**MILLS & PILE, Beecroft Auctioneers**

George Pile & John Yelverton Mills were the appointed auctioneers for the first sales of Crown Land at Beecroft in July & August 1887.

**GEORGE PILE**

**Sydney Morning Herald, Wed 4 Dec 1912**

Deaths.

PILE. —December 3, at his late residence, Carnwath, The Avenue, Ashfield, George Pile, of this city.

**Truth (Brisbane, Qld.), Sun 15 De 1912**

MR. GEORGE PILE DEAD.

The death is announced of Mr. George Pile, who was a somewhat notable figure in political and social life in Sydney. He was a Londoner, born in March, 1834. About the year 1849 his father purchased some land from the A.A. Company at Port Stephens, and the

family soon afterwards came to New South Wales to take possession. There they settled, and George Pile was engaged for some 18 months in "grubbing and clearing," and assisting to build the homestead. Two years afterwards, when gold was discovered in the Bathurst district, the energies of young George were diverted in that direction. He assisted in organising a party to proceed to Meroo Goldfield, and during five years he followed the avocation of a gold miner. He was afterwards engaged in timber getting, splitting, and kindred work at Port Stephens, where he held a lease of a large property, for the Newcastle market. Thence he went to Stroud which district he employed himself at farming until 1862. In January of that year he came to Sydney, and obtained the appointment of council clerk and road inspector to the Municipality of Marrickville, at a salary of £120 a year. For three years and a half he held that position, adding to it, in the last year, the duties of council clerk at Darlington. In 1865, when gold was first discovered at Hokitika, on the West Coast of New Zealand, Mr. Pile resigned his appointments and migrated to Nelson. He engaged in storekeeping but, from the unsettled state of affairs on the "West Coast, was unsuccessful. While awaiting the winding up of his affairs, he assisted in starting the Nelson '"Evening Mail." a daily newspaper, became its editor, and held the billet four months. He then came to Newcastle with his family in the barque Chance, landing in the Coaly City a week after the wreck of the Cawarra. Within a week he was in Sydney once more, seeking employment. Almost his first engagement was on Sands Directory, for which publication he first canvassed for advertisements, and on two subsequent occasions compiled the whole of the work. In 1869 he obtained the appointment of town clerk and surveyor to the Borough of St. Leonards, now comprised in North Sydney. This appointment he held four years. In 1877 Mr. Pile entered into partnership with Mr. Mills, as an auctioneer and estate agent, and the firm of Mills and Pile did an extensive business for many years. A series of "bad seasons" brought the partnership to an end. For some years Mr. Pile has been an observant man about Sydney, and a ready pen and keen observations were employed in "letters to the newspapers" correcting abuses or alleged abuses, in the political, social, and commercial life of the city. George Reid had introduced into political life a certain "dry dog," and George Pile, by some means, had a political "dog" tacked on to him. By his death Sydney has lost a genial, kindly gentleman, political opinions never making any difference in his personal friendships.

**JOHN YELVERTON MILLS**

**Richmond River Express and Casino Kyogle Advertiser (NSW), Mon 29 Dec 1924**

DEATH OF MR. J. Y. MILLS

SYDNEY'S OLDEST ESTATE AGENT

SYDNEY, Monday. — John Yelverton Mills, the oldest of Sydney's active estate agents and auctioneers, died on Saturday night, following upon an operation which took place about a fortnight ago. Mr. Mills, who was in his 83rd year, had been ill only six weeks.

**Sydney Morning Herald, Mon 29 Dec 1924**

MR. J. Y. MILLS.

Picturesque Figure Passes.

HOW SYDNEY GREW.

Mr. John Yelverton Mills, the oldest of Sydney's active estate agents and auctioneers, died on Saturday night, at Royal North Shore Hospital, following upon an operation which took place about a fortnight ago. Mr. Mills, who was in his 83rd year, although he never looked his years, had been ill only for six weeks.

With the death of Mr. Mills there passes one of Sydney's most picturesque and lovable figures. John Yelverton Mills' top hat and cheerful face were conspicuous in the city for very many years. A dapper, fresh-complexioned little figure, whose glossy top hat and frock coat recalled the sartorial niceties of other days, Mr. Mills was one of Sydney's personalities. Practically right up to the time of his death, he maintained all the vivacity and mental alertness of men of much younger years. Only in a chronological sense was Mr. Mills old; in spirits and in the things that made for cheerful optimism, he was always something of a merry-hearted youth. What is sometimes the base metal of sour old age he transmuted into the gold and splendour of youth, by his vivacity and his quiet charm of personality.

MR. J. Y. MILLS.

A resident of Lindfield, into whose life he had entered enthusiastically, Mr. Mills was born in Marsden Street, Parramatta, and was the son of the Rev. John Mills, of Checkley, Dundas, New South Wales. The latter had a school in the street in which Mr. J. Y. Mills was born, and later became a Methodist minister. Sir Chas. Mackellar, M.L.C., and other well-known personalities were among the Rev. John Mills' pupils.

Few men could take their memories back, with the freshness that Mr. Mills could recall them, to the far-off days when Sydney and its environs were in the making; when aristocrats in rich livery hunted the dingoes in places where there are now populous suburbs. In the subdivision of not a few of which Mr. Mills played a leading part — the days, in short, when the wilderness was being tamed and subdued and there grew out of it the city and the metropolis that we know to-day. Of those days, Mr. Mills could talk for hours. He was a man of wide activities. Only in August of last year, in a public appeal for the completion of the Avon and Cordeaux dams, and the construction also of the Warragamba dam, Mr. Mills recalled the fact that he took up the completion of the Prospect Dam on the death of Mr. McGuian, the first contractor.

Mr. Mills' father, at whose private school he was educated, took him, and the other school boys down to the station to see the first train proudly puff and snort its way towards Parramatta. It was with some trepidation that people travelled in the train in those days. Apropos to this, Mr. Mills used to recall how Mrs. Nash, who owned the Woolpack Inn, was persuaded to take a trip into Sydney from Parramatta by train, but was filled with alarm on the train entering a tunnel, and, closing her eyes, started to recite the Lord's Prayer. Mr. Mills' father was one of the original shareholders in the private company which started the railway, but which found it impossible to carry its plans out in their entirety on account of the lack of labour.

It was Mr. J. Y. Mills who cut up what is now the township of Auburn, which he had proposed to call Burford, where his father's people came from in Oxfordshire. The railway authorities, however, very wisely thought that it would be confused with Burwood. Mr. Mills, his poetic thoughts lightly turning to Goldsmith, and to the idyllic pictures of "Sweet Auburn" thus decided to call it Auburn. With the cutting up and establishment of other new populous suburbs he was no less prominently associated.

Mr. Mills first set up in business as an estate agent and auctioneer, in Parramatta. Later he was joined in business by Mr. T. W. Bowden, and on the latter's death Mr. George Pile came in as a partner. The business was then known as Messrs. Mills and Pile, and later, as Messrs. Mills, Pile, and Wilson, but upon the dissolution of the partnership Mr. Mills carried on the old established business alone, and was in daily attendance at his office up to the time that illness overtook him. When the first resumptions were made at Darling Harbour for the railways, by the Public Works Department, Mr. Mills was appointed the Government Valuer on behalf of the Crown, to value and assess the compensation to be paid to the owners and other claimants. He was next appointed Government Valuer for the metropolitan area and water supply resumptions, and he initiated the assessments for wharf leases under the new ad valorem rates while he was appointed by Sir William Lyne as one of the first Royal Commissioners, to take evidence bearing on the Public Works Department, including the railways.

He was part owner, with Sir John Lackey, and Mr. R. B. Wallace, of Nubba Station, in the 'eighties. It was the firm of Messrs. Mills and Pile that put the bridge across the lagoon at Manly, and subdivided Queenscliff. Mr. Mills was a member of the Geographical Society.

Mr. Mills was keenly interested in music. He started the Glee Club in Parramatta, and was prominently associated also with the establishment of the Parramatta Harmonic Society and the Parramatta Philharmonic Society. He was a life member of the Royal Philharmonic Society, and was on the committee of that body for many years. He was also a vice-president of It. He was also closely connected with the formation of the Mosman Musical Society, and the Roseville Musical Society.

Mr. Mills' first wife was a daughter of Mr. Thomas Wheeton Bowden, of the firm of Messrs. Bowden and Allen, solicitors. His second wife, who is still living, is a daughter of Inspector Read, of the Police Force. He has left a son - Mr. Edgar Yelverton Mills and six daughters - Mrs. C. E. Watts, of Keepit Homestead, Manilla; Mrs. A. G. Lear, of Moss Vale; Miss Lynn Mills, the well-known vocalist, and Misses Ella, Meta, and Susie Mills. One son died many years ago.

There will be a funeral service in Wood Coffill's chapel, 810 George Street, this evening, at 5 o'clock. The funeral will take, place on Tuesday morning at Mount Victoria, and will leave the city by the 9.25 a.m. train.



**Sydney Mail, Wed 26 Feb 1913**

REAL ESTATE REMINISCENCES. [J. Y. MILLS]

IN THE EARLY DAYS.

The story of the rise and fall of real estate values in and around Sydney makes very interesting reading. With it are bound up many of the leading events in the progress of the State, and many other “incidents,” which, as this article shows, are not readily connected in the public mind with the buying and selling of land. The story of how Auburn got its railway station is a typical instance of this. In the early days auction sales were conducted on very different lines to what they are now, the day of the brass band, the free trip, and the free luncheon being but memories of the past.

The real estate market in the early days was a very different proposition from what it is to-day. Then there was no organisation of any kind to look after the interests of the auctioneers — or of the buyers — and many things were done that nowadays would be considered hardly up to the standard of good business morals. These were the “good old days” when a big sale was looked upon as a holiday event, and father, mother, and the family were trooped along to enjoy the day's outing. Mr. J. Y. Mills, one of the oldest auctioneers in Sydney, tells some interesting stories of these times. It was the usual thing to provide a brass band for the occasion, and, of course, the “tucker” and the railway, coach, or boat trip were free. Naturally, many took advantage of the opportunity to spend a day in the country, at the seaside, or wherever the land was situated, with no intention of becoming landowners; but it was always necessary to have a crowd, so that a few hangers-on were not so objectionable as they would otherwise have been. So accustomed did the people become to these free passes that they simply would not go to a sale if it cost them anything to do so. “On one occasion,” said Mr. Mills, “I remember my partner, Mr. Pile, and I having to conduct a big sale at Campbelltown — the Denham Court estate. There was a good deal of expense involved, so we decided to charge 2s 6d per seat in the special train that was to be run, the arrangement being that we should refund the money to all who bought blocks. One man, however, absolutely refused to enter the train unless he got his usual free ticket. He said he was a prospective buyer, and we had no right to charge him for a railway ticket. After some haggling, we decided to take him on chance, and to our astonishment he turned out to be one of the best bidders of the day, purchasing something like £1200 worth of land.”

The Bank Smash.

The market has had many ups and downs since the early days. The first real boom that was experienced was in the thirties, when some surprisingly big figures were paid for both city and country lots. Then things fell flat, and the coming of the bank smash settled everything for quite a number of years. Indeed, so dear did money become then that it was possible to purchase a four-roomed cottage and a fair-sized allotment of land for a £20 note. Most of the big people were involved in the smash, and in the subsequent lottery of their estates — where it was a case of “all prizes, no blanks”— hundreds of people became landowners who otherwise might never have owned a foot. “In this connection,” said Mr. Mills, “it is interesting to know, that the late Mr. Mitchell, of Mitchell Library fame, was hit very heavily, and should really have lost his all. But curiously, when the London agents were arranging for the taking over of the shareholders' estates, they decided to ignore Mr. Mitchell's ‘small holding up-country’ as being worthless. It was a very fortunate occurrence for Mr. Mitchell, for that 'worthless' property was none other than the site of what is now one of the most valuable coalfields in the world — in the Newcastle district.”

The Gold Rush.

BUSINESS throughout the State continued very bad right up to the fifties, when the gold rush had a wonderfully bracing effect, arid sent prices away up to a level never before reached. Much a speculation was indulged in, and some of it turned out anything but successful.

In the Parramatta, district, for instance, many blocks were sold at figures considerably beyond their true value. In the township the late Mr. J.H. Plunkett, then Attorney-General, gave £1500 for a block which, after he had held it for several years, was resold for £300. Quite a number of subdivisions were made about this time, the dates of which are fixed for all time in the names that were given to the streets. Inkermann-street, Alma-street, Crimea-street, etc., are proof of the event that was uppermost in the public mind towards the close of the fifties. Mosman was also opened up at about the same time, as witness Raglan-street, named after the British general in the Crimea, and Canrobert-street, after Can Rober, the French general.

Among the principal properties cut up in the Parramatta district in those days were Want's Estate, which sold at enormous prices, and, later, the Government Domain. In regard to the former, the proprietors, as a means of popularising the sale, offered to grant free sites to all the denominations that cared to pick them, provided they built churches on the blocks within a certain time. Several of the religious bodies selected sites, but, curiously, none of them except the Roman Catholics managed to fulfil the conditions, and the latter only succeeded in holding on by laying the foundation of a building which they never completed.

Parramatta's Domain.

The cutting up of the Government Domain was brought about in a curious way. It was a big stretch of country, covering something like 4000 acres, and extending from the Western road across to the Windsor road and nearly out to Baulkham Hills. It was really the Governor's private park, but the people were allowed to use it at will. In Governor Fitzroy's time a pack of hounds were kept there, and hunting over the Domain was a popular sport, but when Lord Belmore came to the State his limited means induced him to let the reserve for farming and grazing purposes. This, of course, meant the exclusion of the public from what they had come to regard as an open recreation ground, and they made such a fuss about it and presented so many petitions to Parliament that the Government was forced to intervene. Instead of again throwing it open, however, they cut it up. The old Government House and 200 acres surrounding it were presented to the town of Parramatta, whilst the rest was sold at from £5 to £10 an acre. This was in the early seventies.

Some Big Transactions.

From that time till well into the eighties many big things were done in real estate in Sydney and the suburbs, Mr. Mills and his partner in one year selling £722,000 worth of land. Dulwich Hill and Marrickville were very popular with the speculator at that time, and much land was sold at from 10s to 20s a foot that is now worth at least £10 to £40. At Mosman and Chatswood, on the other hand, land brought more per acre then than it did for many years afterwards. Among Mr. Mills' city transactions was the block at the north-west corner of Liverpool and Pitt streets. At the auction the allotment was passed in, but a private buyer afterwards paid £4000 for it. In the course of a few years, without putting a penny's value on to it, he borrowed up to about £20,000; then the mortgagees sold it at that figure to recoup themselves. Another important sale was the land on which the A.M.P. building is now situated. When it came into the market Mr. Alexander Campbell paid £10,000 for it on behalf of the A.M.P., but, when the matter was brought before the directors, they repudiated it altogether, and Campbell was far-seeing enough to take it himself. However, the directors soon changed their minds, and paid out the sum asked for. The block next to the Paragon Hotel was another snap. It was sold on behalf of Mr. J. B. Watt, trustee for the Howe-Walker estate, for less than £ 1000, and later on it was bought by the United Finance Society for over £7000.

Careless Surveying.

Surveying was often very perfunctorily done in by-gone days, and as a result of the carelessness in laying out subdivisions many people have since had to suffer. Others have benefited, however, to no inconsiderable extent. Where Beecroft and Pennant Hills stand now, for instance, used to be a block known as the Dr. Savage grant. It was reputed to be 245 acres in extent; but when the surveyors went over it, for subdivisional purposes, they found that there were really 345 acres. A number of interlopers, getting wind of the fact, and taking advantage of the absence of the Savage family in England, “jumped” the area, and held on to it tenaciously for several years. Numerous attempts were made to recover it; then it was sold, with the “jumpers” thrown in, for about £500. When the intruders were eventually expelled the area was cut up and sold in small blocks at from £10 to £50 an acre. The cutting up of the Quid Pro Quo estate, on the Granville side of the Dog Trap-road, at Guildford — one of the lottery subdivisions of the old Bank of Australia — afforded another example of careless surveying. The man who was employed to do the work, instead of taking his tape over the ground, simply sat down in an hotel at Guildford and drew out his plan. On subsequent survey it was found that he had put in a whole row of five-acre blocks that were non-existent, and had marked off a number of others to which there was no access.

How Auburn Got Its Railway Station.

Auctioneers have sometimes had to resort to all kinds of subterfuge to make their lands sell, and one instance of this is told by Mr. Mills with great glee. He had an estate to dispose of almost midway between Rookwood and Granville, but as there was no railway station the prospect of getting buyers was very remote. At the same time a number of gentlemen — including Mr. Wetherall and Mr. John Sutherland — interested in the Newington estate were doing their utmost to get a railway station opened on that area in the hope of selling the land to advantage.

“One morning,” said Mr. Mills, “I was informed that those gentlemen were making great headway with their project, and had arranged to meet the Minister for Works, Sir John Lackey, at 11 o'clock in the morning two days later. It was their intention to present a petition from the residents on the estate for a railway station to be built there. Without losing a moment I got into communication with the Department, and arranged an interview with the Minister for the same morning — only an hour earlier. Then I carefully drafted a petition for a station at a point I named ‘Auburn,’ and spent a whole day in the saddle going the rounds of the people on the Newington and other estates in the district getting them to sign it. Most of them were prepared to sign their name to anything that was likely to be a benefit to the district, so that I found no difficulty in obtaining a formidable list. The next morning, punctually at 10 o'clock, I was at the Minister's office. We discussed the whole scheme, and I offered to give the Government a free grant of land on which to erect both a passenger station and a goods shed — in the public interest. The bait was good, and, before I left, I succeeded in inducing Sir John Lackey to add a minute to the petition stating that it was granted. As I walked, out. of the office I saw Mr. Sutherland and Mr. Wetherall seated in the passage waiting to be received by the Minister. They were granted their interview; but, of course, the result was nil, for not even a Minister for Works could grant two railway stations to one district — especially as the names on my petition were representative of the whole community. Anyhow, that is how the township of Auburn came to be founded.”

Living on the Game.

Real estate has always held a strong attraction for the speculator, and even in the early days there were dozens of men in Sydney who simply lived on the game — and the majority of them made money at it, too. Their rendezvous for many years was the famous Compagnoni’s restaurant, opposite the, old Victoria Theatre, in Pitt-street. Here different groups met every day and discussed business. So big were the overturns amongst them that it was a recognised rule that every time anyone cleared £1000 on a deal he had to “shout” champagne, all round. The fact that hardly any other liquor was ever on the table is fairly conclusive proof of the vast sums that were changing hands daily. One of the principal speculators used to declare that he could go to the city any day he liked and clear £1000 without much exertion. He certainly did it, too, as the books of one of the old-time auctioneers who did most of his business show. In the early eighties these speculators had a royal time among city properties. The then Lord Mayor was very keen on city improvement, and he succeeded in forming a special board whose duty it was to inspect and where necessary condemn buildings in every quarter. Quite a scare set in among property-owners, and all who had dilapidated structures were very eager to get rid of them. Naturally the speculators, day after day, followed up the tracks of this board, and immediately they learned that any block had been branded they stepped in and bought, often at a ridiculously low figure. Within a few hours they would usually have resold it to some city business firm or to some other speculator at a handsome profit. Many of the properties that were condemned during that campaign were situated in Pitt, George, Kent, York, Sussex, and others of the principal streets, so that their disposal was usually a very easy — and to the speculators a very profitable — matter.