

Penrith Valley Heritage Drive



Bennett's Wagon & South Creek Park

James William Bennett arrived in Australia in March 1853 and moved to St Marys in 1857. In 1866, he built the Volunteer Hotel, behind which he built a wheelwright and blacksmiths shop at the corner of Great Western Highway and Princess Mary Street.

In 1875, James Bennett Snr transferred his business to his sons James and George Thomas. After a few years, George set up his own shop in Queen Street. The brothers then decided to combine their trades of wheelwrighting and blacksmithing, specialising in sturdy wheat and wool wagons. The wagons were renowned throughout Australia for their ability to carry heavy loads.

James Bennett Jnr established his own Coach and Waggon Works in Station Street (now Queen St). In 1899 he purchased a block of land on the southwestern corner of Queen Street and Carson Lane on which to establish his works, although there is no evidence to confirm he was working there. Success enabled James Jnr to build 'Bronte', the most prominent home in the town at the time and which can still be viewed on the corner of King and Gidley Streets, St Marys.

George Thomas Bennett purchased his site on the northwestern corner of Queen Street and Carson Lane in December 1888. A photograph from 1910 shows a large corrugated iron shed on this site. James concentrated on the construction of sturdy wagons suited to heavy loads, while George advertised his wagons widely and entered agricultural shows.

After his death in 1921, James' sons, Ernest and Harold, took over the Coach and Waggon Works. They continued to produce high quality tabletop wagons.

Penrith Valley Visitor Information Centre
Panthers Carpark, Mulgoa Road, Penrith 2750
Phone: 02 4732 7671 Fax: 02 4732 7690
Email: pentour@penrithcity.nsw.gov
Website: www.penrithvalley.com.au



Motorised transport gradually reduced the demand for their highly regarded product, and the last Bennett wagon was built in 1934. Ernest (Pat) Bennett continued repair work and general blacksmithing until his death in 1956.

As the works have since been demolished, St Marys residents wanted something to commemorate them. In South Creek Park, the Rotary Club restored the James Bennett wagon, named 'Maxina' (1920), surrounding it with a cage for protection. They also constructed a blacksmith's shop complete with tools following the donation of Frank Champness' smithy tools by his daughter. Some of these tools however are now missing.

Len Stapleton of St Marys Historical Society had the dream of building a Heritage Park within South Creek Park. The old CWA Hall was moved to the Park for a short time in the 1980s, but unfortunately it was burnt down by vandals and plans for the Heritage Park were shelved. Nevertheless, the sheer size and sturdiness of the Bennett wagons is represented in 'Maxina'.

Great Western Highway & Charles Hackett Drive, St Marys