

Bilgola

Bilgola is an Aboriginal word thought to mean swirling waters. James Meehan marked Belgoula in his survey of 1814.

Bilgola Plateau crowns the peninsula rising 164 meters above the ocean beach to 169 metres. Bilgola lies between Newport to the south and Avalon and Clareville to the north. This area was included in the 1833 grant of 1200 acres to Father Therry. In the 1870s WB Dalley purchased land from Therry's estate and is believed to have built a weatherboard house there. The house was rebuilt in about 1919. It became a guest house and served afternoon teas. Dalley's son, John, a satirical novelist, lived at the house and drowned while fishing at the beach in 1935.

Colonel Walter Oswald Watt, World War I aviator, who was awarded the French Croix de Guerre for bravery, also drowned at this beach, while visiting for the weekend in 1921.

Reading

Colonel Watt. Drowned near Newport – Splendid war record.

"Colonel Walter Oswald Watt, late of the Australian Flying Corps, and a director of the firm of Messrs. Gilchrist, Watt, and Sanderson, Ltd., was found drowned at Bilgola Beach, about a mile north of Newport, on Saturday morning.

Colonel Watt was staying at his week-end residence there, and went down to the beach alone, evidently for the purpose of collecting wood. He had taken off his bath robe, which he was wearing over his bathing costume, and this, together with his towel, was found on the beach. A number of sticks were piled in a heap close by. These were close to a point where a number of slippery rocks run down to the water's edge, and not at the place where Colonel Watt usually entered the water when swimming. When the body was examined on Saturday afternoon a bruise was found at the back of the head and a cut in the middle of the forehead. There were also some scratches on one cheek, and these signs suggested that Colonel Watt slipped on the rocks referred to, and fell, striking his head. It is believed that the fall stunned him, and that he was drowned in comparatively shallow water, into which he rolled after the fall.

Mr. Sydney Jones, a caretaker at Colonel Watt's residence, was the first to notice the body floating in the water. He hurried to Newport to obtain assistance. From there some fishermen proceeded in a boat, and recovered the body. Constable Grant, of Mona Vale, and Mr. Bulfin made strenuous efforts to restore animation, but it was realised from the beginning that there was no hope of success, and after half an hour's work they had to admit failure. Dr. Richards, of Narrabeen, pronounced life extinct.

...It was in aviation that Colonel Watt achieved his greatest distinction. He was, in fact, one of the first in Australia to take it up seriously....Colonel Watt was at this time anxious to become thoroughly proficient in the art of flying, which was still practically in its infancy....France declared war on August 2 – two days before Great Britain – and on the

NORTHERN BEACHES COUNCIL

same day Colonel Watt offered his services to the French Government, expressing his willingness to serve in any capacity. At the same time he handed over his monoplane to the French Government as a free gift.

His services were readily accepted by the French Government. This was regarded as a great compliment and an excellent testimony to the value of his services as an aviator, as at that time there were only seven foreigners who were allowed to serve with the French army. He was one of the most popular pilots in the French army, and, for the first 18 months of the war, he flew regularly every second day, and met with the greatest possible success.

...Colonel Watt was awarded the Croix de Guerre, to which were subsequently added three of the highly-coveted palm leaves. These were personally presented to Colonel Watt by General Joffre."

Daily Telegraph, 23 May 1921.

Bilgola House

"Perhaps no more appealing stretch of coastline exists within the whole of the State than that glorious golden chain of beaches lying between Manly and Barrenjoey.

Of late years, thanks to the advent of surf-bathing, and the quick transit afforded by motor vehicles, this glorious district is now recognised as the most popular of our natural playgrounds.

Each individual beach presents its own peculiar characteristics and attractions, and claims for itself a proportionate share of the public patronage.

May we suggest, however, that it is somewhat to be regretted that with the trend of seaside popularity, and the opening up of new resorts, many of the beaches are becoming spoiled and robbed of their natural charm.

A small section of careless and unthinking folk, void of all sense of appreciation of the beautiful, and lacking all regard for the welfare of the oncoming generations, are ruthlessly destroying the existing vegetation, and leaving in their wake a sorry spectacle of their wanton selfishness.

Little wonder is it that the nature loving section of the community direct their attention to the farthest beaches, hoping, by so doing, to partake of a brief, unmolested sojourn before these spoilers of the beautiful thunder down on their tracks.

...This little article was prompted by a recent visit to Bilgola House, the beautiful dream home of Mrs. Maclurcan, of the Wentworth.

This most enterprising person, who ranks amongst the keenest and most popular of Sydney's business women, has indeed displayed a wise choice in her selection of a sea-side home.

Bilgola House lies snugly amongst a particularly fine grove of well developed native palms (Corypha Australis) in the most thickly wooded portion of Bilgola Beach – that delightful little bay immediately over the hill from Newport.

NORTHERN BEACHES COUNCIL

There is really no need for us to eulogise upon the comfort and charm associated with this ideal rest haven.

...From our own point of view as home beautifiers, we would just like to conclude by stressing the fact to our readers, the great possibilities offering for seaside home beautification.

Our beaches are deplorably lacking in shade and shelter, and with their rapidly increasing popularity, a little attention bestowed on this important matter would be mightily appreciated by the community at large.

Might we suggest that much good could be accomplished by owners of seaside residences embarking upon a general tree planting, and our advice in this direction as to the adaptability of the various species will be gladly tendered to all enquirers."

The Garden Magazine, 1 December 1926

Further reading

Joan Lawrence, Pittwater Paradise, 1994, Pittwater Pictorial History, 2006
Historical and contemporary information

Alan Sharpe, Manly to Palm Beach, 1983.
General history