

Clareville

Clareville may have been named by AJ Small, developer of Avalon or Mr Stokes who built boats here in the early part of the twentieth century. Bordered by Newport to the south and Avalon to the north and east and to the west by the shores of Pittwater.

The Clareville area lies in part of two large grants which were made to the Catholic priest, Father John Joseph Therry in 1833 and 1837. This land extended across 1480 acres between present day Whale Beach and Newport. Smaller blocks of land were also granted to J Taylor, 30 acres at Taylor's Point, John Williams, 60 acres and T Warner, 50 acres at Stokes Pont. Settlement was based along the edge of Pittwater as access would have been primarily by water. Clareville wharf was visited by steamers early in the twentieth century. Before Avalon was named the ocean beach there was called Clareville ocean beach. In the early 1920s the area was subdivided and people purchased land to build holiday homes. After 1950 Clareville became a settled residential area.

In 1941 during World War II a naval torpedo firing range was set up at Taylors Point. It closed in 1983 and the wharf was dismantled in 1995.

Memories

Yvonne Emery remembers her childhood

"My aunt, Jeanne Ratte, my father's sister built the cottage "Elise" at Clareville in about 1920/22. It was built to the same plan as the cottage next door, which was owned by Dr Harriet Biffen. I've always understood my parents, Prospere and Barbara Ratte, spent their honeymoon there in 1921. They travelled by train from St Leonard's to Brooklyn on the Hawkesbury River, and then by ferry to Pittwater and Padden's Wharf. In later years, a hired car took us to Clareville until we had our own car.

Bert Padden was a professional fisherman. He used to warn us children about the sharks around. I think it was his son who was a single scull champion. The remains of the old Padden's wharf are still there, the Avalon Sailing Club, now stands 15-20 metres north of this, with the reserve above. The first house next to the reserve replaced Dr Biffen's cottage and my aunt's is still there.

Gradually houses were built along the waterfront and on the hill behind us. The beach now referred to as Clareville, with the Post Office, was called Pearl of Pittwater, with Taylor's Point wharf to the south.

Robert Johnson, the artist, built a house in the area from local sandstone. In 1932, my brother Christopher and I, were playing on what was considered "our beach" when Heather and Brian Johnson arrived. After at first refusing them a ride in the canoe, we became firm friends and explored Pittwater together. We had canoes and then the Johnson's rowing boat and later my brother had a 12ft sailing skiff. We were quite fearless. I don't think most of the time our parents knew what we were doing. When sailing, if the boat capsized, there would

be nobody to rescue us, there were very few boats around in those days. Mr Snape, the butcher from Newport, would sometimes row out to rescue us and was very cross with us. We would walk across to Avalon to surf. By then there was one store, later Wickhams, and not many people. Heather, Brian and Chris helped rescue a visiting Englishman who was caught in a rip and exhausted. There was a shed with a reel and belt but not always manned.

We would help fight bushfires when the houses were threatened. My earliest memories are of the Christmas holidays, no electricity, tank water, and my aunt or my mother cooking on a fuel camp oven stove. The clear water when the high Christmas tides covered the rocks and golden sands where we swam and played. Oysters were gathered from the rocks below the cottage and fish caught. There was plenty of native flora and fauna, including koalas. It truly was a paradise."

Reading

"The RAN operated a torpedo range at Taylors Point from 1941 to 1983, to test the firing ability and the range of torpedoes before they were issued to submarines. 5059 torpedoes in total were fired from Taylors Point up Pittwater. Navy launches cleared small craft from the firing area, a large red warning flag was unfurled from the firing shed and a siren sounded.

Three pontoons were positioned in the water from which the speed and accuracy of the torpedo's course were registered and relayed back in the firing tower. The torpedoes were then retrieved by a patrolling launch. In 39 years only three of the torpedoes went awry, luckily with no human casualties. In 1983 the firing station and outer wharf were removed and the centre was converted to a diving and hydrographic school for HMAS Penguin."

Nan Bosler, The Fascinating history of Pittwater, Part two. 1998

Further reading

Nan Bosler, Fascinating History of Pittwater, Vol.2. 1998.
Clareville torpedo range

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

Josephine McDonald, The Archaeology of the Angophora Reserve Rock Shelter, 1992.
Excavation of Aboriginal site.

Jan Roberts, Avalon Landscape & Harmony, 1999.
History and artistic community.