Early Landholders of Upper Plenty and Surrounds

LAND SELECTION

By 1855, Government Survey of the Port Phillip district had been completed and allotments of land were available for sale. The sitting tenant, often the lease-holder of the pastoral run, had the right of first refusal, known as a 'pre-emptive right'. Some land was purchased by speculators, who correctly assumed that they would make a profit at future sale.

Many early landholders 'selected' land, acquiring it freehold after a nominated period of time. During this time an annual rental would be paid and improvements had to be made, such as clearing land for pasture, erecting fencing, farm buildings and a dwelling. Freehold was not always obtained – some landholders chose to forgo their leases, in which case the lease could be transferred to another person or the land sold outright. Land acquisition by selection allowed people with limited means to eventually own property.

ABOVE: Tooourrong Parish Plan. The Parish of Tooourrong is a division of the counties of Bourke and Evelyn, which came into existence when the early land surveys were done. Courtesy: State Library of Victoria (SLV). An enlargement of this map can be found on the adjacent wall.

VARIOUS: This collection of photographs of early dwellings beautifully depicts the rugged lifestyle of the early landowners. The tree, right, is actually a house. Below is an example of an early bush dwelling, with congregation outside, and bottom left is an illustration of a slab hut, circa 1910. Early dwellings were constructed from whatever materials were readily available, often requiring considerable ingenuity on the part of the builders. Images courtesy: Romsey Australia website.
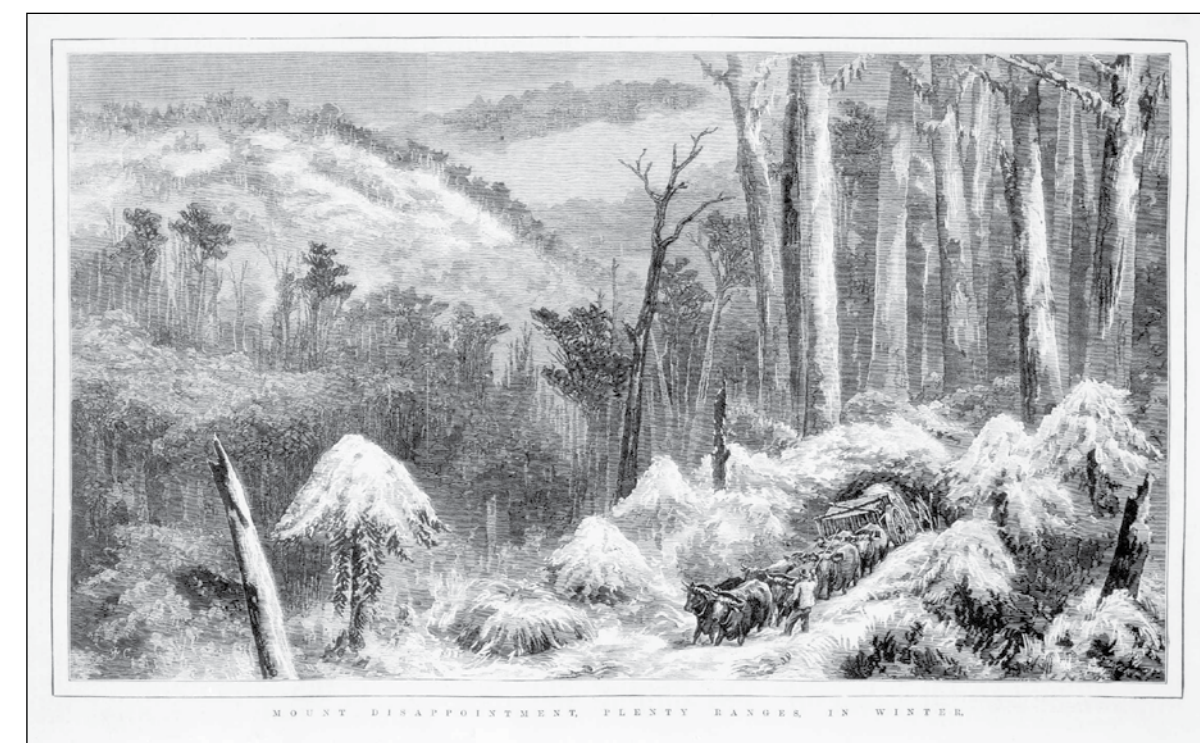

FAMILIES AND PIONEERS

William and Hanna Hadfield

William (b. 1807) and Hanna (b. 1805) married in 1827 and emigrated from Cheshire, England. They purchased land in the vicinity of present-day Hadfield's Road at the 1855 land sales, having previously bought land at Wollert. The Hadfield family occupied this land for more than 100 years, the last occupant being Rupert C Hadfield, a Merriang Shire Councillor for over twenty years. Children of the family attended the Upper Plenty State School until the 1940s. Hadfield Park in Wallan is named after Rupert Hadfield.

George Sutherland

George Sutherland's parents, John and Mary Ann, emigrated from Sutherland, Scotland, in 1852. Their ten children, aged between 8 and 27, came with them. George, in his mid-twenties, was the third eldest son. The eldest sons spent their first years in Victoria transporting supplies to the gold fields. In 1855, George purchased land at Upper Plenty and, later, land to the north of the present-day Wallan town centre. The Sutherlands took little part in community life, directing their energies to work on the farm, church and family life. Following his wife's death in 1869, George sold to Henry Barber.

George's nephew, William, son of Alexander and Barbara Sutherland, also purchased land in Upper Plenty. William was known as a 'master bushman' and was related to George Robertson by marriage. He spent the last fourteen years of his life residing with George and his sister, Georgina, at their Upper Plenty residence until his death in 1936.

Mt Disappointment in winter, circa 1876. Engraving by Samuel Calvert, 1828–1913. Courtesy: SLV.

George Robertson

George Robertson came to Victoria from Scotland in 1852 as part of a large family group, which included his wife, son and daughter. He was aged 31. He initially worked on Mr Moses Thomas's farm, Mayfield, at Mernda. In 1855 he purchased 100 acres at Upper Plenty and later leased Robert Bruce's farm in the present-day Mahadys Road area, where he grew oats, barley and potatoes and ran about twenty milking cows. He died in 1902 aged 81 years.

His son, George, was also a farmer in the Upper Plenty district and a Councillor with the Merriang Shire for a number of years. This George apparently built a waterwheel based on a design he had seen in an American magazine. The waterwheel powered a threshing machine and small timber mill.

Tragically, his son, William, died from fatal injuries after falling into the machinery whilst showing a visitor its workings.

This later George was known by older residents of Upper Plenty as 'Old George', remembered for his local road repairs carried out with the assistance of a horse and dray. George (Snr)'s grandchildren, George and Georgina, purchased a 350-acre property (now subdivided) in the Lords Road–Mahadys Road area around 1910.

Henry Barber

Henry Barber came from Northumberland to Port Phillip in 1844. He first took up land near the Yan Yean Reservoir. The nearby Barbers Creek is named after him. Following a visit to the gold fields in 1857, he acquired T Clark's property (shown on the 1855 Sale Plan, **below and enlargement**) and, later, George Sutherland's Upper Plenty property. He died in 1895 and was buried at the Wallan Cemetery. His grandson, Henry, was a Merriang Shire Councillor in the early part of the twentieth century. Barbers were still residing in the district in 2013.

George Harrison

George Harrison was born in 1816, arriving in Australia in 1841, aged 27 years. He married Mary Gleeson in 1856, having purchased a property in Upper Plenty in 1855. He had several children and was instrumental in successfully petitioning for a local primary school to be built. It is not known what type of farming activity he was engaged in, although most of the local farmers grew crops, raised pigs and

sheep, as well as dairy cows; milk being sold to passing hawkers for the Melbourne market. George had left his property by 1879 and died at the age of 88 years in 1904 at Lake Rowan, near Benalla.

Alexander McDonald

'Sandy' McDonald was born in 1853 in Glenvale. His father, William, arrived in Australia about 1845 and either selected or purchased land at the first Upper Plenty property sales. The family lived at Glenvale while Mr McDonald Senior went to the gold diggings at Bendigo.

Mr McDonald resided in the Upper Plenty/Glenvale/Whittlesea areas all his life. As a young man he rented, for 25 pounds a year, 8,500 acres from the Crown, which included part of the old Glenvale Station. Here he agisted cattle for 3d (3 pennies) a head. He held this land until the *Duffy Village Settlement Act* caused it to be subdivided and sold in 1877. He then farmed his own property at Upper Plenty until 1903, then leased another property until he retired in 1912.

The McDonald family home, circa 1890.

In 1934, in a local newspaper article entitled 'Whittlesea's Oldest Resident', he recalled that very good quality grass was available in the mountains at that time [1860s], but later, with the destruction of the trees by sawmillers and paling splitters, grassland was replaced by rough bush and undergrowth.

The Kelly family were known to Mr McDonald and he apparently knew Ned Kelly well when he lived near Beveridge. He recalled many exciting days on the Whittlesea Racecourse, which was broken up when the railway line was required to run through it.

Alexander 'Sandy' McDonald, circa 1880.

William McDonald, circa 1865.

James Quinn

James and Mary Quinn and their six children were all born in County Antrim, Ireland. They arrived at Port Phillip in 1841. James worked as a woodcutter, farmhand and small farmer on rented acreage in Wallan before selecting the two allotments totalling 710 acres. He is mostly known for his daughter, Ellen, who eloped with John Kelly of Beveridge. This couple's third child was the notorious Ned Kelly.

In 1864, James sold his land to Thomas Dougall, after having sold a right of way for the North East Railway Line on the western edge of his property.

The bluestone remnants of the old Quinn home are still visible on the property. Built by James Quinn, circa 1855, Quinn's Cottage is located on private property on the Epping-Wandong Road. The Australian Heritage Database describes it as: "In a poor state of repairs and disused. The iron, however, remains on most of the roof. The floor is intact. The cottage consists of three reasonable-sized rooms and two small rooms believed to have been additions of the 1880s at the back, believed to have been bedrooms. There is a fireplace at both ends of the building and the baker's oven has its own chimney … the cottage retains some original features, including roof palings, fragments of wallpaper and a chimney crane."

Quinn's Cottage. The photos were taken by John T Collins in 1976, titled 'Wallan East. "Walnaring" Quinn's Cottage'. Courtesy: JT Collins Collection, La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Thomas Dougall

Thomas Dougall, a native of Scotland, came to Victoria with his wife, Mary, and began farming at Ascot. They purchased the Quinn property and renamed it 'Springvale'. The couple and their three sons initially resided in the home constructed by James Quinn in the old style – shingle roof and paling walls with ceiling lined, if at all, with calico, and a verandah on its western aspect. A crane over the open fire with adjoining baker's oven was still intact at the time of sale; the only repairs required being iron placed over the timber shingles.

A new seven-roomed home was built by the Dougalls in 1901–02. The property was later occupied by Frederick Cleve. The 1901 home still exists, having been extensively renovated by the current owners and renamed 'Walnarring'.

Robert Bruce

Not much is known about Robert Bruce other than his purchase of land in Upper Plenty in 1855. He is mentioned in *The Kilmore Free Press* as having participated in local ploughing matches as late as the mid-1860s. He later leased his land to George Robertson and seems to have disappeared. He was widely known for his unusual height of 7 feet 6 inches and was known by many as 'Long John Bruce'. Mahadys Road was originally named Bruces Creek Road but was later changed due to the confusion created by having two Bruces Creek Roads so close together.

Mark Hayes

Brothers Mark and Anthony Hayes purchased Lot 58 on the 1855 Sale Plan, which was later leased to John Wyatt. Wyatt first operated the house on the property as a store and as an inn from around 1861. In 1868 he applied for a beer licence for the building, which he described as, "of brick and contains 8 rooms, rented from Edward Hayes" (*Kilmore Free Press*, 18 January 1868). He named this the Gap Inn, which remained in operation until the death of Edward Hayes. The land was then purchased by Henry Barber.

The Rice family

John Rice was born in County Down, Ireland, in 1833, and arrived in Australia in 1856. He settled in Glenvale in 1857, leasing land from the Glenvale Station. He and his wife, Sarah, raised a large family. The Glenvale Park homestead is believed to have been built during the 1880s after the Glenvale Station had been subdivided and sold. John Rice would have purchased this land by 'pre-emptive right', being the occupier. He died in 1902 and the property was sold in 1920. The early homestead had a dairy, milking shed and brick well and some of the out-buildings remain today.

Glenvale Park homestead, 1985. Built circa 1880 by the Rice family. Photographer: John Waghorn.

The Gardiner family

William Gardiner, a widower, born in Galloway, Scotland, in 1818, arrived in Victoria with his son Alexander in 1851. He worked at a number of jobs, among them a manager's position at Avoca for Hugh Glass, who had owned land at Glenvale in the 1850s. By the mid-1860s he had settled in Upper Plenty/Glenvale and had built a timber home on 670 acres. In 1873, Alexander married Margaret Butcher and together they raised a family of ten children.

In 1910, Alexander had 'Brooklands' built, replacing an earlier timber residence that had been in use since the 1860s. The property remained in the hands of the Gardiner family until the 1970s. After the death of Walter Gardiner, the property, comprising a number of titles, was sold.

Local stories tell that Alexander Gardiner threatened to disinherit his children if they married or did anything other than run sheep on the property. Curiously, their grandfather, William, bequeathed the entire Brooklands estate in trust for his five grand-daughters, his son Alexander being one of the two trustees.

Other local stories claim that Alexander was a possessive father who discouraged suitors from his daughters. Their close neighbour, Joe Holt, was apparently in love with Susie Gardiner and stories have it they left notes for one another under a rock at the creek adjoining their properties. None of Alexander's daughters married, nor did Joe Holt, whose father, Joe Holt Senior, is pictured **right**.

James Patton

James Patton arrived in Victoria from Van Diemen's Land in 1841. No records of his arrival or residence in Tasmania have been found. He is known to have married Margaret Joyce and his presence in the

Glenvale area of Upper Plenty was noted as early as 1844. His first landholding was about four-kilometres north of Glenvale; however, he later purchased land in the present-day Towts Road area, naming his property 'Mount Hope'.

The Argus (21 April 1858) noted the Licensing Court approving his publican's licence at the McDougall Hotel, Upper Plenty (formerly owned by Charles McDougall) and also in 1868 for the Upper Plenty Hotel, presumably the same hotel under a change of name.

He became quite prosperous, owning two farms and another in the centre of Glenvale on which his homestead and hotel were built. "The latter are surrounded by an extensive fruit, vegetable and flower garden, and are well-supplied by water, two tanks, both bricked and cemented, one 12-foot deep and the same width, the other 18 foot in depth and 16-foot wide, having been sunk close to the hotel." (*Weekly Times*, 21 February 1880.) On this property were also located a number of impressive outbuildings, which were used for various farming activities.

Mr Patton was also engaged in horse breeding and had a racetrack built on the Mount Hope property. He died, aged 82, in 1894 at his property and was survived by his seven children.

Octavius Brown and Hugh Glass

Little is known about these men. They seem to have been Melbourne-based businessmen and could have been absentee land owners/land speculators.
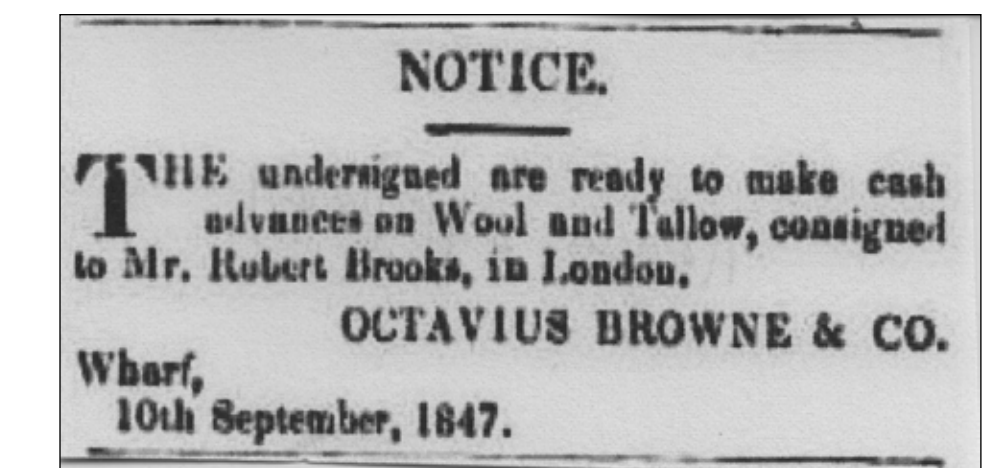
Charles McDougall

Little is known about Charles McDougall other than him being a very early landowner in the Glenvale area and licensee of what was probably the first inn along the present-day Wallan-Whittlesea Road – McDougall's.
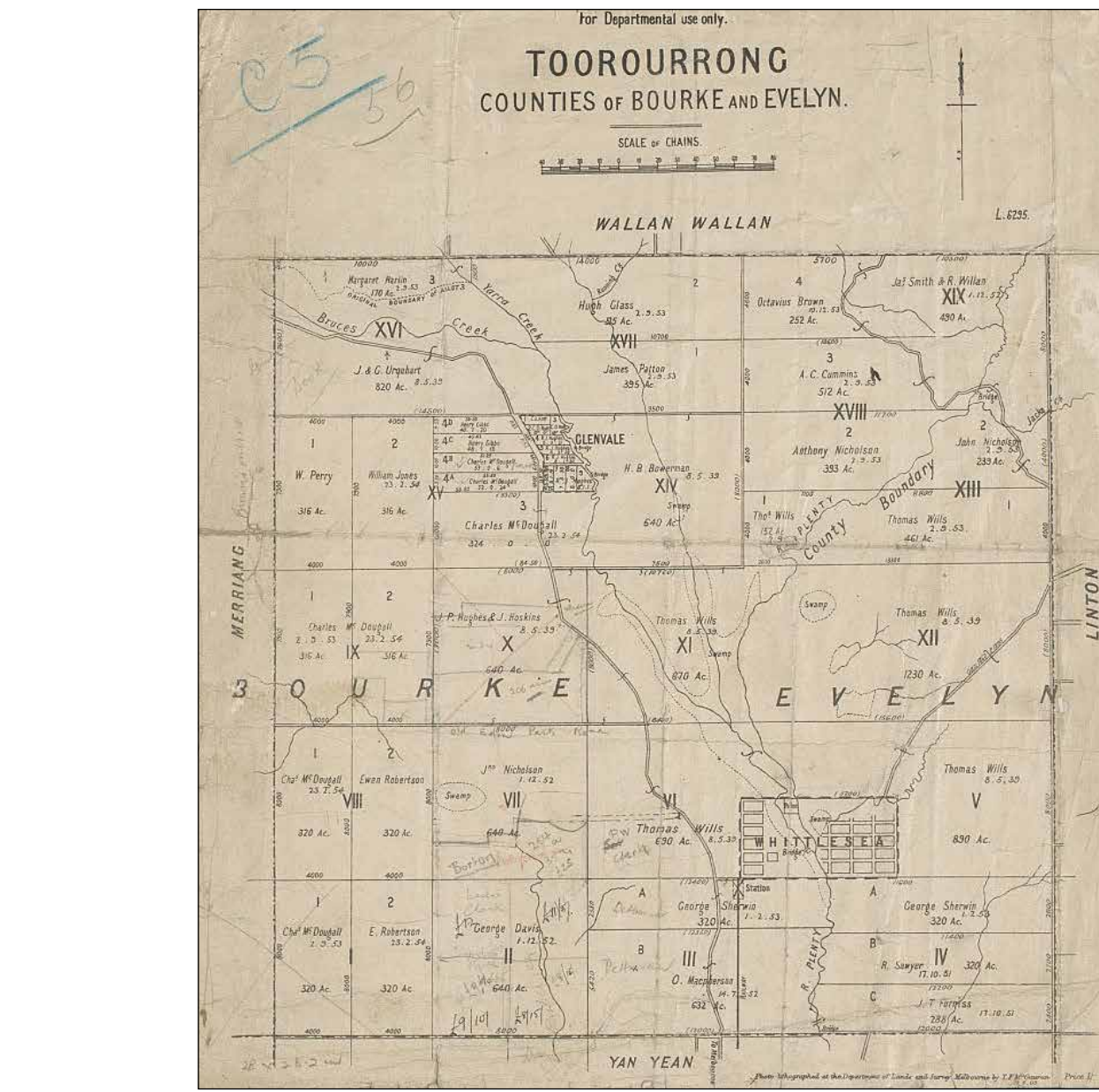
EARLY ROADS

Early roads tended to follow old stock routes – little more than unmade tracks, often impassable in wet weather. The 'Main Plenty Road' (Wallan-Whittlesea Road to Plenty Road) was formerly the main route by which cattle and sheep from northern Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland travelled to the Melbourne market, and it was not uncommon to see several mobs of 100 to 1,500 in number passing through each week. While en route the animals would rely on reserves set aside for 'commonage' purpose and 'the Long Paddock', which refers to roadside vegetation. The reserve at Glenvale was a routine stopping spot for drovers and their mobs of sheep and cattle, which might account for the presence of three hotels.