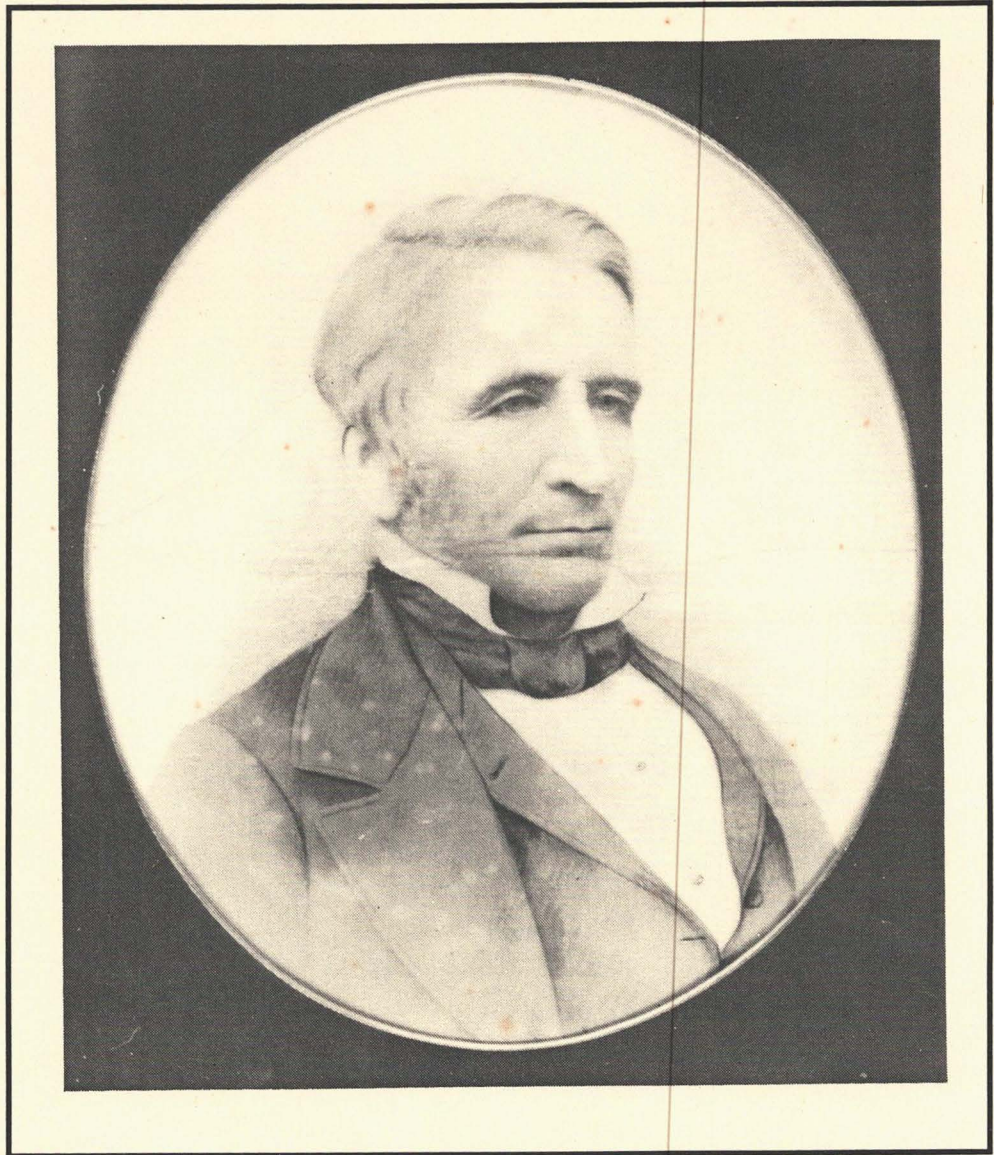


George Boyle White

1802 - 1876



by

Harry F Boyle O. A. M.

Paterson Historical Society Incorporated

Heritage Address 1995

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Contents

Introduction

George Boyle White

The Man	page 1
His Family	page 3
His Career	page 5
His Land	page 9
Epilogue	page 10
Endnotes	page 12
Select Bibliography	page 13

Illustrations

Cover: Portrait of G. B. White, on porcelain
Original in Mitchell Library

Gravestone of G. B. White, Rookwood Cemetery page 11
Photo: Jack Sullivan

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Introduction

I am pleased to write this Introduction to the publication of the 1995 Heritage Address given by Harry Boyle OAM on the life of George Boyle White. Harry is a well-known Hunter Valley historian and Life Member of the Paterson Historical Society. His knowledge and research of the early history of the Hunter Valley, particularly the Maitland and Paterson districts, has been invaluable not only to our Society but to other historical societies and individual researchers.

In this publication, Harry gives us an insight into the life and work of one of the colony's earliest surveyors, George Boyle White, who came to Australia as a young man in 1826. White's surveys were extremely important to the developing Hunter Valley and Harry's research shows how hard life was for him as he travelled across previously unsurveyed and difficult terrain. George Boyle White was a remarkable man who, to a certain extent, has been overlooked by history but thanks to Harry Boyle and this book, he is much better known to us, not only the explorer and surveyor, but also the man himself.

Shirley Threlfo

GEORGE BOYLE WHITE

THE MAN

A young man in a young land, he
Dreams noble dreams of youth,
And foremost in the van of years
He sows the seeds of truth

Roderick Quinn

The subject of this paper, George Boyle White, is a most important figure in the history of the Hunter, Paterson and Williams Valleys. He would have known personally all the early settlers. He did most of the surveying in the area, measured the settlers' grants, and laid out most of the towns we know today. He was a keen observer and recorded all he saw and did for fifty years in the volumes of his diaries still existent.

George Boyle White was educated in Ireland, at Croydon School, until twelve years of age when he left to go to Gibraltar with his mother, brother and step family. In 1815, he returned to England and furthered his education at Startfortn Hall School prior to entering the services of the Honourable East India Company's ships where he advanced to become a first-class navigator. During his time in the E. I. Company's service, White visited Sydney in 1819, and China in 1821 and 1822.¹

White's step-father was posted to Australia and emigrated with his family. At this time, White himself decided to accompany them, and so entered the history of Australia. George Boyle White reached Sydney by the ship CAWDREY on 7 January 1826. Other members of his family had arrived the day before, by another vessel.²

The only physical likeness of George Boyle White is a portrait on porcelain which gives no indication of his physique. {His step-brother was six foot four inches in height (1.9 m) and of great physical strength!} ³ He must have had a strong constitution to survive the arduous years spent surveying the country, living on the salt meat and flour that made up the bulk of his rations, and sleeping out in all weather.

His contemporaries held him in high regard. He could write a scathing letter when the occasion demanded and his integrity was never questioned. There is no doubt that he was outspoken, and would not be talked down to. For example, in 1837, he wrote a lengthy and strongly worded letter to the Colonial Secretary, seeking the grant of land approved for him in 1826 but withheld because he

took up a position in the Survey Department, to no material benefit to himself after twelve years. He concluded this spirited letter in these words:

It was not my object when I first contemplated a voyage of 16000 miles if individual exertion could prevent it that twelve years should elapse without bolstering my condition. I may add that by accepting service under the Government my success in the colony bears but poor proportion to that of most of my fellow voyagers.

The land could not be withheld from him any longer under the circumstances, but the Colonial Secretary, in instructing that he be notified of receiving it, concluded:

Inform him at the same time that if he proposes to continue any correspondence with the Government I expect he will abstain from such very improper language as that in which some part of the letter now under reply is couched. He is not warranted in a letter to be brought under my eye to report that for want of direct individual interest he has failed to obtain advancement in his time. As relates to this Government, such an assertion is unfounded as it is offensive. However much I might regret the necessity it will be my duty if anything disrespectful shall again appear in his communications with the Government to visit the offence with my highest displeasure.⁴

He may have had an easier passage through life if he had been a little reserved. This, however, was not his character.

He was described as 'a fine gentleman of a type rarely seen in this country at the present time', with 'aristocratic features'. He was industrious, educated, intelligent, meticulous, courageous and respectable.⁵ His surveying work was accurate, he was persevering, methodical and steady. It can be fairly assumed that he was highly respected, both professionally, and socially.

He was considerate to his convict servants, providing them with a drachm at the end of the day's work.⁶ In his *private* diaries, which were not meant for public scrutiny, he was both critical and gave credit where it was due. He had pet names for people he did not like, such as *the pot-bellied speaker* or *the old thief*. He was sickened by the avarice he saw around him and left a little poem to describe his feelings:

A little stealing is a dangerous part
But stealing large is noble art
'Tis mean to rob a hen roost of a hen
But stealing millions make us gentlemen

He enjoyed reading the classics and kept a special journal wherein he noted passages from literature that impressed him.⁷

HIS FAMILY

I am the family face;
Flesh perishes, I live on,
Projecting trait and trace
Through time and time anon,
And leaping from place to place
Or oblivion.
The years heired feature that can
In curve and voice and eye
Despise the human span
Of durance - that is I;
The eternal thing in man,
That heeds no call to die.

Thomas Hardy

George Boyle White was born at 4.00 pm on 24 August 1802 at Bantry Bay, Cork, Ireland, the son of Honorah and Boyle White. Boyle White was a Royal Navy captain and master of H. M. ship SANDWICH. His grandfather was Boyle White, Earl of Bantry, and the family assisted in the landing of the French at Bantry Bay.

Boyle White married Honorah O'Sullivan on 12 December 1801. It appears that two marriages were recorded because, for a reason unknown, Honorah made a sworn declaration on 18 March 1806 that she was legally married to Boyle White on 22 May 1802 in the County of Kinsale. This declaration was witnessed by J. Rennie, minister of St Clement's Lane, Middlesex.

Another son, William, was born 3 January 1806 at noon. Their father, Boyle White, died the following month, 19 February 1806. Honorah White later married George Henry Green and had more children. George Henry Green, an officer in the British army, brought his own family to Australia, and George Boyle White joined them.⁸

One of George Boyle White's half-brothers, John Henry Green, was appointed commissariat officer at the first settlement at Melville Island. He brought five buffalo cows and a bull to the settlement, believed to be the founding parents of the untold thousands of buffalo that later roamed the Northern Territory. He also introduced Timor ponies to northern Australia. Unfortunately, John Henry Green was killed by the natives on 2 November 1827. When found, he had

seventeen mortal wounds, three spears through his throat and his head smashed in with waddies.⁹

While working as an assistant surveyor in the vicinity of Singleton, George Boyle White was taken ill with a sickness that paralysed his limbs. He was conveyed to Castle Forbes where he was nursed back to health by the Mudie family. Here he evidently fell in love with Maria, a daughter of James Mudie, for a later entry in his journal states: 'will be spliced to Maria for life'.¹⁰ On 17 June 1830, he married Maria at St Phillip's Church, Sydney. The entry in the church register (no. 236) states:

George Boyle White of this Parish, Asst. Surveyor, a bachelor, and Maria Grieg Mudie of this parish, a spinster, were married in this church by licence, this seventeenth day of June, in the year 1830, by me, signed William Cowper, Chaplain.

This marriage was solemnised between us ... George Boyle White ... Maria Grieg Mudie, in the presence of A. B. Sparke of Sydney ... James Mudie of Castle Forbes Hunter River.¹¹

The couple spent their honeymoon at Tempe, returning to Sydney on 28 June. George Boyle White requested that his step-father bid on John Rotten's grant Greenwood when it was put up for a sheriff's sale but for some reason Green allowed Greenwood to be bought by a man named Farrell. Some time later, George Boyle White heard that Farrell was willing to sell Greenwood for what he had paid for it and in partnership with his step-father, George Boyle White purchased the property.¹²

On 20 July 1830, George Boyle White commenced to build a home at Greenwood. He kept meticulous accounts, costing everything down to the last nail and hinge. Much cedar was used throughout. The total cost of erecting the house was £579.10.4. It was finished on 6 October 1831.¹³ He did not have much time to enjoy his new home because he was chosen to accompany Thomas Mitchell on his first inland expedition.

George Boyle White and Maria's children were:

Henry O'Sullivan, born 11 November 1831
Honorah, born 21 August 1834
Helena Isabelle, born 5 January 1836
Boyle, born 27 August 1837
Maria Larnach, born 28 July 1844, and died March 1848.

The marriage does not appear to have been a happy one. George Boyle White described the situation in his journal thus:

The misery that our union created is to be attributed to her two sisters, to the elder especially, who is a bitch in every sense of the word and the father who was an unprincipled blackguard.¹⁴

George Boyle White's only surviving daughter, Helena Isabelle, married John Dowling Brown of Coulston on 26 June 1855. Brown died on 30 June 1899, and Helena died on 14 September 1918, at Double Bay.¹⁵

Maria, George Boyle White's wife of twenty-six years, died at Greenwood on 11 April 1856, after a five-week illness.¹⁶

George Boyle White's mother, Honorah, died at Goulburn two months later, on 10 June 1856, aged seventy-six years. The information on her death certificate was supplied by John James Martry who was the second husband of Helena Green, George Boyle White's half-sister.¹⁷

HIS CAREER

We therefore shall designedly rely on that most rational,
most certain test that she herself propounds.
She bids man judge by deeds and not by words, to taste
the fruit and then deduce that nature of the tree.

Unknown

Having arrived in Australia at his own expense, looking for a means of making a living, George Boyle White, being a naval surveyor, volunteered to accompany H. M. SUCCESS for the purpose of surveying the coast and roadstead of the Swan River. Some difference of opinion about salary caused him not to go. He obtained a position of sixth clerk in the colonial secretary's office on an annual salary of £110, but meanwhile, he advised the government that provided he was placed on the strength of the surveying department, he would have no objection to go any place where his services may be required. He had applied previously to John Oxley, surveyor general, stating that he had voluntarily been with Henry Dangar for some time acquainting himself with the method of surveying in the colony. Dangar's opinion of him was favourable and at John Oxley's request, White was attached to the surveying department in February 1827.¹⁸

What an asset he proved to the surveyor general! His willingness to go anywhere, his accuracy and his dedication made him the hardest-working surveyor in the department.

Some idea of the volume of work he achieved can be gleaned from the 1827 records. This includes survey of the coast from Broken Bay to Port Jackson, survey of farms at Newcastle and other portions in the parishes of Alnwick, Stanford, Stockrington, Gosforth, Branxton, Belford, Warkworth, Whittingham, Auckland, Sedgfield, Marwood, Stanhope, Wolfingham, Butterwick, Uffington, Lemington and Nelson, and survey of St Matthew parish, adjacent to the towns of Windsor and Richmond.¹⁹

Towards the end of the year he made the acquaintance of the new surveyor general, Thomas Mitchell, when he accompanied him, Hamilton Hume and Lieutenant Wilford over the proposed Hume line of road to Bathurst. This trip took fourteen days and Thomas Mitchell wrote of the pleasure he experienced with 'good company and good weather'. Here began the respect that they each regarded for the other for the rest of their lives.²⁰

Thomas Mitchell was a man of determined character. He brooked no opposition to his orders, accepted no excuses and was practically a law unto himself. Governor Darling, in his dispatch on Major Mitchell, wrote:

...(he is) a good practical surveyor and an excellent draftsman - beyond this he possesses no merit, he is a man of no argument and is totally unequal to the management and proper conduct of an extensive department. But if he were more capable his ill temper would render his talent abortive.²¹

In 1828, White was with Mitchell, surveying trigonometrically farms, reserves and section lines in the parishes of Uffington, Seaham, Butterwick, Alnwick, Hexham, Auckland, Middlehope, Sedgfield, Maitland, Gosforth, Branxton, Stanhope, Belford, Rothbury and Falbrook.²²

In 1829, they surveyed farms and traverses of Falbrook, Lamb's Creek, mountain ranges in the parishes of Stanhope, Marwood and Wolfingham, farms at Wallis Creek, and other surveys at Hexham, Rothbury, Branxton, Chichester and Williams River. He took time to visit his brother William who was staying with Captain Aubin at Maitland.²³

White subsequently succumbed to rheumatic fever in the vicinity of Singleton and was taken to Castle Forbes. Peter Cunningham, surgeon, was sent for and found him seriously ill. Cunningham wrote that the illness resulted from sleeping in wet clothes. It started in his feet and extended over the whole of his body. Every muscle was affected, his pulse was 120, he had swelling of the joints, was delirious and in a precarious state. When Cunningham had to leave,

he sent for Dr Little to take over. To these two men, and the nursing he received at Castle Forbes, he attributed his life. He recovered, and then continued a busy schedule until late May 1830 when he obtained a month's leave to get married.²⁴

On returning to work, he surveyed farms in the parishes of Alnwick, Maitland and Branxton, laid out allotments in the town of Maitland, surveyed the road from Maitland to Patrick's Plains, surveyed farms in the parish of Gotha and the village reserve in the parish of Houghton, made traverses of the new northern road, the Paterson River, Fal Brook, Carrow Brook and the mountain ranges in the county of Durham. He surveyed the road from Maitland to Newcastle, marked the boundaries of Newcastle, surveyed the Newcastle church grant, the Australian Agricultural Company's grant, part of Hunter's River, the reserve and police paddock at Jerry's Plains, the road in the vicinity of Paterson's River, Swan's lagoon, and mountain ranges near Singleton, through the parishes of Carrow and Glendon and between the Williams and Allyn Rivers. In fact, White laid out every town in the Hunter Valley, on the three principal rivers, with the exception of Singleton.²⁵

During this year White accompanied Thomas Mitchell on the first of Mitchell's three inland expeditions in search of the mythical river, Kindur, that had been described by the escaped convict 'George the barber'. White was second in command of the expedition. White and Mitchell had a drink of mountain dew together to toast the start of the journey. When they were in unexplored country that was in a very dry region, White would go ahead alone and search for water, a brave act in a region where aboriginals were showing extreme hostility, guard having to be mounted each night to avoid surprise attacks. The aborigines eventually murdered part of the party, whom they surprised. White kept a detailed journal of the expedition.²⁶

The following years were full of the same work. It is no wonder that his bullocks were dying of exhaustion, but he still had to explain their loss to Mitchell. When an analysis is made of the miles travelled and the work done, coupled with the fact that the bullocks were poor and overworked when White received them from Newcastle, it is easy to understand why the animals succumbed. Everything had to be explained to Thomas Mitchell, why this had not been done, or why he was not in such and such a place, and so on. The amount of paper that was used in correspondence by him must surely be a record. Mitchell even queried the sugar that was found to be adulterated asking George Boyle White to explain. White stated that it was found to be adulterated

with loamy soil to the ratio of two to one, and he stated that it was purchased at John Smith's store, giving the impression that was sufficient explanation.²⁷

White was promoted to surveyor. In 1838, he became a Justice of the Peace. In 1848, he was out on the Western Plains and by 1852, he was becoming disillusioned when all that he could see ahead of him was a prospect of continual slavery, with little thanks. In such a vein he wrote to his son and it is evident from his writing that illness was affecting him. He saw Dr Sloane who wrote a certificate to say that he was suffering liver disease and 'bush scurvy'. He was evidently referred to a doctor in Sydney, a Dr Stolworthy, who confirmed Dr Sloane's diagnosis. In July 1853, White retired from the survey department and in 1855, was granted a pension. He had completed twenty-six years of dedicated service.²⁸

In 1856, White was in private practice in High Street, West Maitland, in partnership as surveyor, architect and civil engineer, with M. de Courcy Nagle. He then lived in Bourke Street.²⁹ As a civil surveyor, White subdivided many properties for sale including such well-known ones as Belle Vue, Millers Forest, Dunmore and Bona Vista.³⁰

On 12 January 1858, a petition signed by fifty prominent citizens of the combined electorate of Northumberland and Hunter, requested White to stand as their representative.³¹ He agreed, and became a well-respected politician. During his term of office, he successfully presented several petitions including one from wine growers seeking to be able to sell small quantities of wine, one from E. J. H. Knapp, asking that land promised in 1826 be granted to him, and one from 132 inhabitants of Singleton concerning the direction of the railway line to Singleton.³² On 30 April 1858, White was appointed chairman of a select committee to inquire into and report upon the management, past and present, of the colony's survey department, with liberty to send for persons and papers.

As chairman of this select committee, he quoted his old head of department, Sir Thomas Mitchell.

The fate of surveyors employed has in general been unfortunate. Some have died miserably, amongst them two of my own sons. Madness has deprived the service of others. The premature old age brought on by constant exposure in the field has been but too apparent even in cases where old surveyors have left the service without any retiring provision.

It is easy to imagine the feeling that George Boyle White, now an ill man, would put into that quote.

Parliament was dissolved in 1859. White either did not seek re-election or was not elected.

HIS LAND

I am he who paved the way
That you may walk at ease today.

Dame Mary Gilmore

Although White commenced work in the colonial secretary's office soon after his arrival in the colony, it soon was evident that this kind of work did not suit him. He made application for a grant of land, stating that he was afraid that the confinement in the office would prove injurious to his health.³³

His application came before the land board on 23 December 1826. His referees were his step-father, G. H. Green, paymaster of the 57th regiment, and John Bingle, who had known him in India. His grant of 1280 acres was approved but in the interval he had been accepted as an assistant surveyor. The result of obtaining this position was that the grant, dated 6 January 1827, no. 152, for 1280 acres, was withheld.³⁴

Major Mudie, no doubt with his daughter's interests at heart, a month after the wedding, applied to the governor for a marriage portion for Maria.³⁵ This was approved and was chosen on a tributary of Glendon Brook with the native name of Mirannie. When the deeds were executed, they were made out in the name of Alexander Brodie Sparke and Leslie Duguid of Newtown as trustees for Maria. They were given permission to sell the land as long as monies were held in trust for Maria.³⁶ Six years later, George Boyle White purchased the land alongside Maria's grant and the following year, claimed the estate that was withheld from him in 1827. After due consideration, this was allowed and he selected land in the County of Wellington that he named Gurragooran. In 1842, White purchased three blocks of land at Lochinvar totalling eighty-seven acres, and 640 acres from John Lanarch, giving him in all 2972 acres.³⁷

About this time, he also bought out his step-father G. H. Green's interest in Greenwood. From this estate, he entered samples of wine in the first Upper Hunter and Patrick's Plains Show, gaining second prize to James Glennie. Controversy was caused by this owing to a mistake by the secretary, John James Martyr, White's half-brother-in-law, and secretary to the show association.³⁸

In 1847, he was in financial difficulties, including an indebtedness to John Eales to the amount of £110, leading to Eales asking that his land be sequestrated.³⁹ He continued to manage his wife's property, Mirannie, after her death in 1856. This was then a sheep raising property. In 1859, he leased Mirannie, together with a thousand sheep and twenty-four rams, to George Brooker of Gresford for £140 per annum. A year later, this lease was extended for a further seven years. The stock then was 623 ewes, 384 lambs and three rams, in all, 1010 animals.⁴⁰

From this time, White moved about, becoming a tenant farmer at Coulston in 1863, Norwood in 1865, and Cardoness in 1866 from where he appears to have finally sold his farming implements, cattle and poultry, and so on.⁴¹

In 1867 he was declared bankrupt which, on top of ill health was a severe blow. He retreated to Paterson to live for a few years and while there, was a witness in an arson case in 1872.

EPILOGUE

Take now the fruits of our labour
Nourish and guard it with care;
For our youth is spent and our backs are bent
And the snow is in our hair.

Frank Hudson

George Boyle White's life proved most useful to the young colony and its government. For the results he achieved, the rewards were petty. In his later years, he considered himself a failure. Writing to his son, he states:

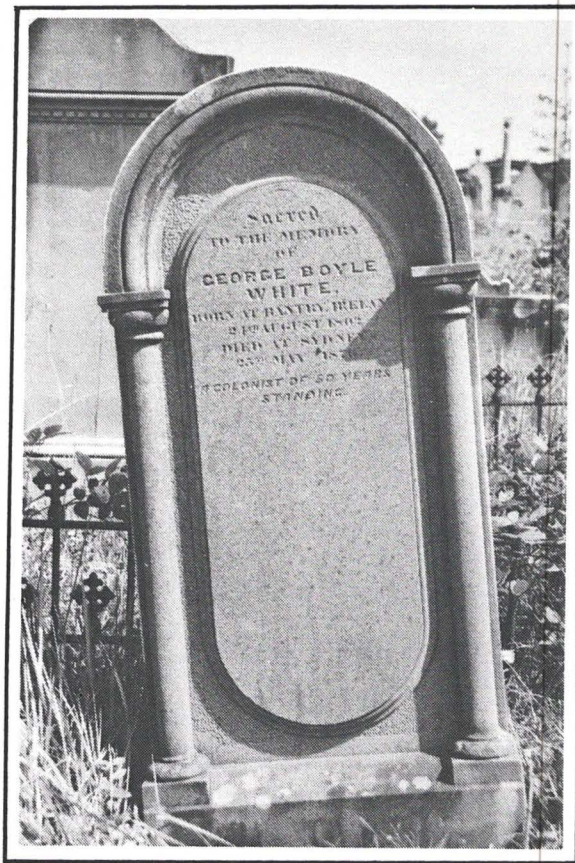
I always seem to miss the exact point of success. I get near it, but never touch it. I am afraid my life has been - always will be, a failure.

He was anything but a failure.⁴²

He spent his last and declining years at Raymond Terrace, near where he said he first landed, at Pennington's, when he came to the Hunter River in 1827.⁴³ Fishing, or entertaining or visiting friends seem to have filled his time. It would have been a pleasant existence for a healthy man but he was very ill. He remarked in his diary: 'the good things in life are not for him I am living by suction only'.⁴⁴

The last entry, in the last of the diaries he kept for fifty years, was on 1 October 1875. He travelled to Double Bay where he died at 12.30 am, on 25 May 1876, in the seventy-fourth year of his age. By his own request, he was buried without religious rites, at the Necropolis, Rookwood.⁴⁵

In the words of a journalist in the *Town and Country Journal* of 1872, (three years before his death), 'he had been insulted by the government and forgotten by the country'.⁴⁶ -



Headstone of George Boyle White
Rookwood Cemetery, Sydney

Photography - Jack Sullivan

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- 8 G. B. White's Papers, M. L. B598-628, Letter Books B650-653, Literary Notes 653.
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- 10 E. Hill, The Territory, p. 49. The Etruscan, vol. 12, no. 3, September 1963.
- 11 Diary of G. B. White, M. L. B598-628.
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- 15 Diary of G. B. White, M. L. B598-628.
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- 17 M. M., 17 April 1856.
- 18 Death certificate, Honora Green.
- 19 Journal of G. B. White, M. L. B598-628.
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- 22 Despatches, 1827.
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- 28 *ibid.*
- 29 M. M., 18 October 1856.
- 30 M. L. D181-183.
- 31 M. M., 21 January 1858.
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- 36 Land Titles Office, Book W-159, Z-772, B6-465, B76-305, B85-420, B87-423, B96-314, B100-392, B103-392, B103-393, B103-576, B123-319.
- 37 *ibid.*
- 38 M. M., 7 and 21 March 1846.
- 39 A. O. file on Bankrupt Estate, 1691/2, Insolvency File 8045/6, is missing. A search by Archives Office staff failed to locate it and it is thought to be mistakenly filed at another location.
- 40 Letter Books, G. B. White, M. L. B598-628.
- 41 M. M. 18 September 1856.
- 42 G. B. White's final diary, 1875, M. L. 628.
- 43 *ibid.*
- 44 *ibid.*
- 45 S. M. H., 26 May 1876. Death Certificate in possession of writer.
- 46 T. & C., 27 January 1872.

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Town and Country Journal

The Etruscan

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