**Basketmakers Plains (Cheltenham’s old name)**

[From] ‘The Convict Timbergetters of Pennant Hills – A History of Biographical Register’

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The basketmakers

Baskets made at the Pennant Hills Establishment were used for carrying the charcoal in the carts down to the wharf and into Sydney. The baskets were made to a standard bushel size and were probably similar to the baskets made for transporting coal at Newcastle. There is no evidence that any were made for sale in Sydney or Parramatta as all the products made in government time were used by the Government. There may have been some use for baskets in other areas of the public works - perhaps mortar for the masons. The basketmakers were located near to a suitable source of raw materials. One very old name for the present-day **Cheltenham** was the ‘Basketmakers Plains’, a name used prior to the coming of the railway in 1886. On a contour map for this area, the vicinity for Cheltenham can be seen as a ‘plain’ when compared to the surrounding terrain of creeks and ridges. This land has no great depth of clay soil, like the area uphill on the ridge behind Beecroft, and supports a different vegetation. It is not known whether the native materials were prepared as in England by pruning and allowing suitable long canes to grow. In the 1820s the most popular material for the stakes for basketry was Waratah, the stems being long and flexible. Suitable species for weaving in and out of the stakes were some members of the Acacia family, Tea Tree and perhaps Hakea, all still growing in the gullies near Cheltenham, but further botanical study is needed to ascertain what grew on the plain itself. Basketmaking activities probably centred on Devlin’s Creek. In England, materials for basketmaking were harvested in winter and spring before the sap began to rise, tied on bundles and graded according to size, then stored dry with a good circulation of air around them. When basketmaking was about to begin the material was soaked in water for several days.’16

16 James Arnold, op. cit.