

# The Breastplate of "The King of Tanilba"

The brass "breastplate" of the "King of Tanilba" has been presented to our Society by the family of the late Edward and Elizabeth Holmes who at one time occupied the old homestead of "Tanilba" on the banks of Port Stephens.

Mr. A. E. Holmes (a member of our Society) contributed a very interesting record of the finding of this old breastplate,

and of the historic estate of Tanilba :—

“The shield, or breastplate, was found by my father, the late Edwin Holmes, and the late William Fisher, of “Brandon,” Seaham, about 1900, on the eastern side of Stingray Bay, near the beach and about 50 yards from the southern boundary of the then entrance to the “Tanilba” property.

My father, who was well versed in aboriginal lore, and was one of the few white men that I have heard of being initiated in the Bora ceremony, often told us that the spot where the shield was found was the burial place for the Tanilba tribe, and that it was a custom for them to bury their dead with their weapons, and in a sitting position facing the East.

This shield or breastplate, has been in the possession of our family for the past 50 years, but unfortunately a “wom-erah” found at the same time, has been lost.

The 50 acres, and ruins of the old home “Tanilba” was purchased by my mother in 1897 or 1898, with the intention of pulling down the old building and rebuilding on the same site.

However, the contractor, Mr. King, of Largs, found that the old walls were so well-constructed that it was decided to use them, and the new additions were made from stone quarried on the Western point. During the rebuilding, a document containing the signatures of all employed on the job, together with a statement by Mr. King, was placed inside the cement walls over the main entrance, and in those on either side of the main steps.

The Holmes family resided at “Tanilba” until 1905 when it was sold to Mr. W. J. Ebbeck who conducted the historic home as a guest house for fishing parties from Newcastle and Maitland. Eventually the property came into the hands of Mr. Clift, and it was he who sold to Mr. Halloren, the well-known land and estate agent, who had the land subdivided and sold into blocks for week-end camps, etc.

Some interesting facts regarding “Tanilba” are that the old olive tree on the western side of the homestead is stated to have been planted by the Caswell family. The old headstone that once stood a short distance from the homestead, had the name “CASWELL” inscribed upon it, according to the older members of the Holmes family. During the Holmes’ occupation, they planted a vineyard and citrus and stone fruit orchards. Tobacco was also successfully grown, but the leaf was dark and coarse.”