

Kiama Municipal Council – A Stone Upon A Stone



View of the Mount Pleasant Ridge with ocean in the background showing how the dry stone walls enhance the landscape. Photography – Wally Abraham

The landscape around Kiama was formed from periodic volcanic flows that laid down beds of latite, a type of basalt. These were inter-laid with layers of sandstone formed from the weathering of the latite deposits. Further weathering generated newer sandstones, which overlaid the old rocks and formed the area's rolling topography. Later weathering, tremors and moisture exposed the old rock, which broke up into large stones on or near the soil surface.

The first European settlers cut and exported timber and cleared the bush to plant crops. With the close of the cedar industry, lands were cleared for agricultural purposes. Ploughing exposed the weathered rock, which was collected and stored in piles on the edges of fields. New, smaller farms created needed fences to define boundaries and keep out stock.

Thomas Newing used walling techniques from the British Isles to build twin skin dry stone walls. Walls appear within and around farms in west Kiama along Saddleback Mountain Road, and then west towards Jambaroo. The dry stone walls create strong patterns on the land. Tecomaria hedges and Coral Trees were added along walls to provide windbreaks and shade. New residential subdivisions in west Kiama necessitate protection of walls.

“The walls reflect the transfer of a craft from Britain and Ireland to Australia. They express the toil of early settlers in setting up their farms, and they provide a patterning to the landscape which gives Kiama a distinctive sense of place. They are also very powerful sculptural forms in the landscape.”

W. Mayne-Wilson, Sydney Morning Herald, June 22nd 2001

“Stones are like people, some are good to work with, they fit in anywhere, but others are cranky, you've got to humour 'em. Leave them to one side a bit and you'll get a place for them alright.”

Thomas. Newing, quoted in Jeff Carter, Stout Hearts, Leathery Hands” Rigny, 1968.



Original dry stone wall with Cabbage tree palms and Illawarra Escarpment in the background. Photography – Wally Abraham



A paddock wall characteristic of those walls built by Thomas Newing in the high country of the Kiama Hinterlands. Photography – Wally Abraham



In the 1860s stone walls to contain cattle were built on Hoddles track over Saddleback Mountain. Today those same walls covered in moss. Photography – Raelene Marshall

- Permian Age Volcanic activity.
- Triassic Age Last 100 million years.
- Last 50,000 years Aboriginal people lived in and travelled throughout the region.
- 1812 – 1820s Visits by timber-getters
- 1820s First land grants in the district. Clearing leases to low income workers.
Crops of wheat, peas and potatoes grown.
- 1850s First subdivision of early grants
- 1860s early Rust destroys wheat crops. Farmers turn to dairying.
- 1857 Thomas Newing arrives in Kiama and builds first dry stone wall at Foxground.
- 1860s – 1920s Most walls built by Thomas Newing, but a few others built some.
- 1927 Newing dies. Few walls built afterwards.
- 1986 Walls first listed as heritage items in Illawarra Regional Environmental Plan.
- 1989 National Trust lists walls on its Register.
- 1990 First of Kiama's 11 town entrance marker walls are built.
- 1992 Kiama's Stone Walls Committee is formed and initiates the listing of the dry stone walls as heritage items.
- 1997 Commencement of the Centenary of Federation Dry Stone Wall Drive project.
- 1999 So far 380 walls in municipality have been recorded and assessed by consultants to Kiama Council.

“Council now requires heritage impact statements on development proposals that may affect the walls.”

