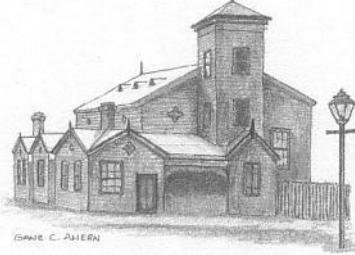


YARRA GLEN & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.

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NEWSLETTER

August 2011 (Published occasionally)

Issue No: 40

Editor: Helen Mann **Ph:** 0429 006 152 helenmann02@gmail.com

FROM THE EDITOR

The Society is one of the happy recipients of the PROV Local History Grants for 2010-2011. We have had to be patient as the applications were submitted in November 2010 and the Grants were not announced until July 2011. The money will help us establish an Online Historical Encyclopaedia of Yarra Glen & District which will enable us to share our collection widely and communicate with interested people, whether they live locally or at the far reaches of the internet. *See details p.4.*

For the second year in a row the Society is having an excursion to a place of local historical interest and I hope this will become an annual event (last year we went to The Singing Gardens at Toolangi). This year we are going to visit the Cistercian Abbey at Tarrawarra on Sunday 14 August. While working on another project I came across an article about Tarrawarra that the late Leigh Ahern had written in 2005. He was preparing a draft chapter for a book on the history of Yarra Glen and districts that a sub-Committee of the Society was planning at that time. Rather than leave the results of his labours gathering dust in our archives it seems an appropriate time, before our excursion, to make it available. I am sure those of you who knew Leigh will enjoy his 'presence' as you brush up on the history of Tarrawarra.

Helen

YARRA GLEN MEMORIAL HALL

As mentioned in last month's Newsletter the Society does not have access to The History Room while the Memorial Hall is being renovated.

Modifications have been made to the RSL rooms, the main entrance to the Hall is being shifted to the north-east corner and a new toilet block has been added along the north wall (which faces the park). A community meeting/consultation room will take the area formerly occupied by the old toilets and a large bank of storage cupboards is being constructed along the back wall of the main hall. Some alterations are being made to the McCoomb Room and the kitchen and more storage is being added in that area also. The History Room will gain a couple of extra metres by the removal of a built-in cupboard and new carpet is being laid. A copy of the plans has been placed on the safety fence at the front of the Hall for community members.

The latest advice that we have from the Yarra Ranges Council is that the toilet and kitchen fit outs will not be completed until the last stages of construction

... and the final completion date is end November 2011. The builders are on track with the works and are mindful of the hall's occupants desire to move back in as soon as possible. However, under the circumstances, taking into account the potential risk it is advisable for the Historical Society to make alternative arrangements for its meetings until the building is complete.

Alternative arrangements for our meetings have therefore been made and are listed below. We regret any inconvenience to our members. Any queries can be directed to the Secretary or Treasurer as usual:

Secretary: Helen Mann 9730 1875

Treasurer: Jill Sheffield 9730 1587

Email yarraglenhistorical@live.com.au

Historical Society Monthly Meetings

All are on a Sunday commencing at 1:30pm

14 August 2011 – Excursion to Tarrawarra

Meet at 1:30pm at the Yarra Glen & District Living & Learning Centre, 12 Anzac Avenue, Yarra Glen

Bring afternoon tea as per our usual meetings.

11 September 2011 – Guest speaker is Mick Woiwod who will be talking about his new publication *The Diaries and Reminiscences of Andrew Ross*

Location: Yarra Glen & District Living & Learning Centre, 12 Anzac Avenue, Yarra Glen

9 October 2011 – AGM

Location: Yarra Glen & District Living & Learning Centre, 12 Anzac Avenue, Yarra Glen

13 November 2011 – **Tetlow Talk** with Barry Watts as guest speaker

Location: Uniting Church Hall, Corner of Kameel Drive & Melba Hwy, Yarra Glen [at the end of the service road in front of Melba Lodge]

TARRAWARRA

By Leigh Ahern¹

The original run known as *View Hill* appears to have comprised some 12,000 acres (4,800 ha) extending between the present-day township sites of Yarra Glen and Healesville. The station was named for a distinctive knoll rising some 75 m above the river flats, 0.7 km north-west of the present Tarrawarra Abbey.

The first known European occupant of *View Hill* was a Scot named John Thomson, who may have taken up the land under a pastoral licence as early as 1839. At the time of Thomson's death, on 3 October 1844², his young nephew Thomas Thomson was also living on the station. The run by this time was carrying 3,500 sheep in which Thomson had a half-share.³

During his time at *View Hill*, John Thomson must have enjoyed a good relationship with his southern neighbour William Ryrie, of *Yering Station*, as the latter was one of two executors named in Thomson's will, the other being a Melbourne merchant, James Graham. Both of these men acted most honourably in the discharge of this duty. After Thomson's passing, and the settling of his estate, Ryrie and Graham themselves formed a partnership to take over the lease on *View Hill* in 1845.⁴ Throughout 1845 they endeavoured to provide a means of livelihood for Thomson's nephew and displayed a degree of 'guardianship' towards the young man. The lease of 12,000 acres by Graham and Ryrie was renewed in 1848.

CLAIMS TO LEASES OF CROWN LANDS BEYOND THE SETTLED DISTRICTS

James Graham and William Ryrie

Name of run – **View Hill**

Estimated area – **12,000 acres**

Estimated grazing capabilities – **3600 sheep**

Commencing about half a mile S of the junction of Gulph Creek and the Yarra; bounded on the S by the Yarra; on the E by Watts river; on the N by the dividing range and the marked boundary line between this station and Dickson's, which bears W by S about 3 miles; on the west by the marked boundary line between this station and Ryrie's, which bears about SSW for about 1 ½ miles, to the commencing point.

Argus 29 Sept 1848

In July 1850 William & Donald Ryrie sold their interest in the licence of *Yering Station* and William moved to *View Hill* with his wife Marianne (née Cassels) and two young children—Anne Stewart Ryrie (b. 5 Jan 1849 at Yering) and John Cassels Ryrie (b. 26 Nov 1850 at View Hill⁵).

During these early years a cottage—known as *Elm Cottage* (or *The Elms*)—was built about 0.6 km south-west of the

present site of *Tarrawarra (Notre Dame) Abbey*, either by Ryrie or his predecessor, Thomson. Presumably, the Ryries occupied this dwelling.



Elm Cottage showing the horizontal slab construction

In 1851 Ryrie had applied for a Pre-Emptive Right to 160 acres east of Steels Creek. In July 1853 he was granted 640 acres around his homestead and James Graham withdrew from the partnership in October of that year. In December Ryrie sold the station and the Pre-emptive Right to "Messrs Symond and Perry" for £13,000,⁶ although only the name of 'George [or Geo.] Symons' appears on relevant cadastral plans.⁷

After the sale of *View Hill* William Ryrie and family returned to Braidwood, New South Wales. In 1855 they went back to Scotland where William died on 21 July 1856.⁸

Symons appears to have sought from Ryrie, in 1855, an extension of time to pay, because of 'poor cattle prices'. Nevertheless, 'Symons & Perry' operated successfully as Melbourne-based auctioneers, dealing with a variety of items from a large ship (in 1853) to gold.

In addition to his large land holdings at *View Hill*, Symons, in April 1858, purchased for £224 a 140-acre (56-ha) block located between the present Glenview and Yarraview Roads, in Yarra Glen. The road on the north-east boundary is named (though with incorrect spelling) 'Symond Street'.

George Symons died in Melbourne on 16 September 1860 aged only 35. One son, Charles William, died in 1875 aged 20, after which George's wife Elizabeth returned to England with her remaining children. The "Symons' View Hill Pre-emptive Right", as delineated by C. Hodgkinson, District Surveyor, in his survey plan of 1856⁹ (and on later parish plans), shows a 640-acre parcel incorporating View Hill, (Paul's) Creek and the *Elm Cottage* site, this area presumably corresponding to Ryrie's original grant. The total area of Symons' *View Hill* estate at this time was some 4260 acres

¹ Leigh Ahern (1951-2009) drafted this article in 2005. It has been edited by Helen Mann

² *Port Phillip Herald*, 8 October 1844

³ Tomlins, D. (2003) *Tarrawarra property—a brief history*. Unpublished notes; Tarrawarra Abbey, Yarra Glen.

⁴ Tomlins (2003)

⁵ *Melbourne Morning Herald*, 26 November

⁶ Tomlins (2003)

⁷ A brief biography of Symons appears in the YGDHS Newsletter No.16, p.2 (May 2005).

⁸ Tomlins (2003)

⁹ Country lots in the Parishes of Burgoyne and Tarrawarra on the Yarra Yarra River (near Symons Station) County of Evelyn. C Hodgkinson, District Surveyor, Surveyor General's Office, Melbourne; April 3rd 1856.

(1721 ha), comprising 13 lots varying in size from 130 to 535 acres (52 to 216 ha) together with the 640-acre pre-emptive right.

Hodgkinson's 1856 report describes the lands in the vicinity of Symons' Station in the following terms:

Part of the surface contiguous to the River and Creeks consists of rich open marsh land, very wet in Winter, but covered in Summer with luxuriant herbage. The old sedimentary rocks constitute ranges of moderate elevation (except in the northern portions where the hills are high and steep) in general well grassed and wooded with Gum, Stringybark, Box, Lightwood, Oak, Honeysuckle and Wattle.

Some of the slopes display soil favourable for Vine culture and some of the portions embracing marsh land would be well adapted for small Dairy Farms. This tract of country has the disadvantage of very difficult access to Melbourne on account of the unavoidably steep ascent of the Big Hill Range. Some portions of the roads traversing the tract would be very wet in Winter although sound during the Summer months.

Hogkinson's remarks on difficulty of access to Melbourne highlight the notorious Big Hill on the current Eltham – Yarra Glen Road but also reflect the absence of a bridge across the Yarra River from Yering and the consequent impracticality of access via Lilydale.

After Symons' death *View Hill* passed in 1861 to William Nicholson who had been Premier of Victoria during 1859–60. During his term, he is credited with having enacted (on 19 March 1856) the world's first statutory system of election by secret ballot.¹⁰ Nicholson was reportedly an occasional visitor to the station until a paralytic seizure in 1864 caused his withdrawal from public life. He died at St Kilda on 10 March 1865.¹¹ In May 1870 the property was declared forfeit (possibly due to defaulted payments) and, in 1871, was bought by Thomas Francis Day at auction. However in 1872 the property was again declared forfeit and this time was sold to Richard Robert Woolcott.¹²

Woolcott was a practising attorney who involved himself in many aspects of legal and civil affairs in the district. He served as both shire councillor and magistrate for over 15 years.¹³ In 1886 he donated land for the Anglican church to be built near the corner of Bell Street and Armstrong Grove, the church later being moved to its present site at the corner of Anzac Avenue.

At *View Hill* Woolcott showed a passion for innovation—at great expense. He extensively drained and cleared the river flats, after which the carrying capacity as a stock-fattening property was greatly increased. By 1888 there were 7,000 sheep, 300 cattle and 120 horses.¹⁴ Most significantly, Woolcott extended *Elm Cottage* to fifteen rooms—configured around a court-yard containing a well—with bricks hand-

made on the property used for fire-places, chimneys and floors. Most of the building was later destroyed by fire, although Ryrie's (or Thomson's) earliest portion fortunately survived.¹⁵

In 1893, Woolcott sold *View Hill* to David Syme, who had become owner and editor of *The Age* newspaper (Melbourne) in 1860,¹⁶ and who now also owned *Killara* and *Dalry* properties. Syme, like Woolcott, ushered in many changes to the property, including its renaming as *Tarrawarra*.

Syme's daughter Lucie and her husband, William C Macalister, came to live on the property, Macalister proving himself a competent and devoted manager who oversaw extensive further developments. A new house was constructed in 1901 for the Macalister family at *Tarrawarra*. By now, the Lilydale–Healesville railway ran through the property.



The house built by the Macalisters which later became part of the Abbey.

Under Macalister, the overall extent of *Tarrawarra* was greatly increased, and additional draining, clearing, fencing and cultivation ensued. In particular, Macalister built up a major enterprise in the supply of horses to the Indian Army.

Tarrawarra was to become a focus of rural prosperity and social gaiety for the next two decades.¹⁷ Plans for a small township had long centred on the *Tarrawarra* railway station. A number of cottages had been built near the station entrance and by 1891 the *Tarrawarra Palace Hotel* was “in course of erection” on a nearby hill leading down to the Yarra.¹⁸ However, there is no record of this enterprise ever coming to fruition.

With the end of World War I, settlement in the area intensified and 1918 saw the sale of the parcel containing *View Hill* knoll to the White family.

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¹⁰ Palmer 91967)

¹¹ Palmer (1967)

¹² Tomlins (2003)

¹³ Whitworth, R P (1888) *Victoria and its Metropolis: Past and Present* (Melbourne)

¹⁴ Whitworth (1888)

¹⁵ Palmer (1967)

¹⁶ Younger, R M (1982) *A concise history, Australia and the Australians*. (2nd edn.) Hutchinson Group (Australia) Pty Ltd.

¹⁷ Palmer (1967)

¹⁸ Anon (1891) *The Visitor's Guide to the Upper Yarra and Ferntree Gully Districts*, [etc.]. H Massina & Co., Melbourne.

In a further bid for social and economic viability, the small Tarrawarra community gained the amenity of a bridge across the Yarra River at Tarrawarra Road about 1920. However, by about 1945, this wooden structure had declined so much in condition as to render its closure necessary and its remains are no longer evident.¹⁹

In April 1923 a Mr Edwick purchased the remainder of *Tarrawarra* from William Macalister, but died in 1924, leaving the property to change hands again in 1925, this time passing to Keith Aikman. The next buyer was Charles MacDonald in 1929 and then William Houghton in 1945.²⁰

Finally, in 1954, the 'Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance' (known also as 'Trappist' monks) from Roscrea, Ireland, purchased about 1000 acres (404 ha) of the former *Tarrawarra* property, in order to found a new and self-sufficient community. The land purchased included *Elm Cottage* as well as the 1901 homestead building, which became the basis for the *Tarrawarra Abbey* complex.²¹

Remarkably, *Elm Cottage*, though much modified and extended, still stands on *Tarrawarra* and today is a functional part of the Abbey. A great effort has been made by the current owners to preserve (with suitable protection from the elements) the original portion comprising six rooms with its hand-hewn adzed slab walls and wooden roof-shingles. The Abbot of *Tarrawarra Abbey*, Dom David Tomlins, believes that the slab section was indeed built by Ryrie, and that the two present front rooms were added some 20-30 years later.²² The cottage is considered to be the oldest existing building in the Yarra Valley region.²³

Snippets from the Press

The Advertiser, Monday 1 November 1954

Monks To Establish First Abbey

Melbourne, Oct. 31

A party of eight Cistercian monks arrived in Melbourne to form the nucleus of Victoria's first abbey. With three other monks already here, they will move into their quarters at Tarrawarra, near Yan Yean (sic), 21 miles north of Melbourne, in a weeks time. The 1,024 acre property, to be known as Notre Dame Abbey, will be officially opened by the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne Dr Mannix early next month. All the monks have come from the Abbey of Mount St. Joseph, at Roscrea, in County Tipperary, Ireland. The order, sometimes known as Trappists or White Benedictines, have a rule of strict silence which means they can talk only when they have their superior's permission to do so.

Healesville Guardian, Friday 15 October 1954,

TILLERS OF THE SOIL.

¹⁹ Fred Sadler, personal communication.

²⁰ Palmer (1967)

²¹ Tomlins (2003)

²² Tomlins (2003)

²³ Tansley (1978)

Fifteen tons of farming equipment from Ireland – a truck, tractor, ploughs and harrows - are being brought to Australia by the eight Cistercian monks who are to establish an abbey at Tarrawarra. The equipment will reach Melbourne in the Esperence Bay on October 29. Last Sunday, a party of visitors to the Sir Colin Mackenzie Sanctuary were understood to be some of the monks, who, it was said, are now in temporary residence at 'Comely Bank' Healesville.

Healesville Guardian, Friday 10 June 1955

Auction Sale

OF FURNITURE

On Wednesday, 22nd June, 1955

at 12 o'clock at Elm Cottage on Notre Dame Abbey, Tarrawarra, on main Healesville-Yarra Glen Rd., by order of Captain W. C. Baxter.

This is an unreserved sale of first-class Furniture, Inner Spring Mattresses, Blankets, Floor Coverings; Kitchen Utensils; Gardening and other Tools.

Full particulars in next issue;

Auctioneers: H. E. B. & K.G.THOMAS, Warburton, with SYDNEY H. BRADSHAW, Healesville.

ONLINE HISTORICAL ENCYCLOPAEDIA of YARRA GLEN & DISTRICT

The Society has received a \$7,500 PROV Local History Grant which has been provided by the Victorian Government through the Community Support Fund and the Public Record Office Victoria.

The grant will enable us to publish an online encyclopaedia whose content can be edited, updated and added to over time – as opposed to the static format of a printed book. People will be able to send contributions, corrections and information to be added to the encyclopaedia via email and social media links on the website.

Morgan Calder of ACME Black & White Studio in Yarra Glen is going to design and host the web site. She will provide us with training in the management of the content and social media accounts.

The Yarra Glen Primary School is collaborating with us to develop aspects of the web site which will become a local history resource for school children.

Development of the site will take at least twelve months – we hope to launch it at the end of 2012.

If any members (or potential members) are interested in being part of this interesting project please contact Helen Mann (Secretary).