pile sets still held together by long iron bolts. There is even the odd pile set or two still standing, supporting moss-covered bridge girders and rotten sleepers.

The Pumpkin Point line passed through drier and more open country. Bushfires accounted for the bridges fairly early on in the piece, so very few bridge timbers remain. South of Locke's Hill, all the land has been bulldozed and sown with pasture grasses to make way for hobby farms. The line is extremely difficult to follow here, the best hope being to locate the old bridge abutments at creek crossings, and to mark the colour variations of early Spring grasses where the formation crossed the paddocks. In this area the grasses tend to be shorter and greener on top of the old line. At Pumpkin Point itself, the area has been recently subdivided, using a D9 Caterpillar bull-dozer, to make suburban-type blocks of land. Much of the unique zig-zag formation was destroyed in the process, though the patient observer can still trace its course.

There are still a few local residents in Stroud and the surrounding districts who lived and worked at Simsville. It is their stories that will give the visitor the most vivid pictures of what Simsville was like, when the mill was working at full pressure and the place was full of life.

CONCLUSION

The history of Simsville did not span any great length of time, just 36 years from 1911 to 1947. Yet during this period tremendous changes swept Australia, propelling the country from the Victorian era into the modern post-war era. Two World Wars and the Great Depression irreversibly changed our society's values and set us firmly on the path of technological change.

The timber industry was no less affected. During Simsville's life steam power and animal power gave way to the internal combustion engine; caterpillar tractors and motor lorries took over from bullock teams and logging tramways. At the end there were far fewer little communities clustered around isolated bush sawmills. Greatly improved road transport and timber worker's expectations for better social amenities meant that new sawmills were built near or in established villages and towns. At the end the era of the logging tramways had finished as well.

The story of Simsville is also the story of people and timber, and the efforts of the timber companies to profitably cut, saw, and ship it to markets. The life of the village community depended upon the fortunes of the Jarrah Mill. Short periods of prosperity alternated with bad times caused by wars, the Great Depression, cheap timber imports, mill fires and a company collapse. Through it all the timber workers and their families showed a determination to survive and make the best of both good times and bad.

With hindsight it can be said that the first two companies at Simsville, Millars and Pines & Hardwoods, both overestimated the quality of the accessible timber reserves within the Purgatory forests. They judged these forests to be as productive as the superb Gippsland forests in Victoria or the West Australian karri and jarrah forests. In fact many of the Myall River hardwoods give poor sawn recoveries due to the presence of hollow twisted pipes inside the trees.

Both Millars and Pines & Hardwoods built expensive timber tramway systems based on these expectations. Once built these expensive assets made it difficult for their owners to cut their losses and walk away. Millars was large enough to absorb their resulting financial losses; Pines & Hardwoods were not and were ruined. Only Stroud Timber and Smith & Ellis made profits from Simsville — they invested modestly according to their available timber reserves. Smith & Ellis especially benefited from their introduction of logging tractors and motor lorries to lower their logging costs and really open up the whole of the area over which they held cutting rights.

The Simsville tramways played a key role through the history of Simsville. They were the Jarrah Mill's lifeline for most of tnat time, transporting millions of superfeet of timber from the forests to Stroud and to the Pumpkin Point wharf on the River. They undoubtedly helped prolong the life of the mill and the village community. The unique American Climax steam locomotives that steamed over their rails helped to make this one of the more unusual timber tramway systems in NSW.

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Margaret Chadban, Stroud: lived at Simsville 1924 to 1930; sawmill clerk 1928 to 1930. Father was Allen Wilson, the Pines & Hardwoods bush foreman.

Mervyn Carson, Sydney: Jarrah sawmill clerk 1934 to 1939, then manager from 1939 to 1947.

Jessie Dumbrell, Newcastle: lived at Simsville 1922 to 1928. Her father was Tom Richards, a log hauler driver.

Matt Gooch, Stroud: long experience in the local timber industry. Owned a store in Stroud and supplied Simsville with groceries during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Colin Isaac, Booral: attended school at Simsville during the early 1930s, worked in the mill for several years. His father was bush foreman 1931 to 1938.

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Carl Mulder, Stroud: lived at Pumpkin Point 1925 to 1938. Worked at the Pumpkin Point and Allworth timber depots, then at the Jarrah sawmill. Father was Harry Mulder, the wharf foreman.

Stroud Road railway station in 1991. *Ian McNeil*

Ted Mulder, Stroud Road: Carl's brother, and had similar work experience.
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