

Towser's Huts, Cobar, New South Wales: Historic Ruin or Ruined History?

HAROLD BOUGHEN

The town of Cobar in western New South Wales, with its long mining and pastoral history, is an extremely fertile area for historical and archaeological investigation. One important site, located just outside the town, is Towser's Huts, the remains of a group of stone-walled buildings of unusual design, including uncharacteristic semicircular fireplaces. A local mythology has grown up about these buildings and a well-meaning but misguided attempt at restoration in the late 1960s and early 1970s was unsuccessful and placed the remainder of the ruins in jeopardy. During an investigation into the history of the site, the author, an employee of Cobar Mines Pty Ltd, uncovered an aspect of the role of the non-British immigrant in the development of rural Australia and of the mining industry in particular. From oral history, documentary evidence, and analysis of the building remains, a tantalising glimpse of one immigrant's life in an outback Australian town was obtained.

INTRODUCTION

It would appear that these "original motel units" consisted of nine units of which there was an "executive suite" of two rooms (these are the rooms which have been restored partially). There was also a dining room which is interesting because of the arch in the fire place has been built with rock and clay and without the benefit of any support bars [*sic*]. To complete the "motel complex" is the three roomed residence of Mr Towser who it is understood was a native of Sweden and the units were let mainly to Italians who were "charcoal burners" to supply charcoal to the mines.'

The above unattributed and somewhat ungrammatical item, was printed in a special edition of *The Cobar Age* on 1 July 1969. The edition was produced to mark the celebration of the centenary of the discovery of copper at Cobar. This brief description is effectively the only recorded history of Towser's Huts. The remains of this series of stone buildings are located on the northern slope of Fort Bourke Hill, approximately 3 kilometres from the town of Cobar. Because of the lack of knowledge of the true history of the huts and their occupants and because of the deteriorating condition of the ruins, it was considered that detailed recording of the site and some research into the background of the buildings, was warranted. Furthermore, the building materials and building design were somewhat atypical of the general style prevailing in the area and it was thought that this might be significant both to the history of the buildings and of Cobar.

The history of the buildings may be divided into three phases:

1. Early history covering the period of construction and use.
2. Middle history covering the period of anonymity and disuse.
3. Modern history covering their 'rediscovery', reconstruction and current condition.

To investigate the first two phases, it was decided to search through local records which might be able to confirm dates, owners, origins and uses of the buildings. If possible, this investigation would be extended to archival records in other areas and would also include retrieval of any photographic records that might exist. Long-term residents of the town,

who might have first-hand knowledge, would also be interviewed. With respect to the modern history of the site, records from local newspapers, from tourist publications and from the service club involved in the restoration, would be examined. Members of the club still able to be contacted, who were involved in the project, would also be interviewed to determine the extent of restoration and the contribution of the restoration to the current status of the ruins.

The site would be surveyed to record the ruins in some detail and photographic records would be made, as appropriate. Close visual inspection of the ruins would attempt to distinguish the remaining features of the restoration and also any features which might be pertinent to the overall history and significance of the buildings.

EARLY AND MIDDLE HISTORY

It has generally been recorded in the local history of Cobar, that Towser's Huts were constructed in the 1890s and were rented to miners of that time.¹ Since the area adjacent to the site of the huts was occupied by the Fort Bourke Mine of The Cobar Gold Mines Ltd, the records of mining leases in the area were considered to be a potential source of information. The area is currently held by Cobar Mines Pty Ltd and that company possesses significant quantities of archival material, particularly in the form of lease plans. A search of these files resulted in the discovery of a plan of Portion 265, County of Robinson, Parish of Cobar (Fig. 1).² This plan was made in 1902 and shows two stone buildings, a shed and one stone hut. These are, without doubt, Towser's Huts, thus confirming the existence of at least some of the buildings early in this century. There are several other interesting features shown on this plan. First, there is the name of the man for whom the survey was carried out, Antonio Tozzie, clearly an Italian name. (Investigations have suggested that the spelling of the surname is either an Anglicisation or a misspelling and the 'correct' Italian spelling, Tozzi, will be used in all future references.) Second, is the fact that a large part of one of the stone buildings and a corner of the second, fall outside of the surveyed area. Third, the area, which was apparently held as a Mining Tenement for residential purposes under a Miner's Right, was surrounded by and excluded from the Gold Lease (GL) 48, held by The Cobar Gold Mines Ltd. Fourth, there is the existence shown within the surveyed area of a stake

oxides for the smelter and 'only Italians could stand the heat'.⁵ Sulphur dioxide is likely to be another significant hazard with this stage of the ore treatment.

Italians in Australia

The role of Italians in the early settlement of Australia is an interesting one, although records are scarce until 1871, when country of birth was incorporated into the census record. Some apparently arrived with the gold rushes in the 1850s⁶ and a number were brought out in the 1860s as plasterers, 'the most skilled in the world', to carry out the intricate plaster work that was in vogue during this mid-Victorian period of architectural style.⁷ In 1891 there were 3890 persons of Italian birth in Australia, of which 1477 resided in New South Wales. There were 248 of these who were female. In 1901, there were 1577 Italians in New South Wales, including 334 females.⁸ Generally, Italians at this time tended to fill a fairly narrow range of occupations, including restaurants, fruit and vegetable growing and vending, fishing, cane-cutting, and to some extent mining and timber-getting,⁹ particularly in Western Australia and Broken Hill.¹⁰ In Western Australia, migration was often arranged by prospective employers and, as a Royal Commission on the subject in 1902 found, 'the Italians were hard working labourers who were anxious to work and save to acquire independence and a small property of their own'.¹¹ 'They had the virtue of docility and temperance and the ability to work in the hottest of weather: consequently they were sought after by contractors, *a few of whom were themselves Italian*' (emphasis mine).¹² This was another representation of the findings of the Commissions carried out in Western Australia in 1902 and 1904. Borrie also reports that 'In contrast to the Australians who usually lived in wooden houses, the Italians built many stone houses. Generally, however, these followed Australian designs with wide verandahs'.¹³

Colonial laws with respect to the naturalisation of aliens varied from colony to colony. In New South Wales, this took the form of 'letters of denization' from the Governor to respectable foreign persons, which gave the rights of British subjects provided an oath of allegiance was taken within a year. Subsequently, a residential qualification of five years was introduced. There were no restrictions on the holding of real and personal property by aliens of friendly powers and the only disability arising from not being naturalised was the lack of the vote and the inability to hold public office.¹⁴

Italians in Cobar

Italians living in Cobar in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century included the names Padula, Chaperoni, Morelli, Agostinelli, Rossetti and Dalgarno.¹⁵ Of these, most is known about Michael Angelo Padula, who travelled overland to Cobar from South Australia in 1889. He was naturalised in 1894 at the age of 43 years.¹⁶ He was a jeweller by trade and owned several shops in the town and served as an alderman on the Cobar Municipal Council.¹⁷ He was also a musician of some note, singing and playing the harp and he was involved in the local music and drama group. Dalgarno was a pharmacist and Rossetti worked at the Cornish Scottish and Australian Mine. The latter was injured by an explosion of dynamite that had been cached in a stove.¹⁸ M. Scarlatti was injured working on the surface at the Great Cobar Mine, on 14 February 1899, when a log rolled onto his foot.¹⁹ This man may have been involved in ore calcining at the time. A. Marconi suffered a crushed and amputated finger, by a fall of rock underground at the Great Cobar Mine, on 19 March 1901.²⁰

Italians appear to have formed a significant segment of the Cobar community, ranging from successful businessmen to labourers at the mines. Searches of the indexes to pre-1900 records of the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, failed to show any evidence for Antonio Tozzi.²¹ Two records, one showing the marriage of Leopoldo Tozzi and the other recording the birth of a child to this family, were listed. This demonstrated the presence of the Tozzi name in New South Wales at the appropriate time. No evidence for a name such

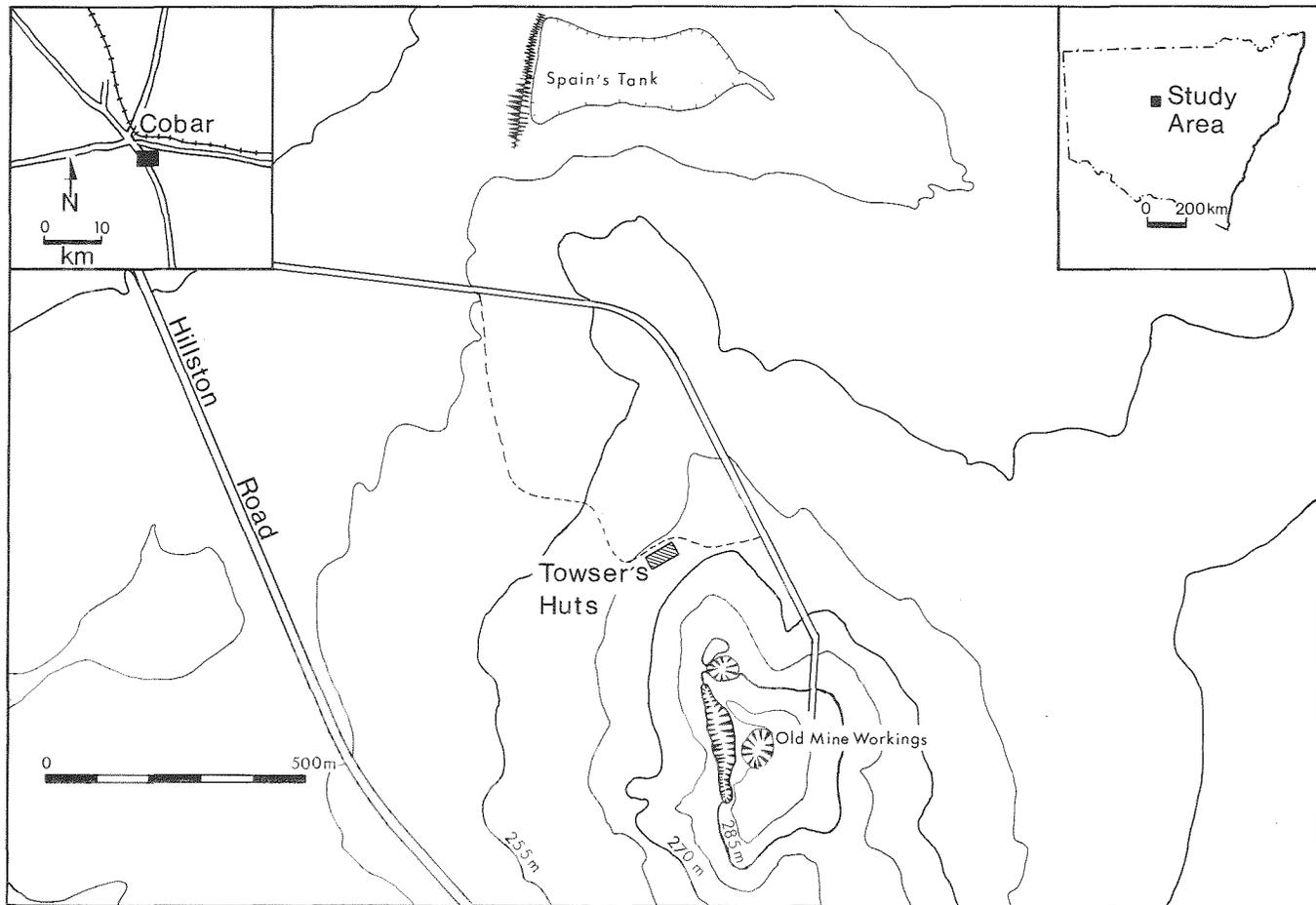
as Towser was found in these records, although the name Tozer occurred quite commonly. No record of Antonio Tozzi has been found in records of naturalisations in New South Wales up to 1904, when such record keeping was transferred to the Federal Government.²² A search of the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages around 1918, when Towser was said to have died, produced a record of Antonio Tozzi, gold miner, who died in Parramatta Mental Hospital on 4 May 1916 aged 65 years. His place of birth was given as Switzerland.²³ There is no mention of Antonio Tozzi in records of Italian migration from northern Italy and Switzerland during the 1850s.²⁴ This is not surprising considering that he would have been very young at the time. If he had migrated at this time he would have been an unlikely carrier of traditional building skills. As yet, no characteristic building method or style, corresponding to those of Towser's Huts, has been found to prevail in this northern Italian region, although the search is far from complete. Unfortunately, at this stage it has not been possible to unearth any more significant data on Antonio Tozzi, who is, without a doubt, the person responsible for the construction of Towser's Huts.

MODERN HISTORY

During the 1960s there was a general resurgence of interest in the history of Cobar, as the centenary of the discovery of copper approached. The culmination of this was a week of celebrations held in August 1969. In the lead-up to these celebrations, the local Lions Club conceived the idea of restoring part of the complex now known as Towser's Huts. It was thought that this would enhance the appeal of the site as a tourist attraction and make a contribution to the centenary celebrations. As far as can be determined from records made available by the Club,²⁵ the project commenced in September 1968 and, after a series of working bees, was completed in August 1969, in time for the centenary celebrations. Work recommenced in February 1970, to repair damage by vandals to the restored section and this work continued to be reported until June of that year. In March, a film was made by Mid-State Television, showing the work in progress. There appears to have been another bout of vandalism between June 1970 and the commencement of yet more work in May 1972. Shortly after this, there was a reassessment of the viability of the project by the Club and the final mention of it in the Club records occurs in September 1972. In an attempt to ascertain more detail than was available in the Club records, a number of Club members and ex-members who were involved in the project were interviewed. Indeed, in some cases they visited the site with the writer. It was hoped, in this way, to determine the state of the ruins before restoration, the extent of the restoration, and the contribution of the restoration to the current condition of the ruins. The results of this investigation are, of necessity, something of a distillation of the information collected, highlighting both the common threads and some of the contrasts.

Generally, it was agreed that a large proportion of the ruins, including the two rooms that were restored (Rooms E and F, Fig. 4b), are today in a similar state to that prevailing before the project started. The floors of the two rooms involved were covered with up to 500–700mm of soil and rubble, presumably from the collapsed walls. A similar talus slope existed against the outside walls. Differences from the general recollection included walls being higher/lower, the dividing wall between the two rooms being virtually complete, including an arched doorway, and that there were definite signs of windows in the front and/or back walls.

The general recollection of the work carried out was only slightly more uniform. The rubble was excavated from the floor of both rooms to the level of the flagstones. The fireplace in the western room was also excavated. The existing walls were built up to a level deduced from the maximum height of the standing walls. This was done with stones from the rubble excavated from the rooms or stones lying about the site and



elsewhere around the hill. Soil was used as mortar, without any real thought as to suitability for the job or to method of placement. It was generally conceded that the restored stonework was much inferior to the original. Stone or rubble was not removed from any of the other rooms. A sloping galvanised iron roof was installed, with steel bars being driven through the stonework to allow the roof timbers to be fastened down with fencing wire. No artefacts, other than broken bottles, were found in the rubble excavated.

Differences from the general version included clearing a flagstone verandah area in front of the rooms and clearing the rubble talus behind the rooms. One report also included excavating a water drain, a well and a toilet. Ash in the fireplace, a cooking pot, an iron chimney pipe, a coin and whole bottles were also mentioned as artefacts which were turned up on the site. The people recalling these facts had no idea what might have happened to these finds.

A single photograph of the restored section,^{2b} which may have been taken in 1969, confirms several of these general recollections. The restored stonework was certainly much inferior to the original, with the stone appearing to be randomly oriented, contrasting strongly with the semi-coursed, carefully aligned finish of the original. The original stonework remaining in the front and dividing walls was more extensive than at present. A window was built into the front wall of the eastern room, without really strong evidence for the previous existence of one, except for the higher stonework at either end of the wall, which also happened to be corners and therefore likely to be more robust. There does appear to have been a flagstoned area in front of the entrance door.

Despite extensive enquiries among the Lions Club members, people involved in the centenary celebrations, local photographers, and Mid-State Television, no photographic record of this service project has come to light, other than a short strip of amateur movie film which was taken during the 1970

Fig. 2: Location of Towser's Huts. Inset maps show position near Cobar and within New South Wales.

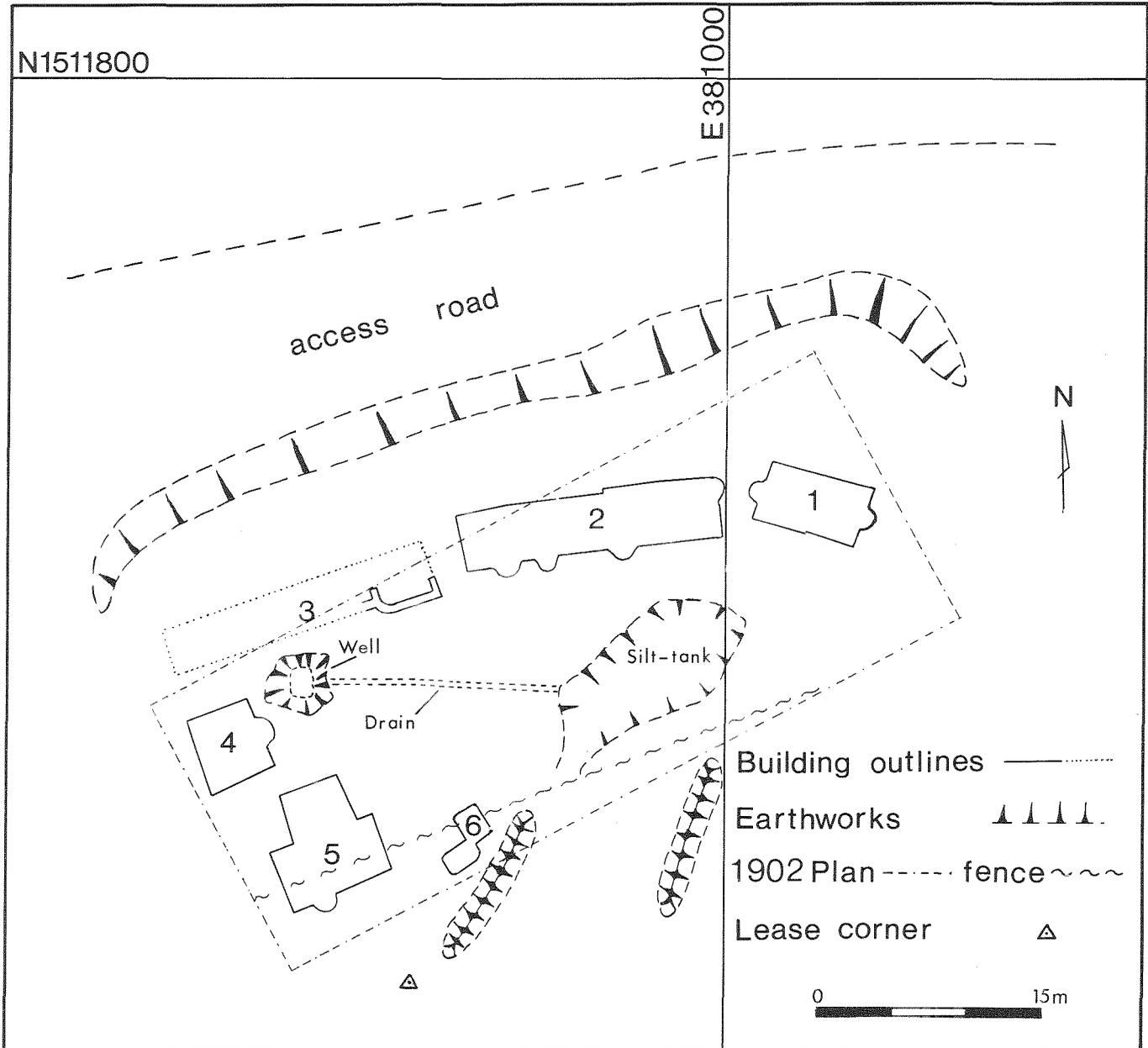
television coverage. This gave no useful information on the project. Back editions of *The Cobar Age*, covering the four-year period in question, were scanned but other than the article containing the brief excerpt quoted at the beginning of this paper, there was no written and no photographic coverage of the project in this newspaper. The Club members' knowledge of the early history of the huts was limited to versions of the local mythology quoted earlier.

This investigation has demonstrated several features which permeate investigations into even the recent historical past, let alone the distant past. First, there is the fallibility and variability of the human memory, apparent in investigations into all stages of the history of the site. Second, there is the general shortage of, and shortcomings in, the record-keeping of organisations and individuals. Undoubtedly, there are individuals who could not be interviewed and other records that might be investigated. It is also important, however, to see what the stones themselves have to say.

CURRENT STATE OF THE RUINS

The position of the ruins is shown on a contour map of the general area (Fig. 2) by a block corresponding to Portion 265. The area of major concern, covering the ruins and environs, has been surveyed in some detail by stadia reduction. A general plan of the site appears in Fig. 3. Detailed measurements of each of the buildings have also been carried out by tape and larger scale floor plans of each building have been drawn (Fig. 4).

The site generally conforms to the contours of the immediate area but has been subject to several modifications. First, there is the large levelled area which extends in front of the



main long building (Building 2) and for some distance to the west. Second, there are the excavations further upslope connected by a flagstone-lined drain. Third, there are linear mounds further upslope again. Scattered over the site there are the remains of six buildings which will be described in turn.

Building 1

This building was a small two-roomed structure, located at the eastern end of the complex. The remaining structure is generally very low and particularly at the north-eastern corner, definite details of walls cannot be detected other than by the scattered rubble. Room A (Fig. 4) has the less complete floor plan of the two rooms and no evidence could be found for the position of the door. From the regular termination of the eastern wall and the wider spread of rubble adjacent to this area, it is thought that this may have marked the location of the fireplace. Wall-thickness of this room is about 350–400mm. The type of stone used appears different and the quality of the stonework appears to be of lower standard, than is evidenced either in the adjacent room or throughout the remainder of the complex. The floor plan of Room B could be determined with a greater degree of confidence because

Fig. 3: Plan of Towser's Huts site, showing major features.

of a larger amount of intact well present, although the northern wall was barely discernible. The position of the chimney was clear and the placement of the door could be determined with a reasonable degree of certainty. The walls of this room were 450–500mm thick and the stonework was fairly typical of the slabby siltstone used elsewhere. The southern wall of this room did not align with the corresponding wall of Room A and appears to overlap the dividing wall. For this reason, as well as the differences in stone and quality of stonework, it is thought that this room was built later than Room A. In fact, it seems likely that Room A is the small 'Stone Hut' shown at the eastern end of the 1902 plan (Fig. 1). It may have been the first building on the site, if changes in craftsmanship are any guide.

Building 2

This is the largest building on the site, consisting of a total of five rooms in (what appears to have been) four units (Fig. 4). These were, in all probability, built at different times. In all rooms, the front wall is in the most deteriorated condition

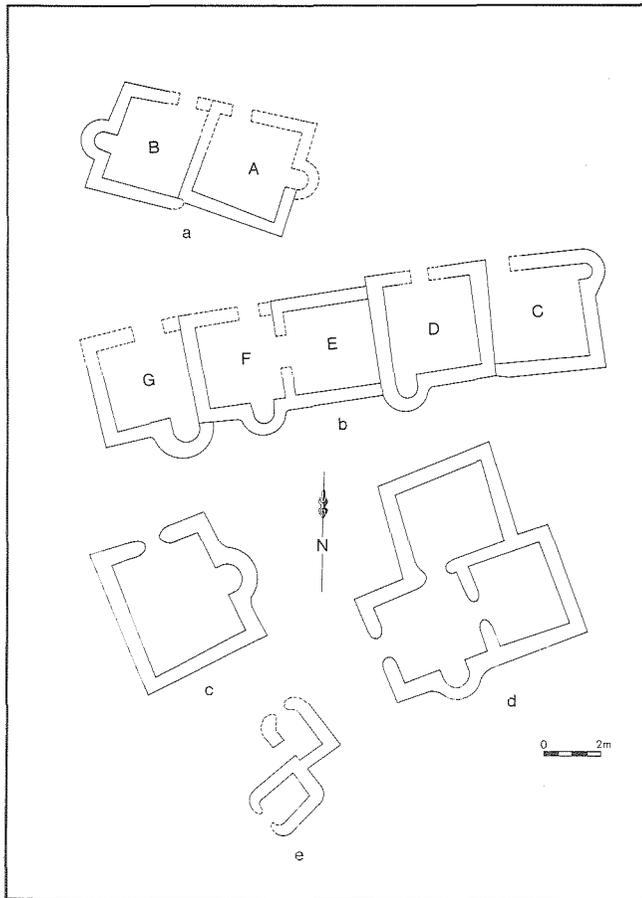


Fig. 4: Floor plans of individual building remains. These are correctly oriented but are not in their correct positions relative to one another. (a) Building 1. (b) Building 2. (c) Building 4. (d) Building 5. (e) Building 6. Broken lines indicate indefinite or inferred parts of structures.

and in the case of the two-room unit the dividing wall is also largely destroyed. Generally, the dividing walls and the rear wall are in a reasonably good condition, standing up to 2.2m high. These walls have probably survived better due, in the case of the dividing walls, to the lack of openings such as doors and windows, and due to the buttress of soil and rubble behind the rear walls. From an examination of the structure remaining, it would appear that Room D was the first to be constructed, followed by Rooms C, and E and F, since the walls of these rooms form butt joints with those of Room D. There is also a significant change in alignment of the rear wall of Room C compared to that of Room D. In addition there is a 300mm step in the line of the front wall between Rooms D and E. Room G was built after Rooms E and F, as evidenced by the butt joint where the chimney of this room joins the rear corner of Room F. There is also a considerable misalignment of the walls of this room, compared with the rest of the building. Generally, Room G is in a very poor state of repair, with the front wall in particular being virtually obliterated.

Each room in this building, except Room E, has one of the semicircular fireplaces so characteristic of the site. Three of these are located in the corner of the room, whilst the fourth is somewhat off-centre in the rear wall. The location in corners is somewhat unusual and at the moment it is considered that this may have resulted from constructional expediency, rather than from considerations of efficiency of heating. The location of the fireplaces in all the other buildings is certainly more conventional.

Rooms E and F were the part of the building which were

the subject of restoration by the local Lions Club. Relatively little evidence remains that would indicate to the casual observer that any such work had been carried out. Some of the stonework on the top of the back wall gives the impression of being less well bonded and of being of smaller stone which is not as well matched and coursed as elsewhere in the building. A large wooden beam lies on the floor of the rooms. This was once part of the restored roof support (Fig. 5). The iron spikes, driven through the stonework, are still in place. The floors are generally quite clear, compared with the other rooms and the flagstones are readily visible. Considering the quantity of material that obviously would have been incorporated into the front and dividing walls, it is surprising that there is so little rubble either inside or outside these rooms. It would appear that some must have been removed at some time. Recently discovered photographs, which are firmly dated to August 1975,²⁷ show the rooms in an intermediate state of repair suggesting that any removal of debris must have been more recent than this. There is no evidence to suggest that the Lions Club was involved at this late date and no information has been forthcoming to suggest when, why or by whom such a clean-up would have been carried out.

From a consideration of the relationship between buildings, if those shown on the 1902 plan (Fig. 1) were even approximately to scale, it would appear that Rooms C to F represent the building present at that time. Room G would have been added after that date.

Building 3

This is probably something of a misnomer, because to a very large extent Building 3 is not there. The remains consist of a very fragmentary section of stone wall (Fig. 3), which includes a curved section similar to that found associated with the fireplaces in the other buildings, occurrences of what appear to be flagstones and what might be part of a wall showing through the soil. The major evidence for the previous existence of a building on this site lies in its appearance on the 1902 plan (Fig. 1). However, some additional evidence does exist today and that is the thick growth of hop bush (*Dodonaea* sp.) on the site. This phenomenon is particularly evident in aerial photographs (Fig. 6). Further evidence for the previous existence of this building, is the extension of the levelled area in front of the complex past the proposed extent of the building. There is also a steep rubble-strewn bank, extending from the limit of the remaining walls to a point adjacent to the position of the well. The realignment of the rear wall west of the curved section is interesting, suggesting that there was some obstruction to the continuation of the original line. If the original line had been extended, the rear wall of the building would have come perilously close to the edge of the well. However, there is no definite evidence that the well existed at the time that the building was constructed.

Building 4

This building is a single room (Fig. 4) and is obviously the one referred to as a 'dining room' in the item in *The Cobar Age*. The arch of the fireplace is no longer complete, as it apparently was at the time of the article. A photograph of this building of unknown date,²⁸ but possibly from the same period, shows the arch complete but with the remainder of the stonework in the immediate vicinity substantially as it is today. Some impression of the massiveness of this structure but also of the fragility of its current state, may be gauged from Fig. 7. As well as the interest due to the fireplace, this room is interesting because of an example of what appears to be a refinement in building technique, compared with that of the buildings already discussed. This is the curved finish or bullnose jambs of the doorway. In all previous cases, the evidence available suggests that square jambs were the norm. One section of the wall also gives insight into the construction methods used. The cleavage and bedding of the local siltstones produce a tendency to break into wedge-shaped pieces, which have been interleaved from both sides of the wall. A filling of clay and fine stone



Fig. 5: Building 2, Room F, facing south-west. Note the semicircular fireplace in the rear wall. Scale of 2m in 50cm divisions.

completes the structure and weatherproofs the wall. An occasional large slab serves as a through-stone (Fig. 8). Since this building does not appear on the 1902 plan (Fig. 1), it must be assumed that it post-dates this time.

Building 5

This building consisted of three rooms (Fig. 4) and was referred to as the 'residence of Mr Towser' in the newspaper item of July 1969. The building also has some relatively high walls remaining and the plan and construction methods certainly merit attention. First, there is the departure from the linear format of the previous buildings, with their series of separate rooms. Second, it would appear from the interleaving of the stonework at the corners, that it was built as a unit from the start and not in piecemeal fashion as appears to have been the case with the other multi-room units. Third, it has only one fireplace as distinct from all other buildings, which generally have a fireplace in each room. Fourth, it shows the aesthetic refinements of the bullnose door-jambs on all three doorways, which in one case has required a curved transition from the adjacent wall. Finally, although there is evidence on other buildings, by far the most extensive evidence of the dressing of stone is to be found on this building (Fig. 9). Once again, this building presumably post-dates the 1902 plan (Fig. 1) and it would appear from the extra attention to detail and the coherence of the structure, that it was not a rush job.

Building 6

Last, but by no means least in the register of building associated with Towser's Huts, are what must be the toilets (Fig. 4). Only low walls remain but it is possible to see that the buildings were finished with some rounded corners. For the one with firm evidence for the door position, the suggestion is that it was built with the bullnose door-jambs. However, there does appear to be something of a mixture of styles, suggesting that the northern building may have preceded the southern,

although there is no real evidence from other constructional features for this. The latrines appear to have been of pit type, as there is evidence of an excavation below the northern one, whilst the southern one is filled with rubble. This could accord with the statement by an ex-Lions Club member, that one of the toilets had been excavated during the restoration. The large, regular gap in the south-western wall of the northern unit could have been a door, but only if the interpretation of the normal layout of such facilities is in error. This is because it would have been rather peculiarly placed in relation to the pit, if it was an access door. Another possibility is that it could have been used as a service access if, at some stage, a pan latrine was in use. There is no evidence of a similar feature on the other unit.

Other Features

There is one other major feature of interest on the site and this is the connected series of excavations and earthworks on the upslope side of the buildings (Fig. 3). This must be considered as a whole, because it almost certainly represents a water-collection system. The linear mounds on the highest parts of the site, have been positioned to direct the sheet runoff from the stony ridge into the large relatively shallow excavation behind Building 2. As well as these two diversion banks, there are other features which are not so well defined further to the east. These might also have served to deflect water into the catchment of the silt-tank. This is how the excavation behind Building 2 has been interpreted and when it filled, clear water would have overflowed via the flagstone-lined channel into the well. The depth of the well is not known but the depression leading into the, just visible, well mouth is over 1m deep. If the well was excavated by the Lions Club, the respondent was not able to recall how far the excavation went.



One other feature of minor interest on the site is an alignment of stones set out in a right-angle. This was a normally accepted method of marking the corners of mineral leases. As nearly as can be determined, this is a modern lease boundary and does not relate to the current project directly.

SYNTHESIS

If Mr Tozzi was solely responsible for the works present on this site, he must have been a truly prodigious worker. It is estimated that some 150 cubic metres of materials would have been required to build the maximum number of rooms that probably stood on the site. This would be approaching 300 tonnes of rock and soil. It is considered unlikely that this amount would have been lying around close by. The stone could have arisen as a result of mining operations and there is a small shaft only 50m to the east of the site. About 200m away to the north-east, there is also a small quarry, which occurs on an outcrop that would have provided the sort of material used. Whatever the source, the stone would have had to be transported some distance over ground that was far from level or smooth. The levelling of the site for Buildings 1, 2 and 3, as well as the excavations for the silt tank, well and latrines, would also have required a considerable input of labour. This is all without the building, demolishing and rebuilding of the huts themselves.

Fairly obviously, this work would have been done in stages and as suggested earlier, it seems that Room A of Building 1 may have been the first on the site. By the time of the survey in 1902 (Fig. 1), Building 2 (Rooms C, D, E and F) and Building 3 had also been built. It is estimated from its size, that Building 3 would have consisted of at least five rooms. A shed, presumably of wood, and a stake fence had also been built. The buildings were valued at 100 pounds and the fence

Fig. 6: Aerial photograph of Towser's Huts from the north-west, showing Building 2 to the left and Buildings 4 and 5 to the right. The site of Building 3 is indicated by the thick growth of hop bush (Dodonaea sp.) in the centre foreground. Photograph by Graham Connah, 1.00 p.m., 19 August 1986.

at 5 pounds.²⁹ When the area surveyed for the 1902 plan is plotted on a modern plan (Fig. 3), some very interesting features come to light. The line of the northern boundary coincides almost exactly with the limits of recognisable walls of Building 3 and the rubble embankment leading from the limits of the extant wall to the vicinity of the well. Virtually all of the extant remains fall inside the 1902 boundary, except for part of Room G in Building 2. Buildings 4, 5 and 6 are adjacent to and approximately aligned with the boundary. This is suggestive that, as a result of the 1902 survey, Mr Tozzi was obliged to demolish Building 3 which fell largely outside his boundary. It is possible that the step in the front wall of Building 2 may have resulted from an attempt to realign part of this building also. Possibly using the materials from Building 3, Buildings 1 and 2 were extended by adding a room each, and Buildings 4, 5 and 6 were constructed. The stake fence, which is only shown on the 1902 plan within the surveyed area, in all probability would have extended outside that area and around the buildings, delineating what Mr Tozzi thought was his block of land. The alignment of the fence roughly parallels the alignment of the main buildings and the limit of the levelled area in front of them. It also would have run along the southern bank of the silt-tank. It is thought unlikely that the Crown would have been responsible for obligating Mr Tozzi to remove his building. If he was obligated, it was most probably by the mining company whose lease surrounded him. The Cobar Gold Mines Ltd.³⁰ This is purely speculative at this stage. However, it might be possible that records do exist which could confirm the idea.



Fig. 7: Fireplace in eastern wall of Building 4. Photograph facing east. Scale of 2m in 50cm divisions.

Why did Mr Tozzi build in stone? It cannot have been because of lack of suitable building materials. Bricks were produced in Cobar at a very early stage, probably from about 1872.³¹ The general style of house built by the miners was a timber-framed cottage, with gable roof, skillion verandah at the front and skillion kitchen behind, and with one or two (sometimes three) square brick chimneys. A number of houses of this style and vintage stand in Cobar today. It is unlikely that this type of stone was preferred as a superior building material, for, if it were, more buildings would have been built from stone in the area. The few that apparently were built of stone, but long since demolished, were of conventional design and also used brick as well. Certainly the stone would have been cheap, most likely requiring only the input of labour. The possibility also exists that Mr Tozzi was building in a material and style with which he was familiar. A style of stonework vaguely reminiscent of that occurring in these ruins is known to occur in Italy,³² although the building designs appear to be quite different in most respects. However, the method of wall construction is probably not particularly unusual for the materials available and numerous examples are widely spread throughout South Australia.³³ The suggestion of a Cornish pattern³⁴ does not hold up by comparison with the undoubted Cornish houses at Moonta, in South Australia.³⁵ The similarity of the fireplace plans to those remaining at Port Essington³⁶ is evocative but even those do not appear to have been linked conclusively to Cornish craftsmen. Jeans and Spearritt³⁷ seem to imply 'towser' as a word meaning 'miner'. However, a search of etymological references³⁸ has provided no support for this implication, although one reference to a 'rough or energetic person' might conceivably be applicable in this case. Given the well known plasticity of Australian English, it is not difficult to imagine a transformation in the local vernacular from Tozzi (perhaps via Tozer) to Towser.



Fig. 8: Cross-section of the eastern wall of Building 4. Photograph facing south. Scale of 40cm in 10cm divisions.



Fig. 9: Dressed stones in the northern wall of Building 5. Photograph facing south. Scale of 40cm in 10cm divisions.

The unitary nature of the buildings does suggest that they were intended for multiple occupancy. It seems unlikely, considering their location on the outskirts of town, that they were intended for casual occupancy. If this were some sort of family residence, which grew to accommodate an expanding family, a family of this size would have left more impact on local history. Certainly, considering the extent of the buildings shown on the 1902 plan, a family requiring such a residence would surely have shown up in the registry records. Whether Mr Tozzi was merely a boarding house keeper, or whether he was a contractor supplying accommodation for his employees (possibly also Italian), is uncertain. Given the shortage of women of Italian birth in New South Wales at the time, if he was married, there is a fair chance that it was not to an Italian. The construction of the three-room building is more evocative of a family home and considering the change in design and the extra care in construction, the influence of the fairer sex might be a possibility.

CONCLUSION

In a relatively short time, it has been possible to piece together a more coherent picture of the history and purpose of Tozzi's Huts than was previously available. Fairly obviously, a great deal more could be done with detailed recording and analysis of the stonework. It also seems likely that further archival research would be fruitful. On the other hand, it is unlikely that much more first-hand knowledge will be forthcoming from oral sources, unless the work required is done quickly. Overall, further work would certainly be justified by the possibility of throwing more light on an interesting facet of Italian migration to Australia and the role of Italians in the development of the Outback.

The results of the restoration by the Lions Club have fortunately not been severe as far as the buildings themselves are concerned. It served to attract the attention of vandals at the time and the restoration has been effectively destroyed.

However, it does seem that the original stonework was sufficiently robust to withstand such treatment, although some deterioration, particularly in the vicinity of the restored section, has occurred. At the present, the site is still visited by the occasional tourist, who appears to do little more than stop on the access road, look out of the car window and take a photograph. The occasional beer bottle and can and signs of small fires attest to infrequent visits by local youth but, by and large, the main enemies of the ruins appear to be time and the weather. As an archaeological site, the two rooms that were restored have obviously received a set back, as may have one of the toilets and the well. However, this is part of the making of an archaeological record and must be the sort of interference that the archaeologist should be trying to detect and allow for in any interpretations.

In summary, it does appear that the history of Tozzi's Huts might be slightly tarnished, but by no means ruined.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks must go to the many people who were of assistance to me during this investigation. In particular, thanks are due to Cobar Mines Pty Ltd for allowing access to records and equipment, to the Lions Club of Cobar for access to their records, and to Wally Snelson and Arthur 'Pop' Burgess, who gave so freely of their time and recollections. To the others, too numerous to mention by name, thank you.

NOTES

1. Anon. 1978.
2. Crown Lands Office.
3. A.M. Burgess, 1985: personal communication.

4. W.P. Snelson, 1985: personal communication.
5. W.P. Snelson, 1985: personal communication.
6. Borrie 1954: 49.
7. Freeland 1968: 146.
8. Borrie 1954: 50–51.
9. *ibid.*: 57.
10. *ibid.*: 60–61.
11. *ibid.*: 146–7.
12. Pyke 1948: 103.
13. Borrie 1954: 120.
14. *ibid.*: 25, 27.
15. W.P. Snelson, 1985: personal communication.
16. R. Maguire, 1986: personal communication.
17. Clelland 1984: 84, 133.
18. W.P. Snelson, 1985: personal communication.
19. Slee 1900: 92.
20. Slee 1902: 75.
21. Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages.
22. R. Maguire, 1986: personal communication.
23. Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages.
24. A. Pagliano, 1986: personal communication.
25. Lions Club of Cobar.
26. Jeans and Spearritt 1980: 51.
27. G. Connah, 1986: personal communication.
28. Anon. 1981: 39.
29. Crown Lands Office.
30. G. Dalby and I.A. Chalker. 1985: personal communications.
31. Clelland 1984: 37.
32. Agosti 1979: 40, 57.
33. G. Young, 1986: personal communication.
34. Jeans and Spearritt 1980: 51.
35. Smith 1980: 34.
36. Allen 1967: 68–73; Megaw 1984: 9.
37. Jeans and Spearritt 1980: 51.
38. Anon. 1933: Vol. 11, 192, 206.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Published sources

- AGOSTI, P. 1979. *Immagine del 'mondo dei vinti'*, Mazzota/Fotografia, Milano.
- ALLEN, J. 1967. The Cornish round chimney in Australia, *Cornish Archaeology*, 6: 68–73.
- ANON. 1933. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol. 11, The Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- ANON. 1978. *Cobar information booklet*.
- ANON. 1981. *Orana Region tourist guide*. Orana Tourist Association, Development & Advisory Publications, Dubbo.
- BORRIE, W.D. 1954. *Italians and Germans in Australia: A study of assimilation*, F.W. Cheshire Pty Ltd, Melbourne.
- CLELLAND, W. 1984. *Cobar Founding Fathers*, Macquarie Publications, Dubbo.
- FREELAND, J.M. 1968. *Architecture in Australia*, Penguin Books, Melbourne.
- JEANS, D.N. & SPEARRITT, P. 1980. *The open air museum*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney.
- MEGAW, J.V.S. 1984. The archaeology of rubbish or rubbishing archaeology: Backward looks and forward glances, *Australian Journal of Historical Archaeology* 2: 7–12.
- PYKE, N.O.P. 1948. An outline history of Italian immigration into Australia, *The Australian Quarterly* 20 (3): 99–109.
- SLEE, W.H.J. 1900. Annual report of the Chief Inspector of Mines and Superintendent of Diamond Drills, *Annual report of the Department of Mines and Agriculture of New South Wales, 1899*: 84–92.
- SLEE, W.H.J. 1902. Annual report of the Chief Inspector of Mines and Superintendent of Diamond Drills, *Annual report of the Department of Mines of New South Wales, 1901*: 74–8.
- SMITH, R. 1980. *Historic Australia*, Curry O'Neil, Melbourne.

Unpublished sources

- CROWN LANDS OFFICE, Plan LB02-1480 Be.
- LIONS CLUB OF COBAR, 1968–1973. Meeting minutes and monthly reports.
- REGISTRY OF BIRTHS, DEATHS AND MARRIAGES. Microfiche index of pre-1900 registrations, Dubbo Municipal Library.
- REGISTRY OF BIRTHS, DEATHS AND MARRIAGES. Register of deaths occurring in New South Wales, Sydney.

Newspapers

The Cobar Age