

FISCHER – BRACKS HISTORY OF DARLINGTON

PART ONE

'In the hills above the city -

Cradled in the trees

With the scent of eucalypts

Sweet upon the breeze'.

So run the first four lines of the Darlington School song written by Mr. Chris Durrant, the current P. & C. President at the time of Darlington Primary School's 70th birthday in 1982.

Today the village of Darlington nestles just so in its cradle among the trees and indeed the scent of eucalypts (and its distinctive pines) is sweet upon the warm breezes of spring, summer and autumn. But not always was this busy little village, with its uniquely Anglo/Australian atmosphere, nestled so comfortably among the sloping hillsides.

Over one hundred and fifty-seven years ago, indeed going back forty thousand years or more, it was not the boys and girls, men and women of European forebears that made their homes in the peaceful atmosphere of the hills, but people of the Nyoongar tribe of Aborigines in their families and clans who spent their days and weeks, months and years, in the age-old custom of their ancestors. The cycle of each year was spent on nomadic walkabouts from hills to coast and back to the hills again, depending upon the seasonal foods available in their natural habitat. Meetings took place with other families and clans at special times of the year such as the yam-digging season along the banks of the Swan River near where Guildford now stands - a rich harvest ground for these sought after roots. Gatherings were held for important ceremonies and corroborees; trading took place with each other in foodstuffs and the like and important news was passed on. No doubt, many a wary eye was kept on the river for the appearance of the Wagyl, a spirit serpent of Aboriginal legend which is believed to this day to inhabit a cave in the hillside, near where Bennett Brook enters the Swan River.

One can imagine the curiosity, wonder (and later chagrin) which these Nyoongar people must have experienced upon first sighting James Stirling and his men on their exploration of the Swan River in 1827, and later when settlements were established in the Swan River Colony from 1829 onwards. Between 1829 and 1831, when Ensign Robert Dale and his exploratory parties were surveying lands outwards from Guildford into the hills and along the Helena River, there were peaceful and co-operative encounters with the Aborigines and ample proof was found of their existence. It was in 1831 that Dale, with an accompanying party, set out to blaze a trail over the ranges to York and it was this journey, and Dale's subsequent reports on it, which led indirectly to settlement in the area which was to become known as Darlington some forty-nine years later. The pioneering party on this occasion consisted of a cart belonging to Messrs. Clarkson and Hardey drawn by two horses and two cows; a second cart drawn by two cows; three pack-horses carrying provisions and clothing; Dale and a party of men including George Fletcher Moore, whose writings in his diary of 'Ten Years of an Early Settler in W.A.' offers a vivid description of the trip. The party had approached the hills up what is now the Boya Valley and, keeping the high ground to the north of the valley, blazed a trail across ground where Boya Quarry was much later established.

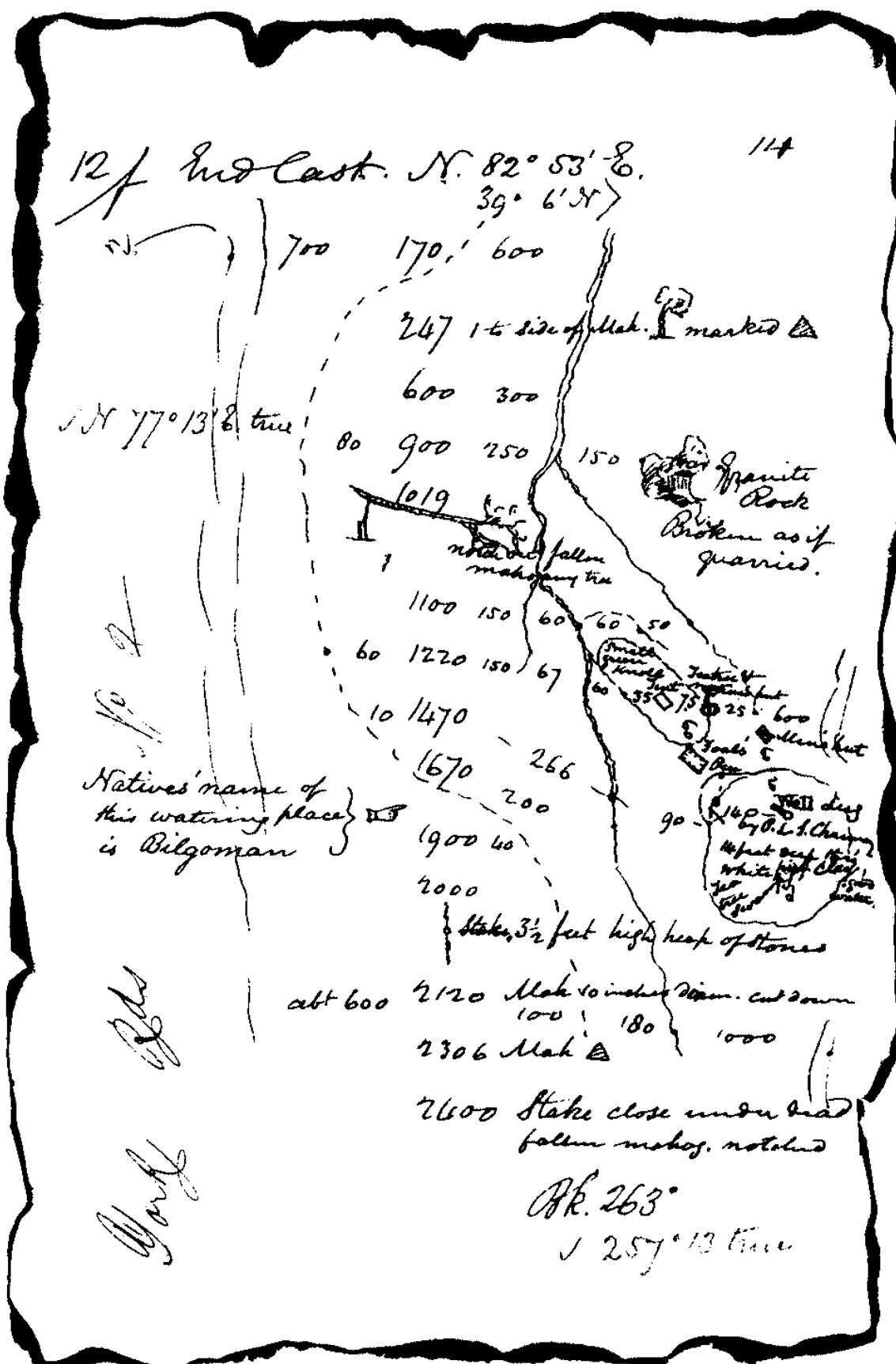


Figure 1 Chauncy Survey Map 1846 - note mention of the name 'Bilgoman' for the watering place.

They progressed across the north of the present Saw Estate and, still keeping to the high ground, passed just to the south of where 'Kirkcaldy' (Mr Hugo Fischer's) residence now stands. Thence they progressed across the site of Lionel Road northwards to cross the line of the future Great Eastern Highway and follow a valley to the east of today's John Forrest National Park and onwards toward York.

The blazing of this trail, however, did not lead immediately to a permanent settlement in this area of the hills. It did, however, lead to the establishment of a well-used road to York which eventually induced people to settle further and further out from the established centres at Fremantle, Perth and Guildford. By the 1850's a convict camp was established beside the Bilgoman Well. This well had originally been dug by the then Assistant Surveyor of the Colony, Philip La Mothe Snell Chauncy, during his survey of the York Road which was commenced on 10th March, 1846. It was fourteen feet deep and was sunk through white pipe clay near a known Aboriginal watering-place which was called Bilgoman.

Within the last twelve months or so local interest has centred on this long-abandoned well which is located in thick and overgrown bush directly below the Bilgoman Swimming Pool near where Darlington Road joins Great Eastern Highway.



The Bilgoman Well when first found and cleaned out in 1986



1920's photo shows the ruins of the Greenmount convict station courtesy of M&HHS.

Dale's original track was used only infrequently by travellers to York in an effort to avoid the long haul up the steep scarp over the main road, which was rocky and difficult to negotiate. Its course, however, passed close by the site of where 'Clayton Farm' now stands. This was originally a tract of land of 1100 acres granted to Henry Camfield in the 1830's. This was later leased to James Drummond the Colonial Botanist, and later still to James Clayton becoming known as 'Clayton's Place' or simply 'Clayton's'.



Clayton farm 1984 with the lovely mellow colour of its old bricks

Clayton Road today skirts what remains of the original land grant after successive subdivisions. In the latter part of 1860, the then property had been purchased from Mr. Camfield by Mr. Richard Smith. It was he who built the two-storied brick residence which is shown in the photograph above. This was the first permanent settler's residence anywhere near what was to become the Darlington area.

In 1876 Richard's son, Alfred, left the family property to establish a timber mill further east in the hills. This became known first as 'Smith's Mill' which later became Glen Forrest. A few years later R.W. Hardey and William McGlew acquired a land holding south of Smith's Mill and planted it with vines. This became known as the Glen Hardey Estate. Incidentally, it was Hardey's brother, John, who had been in Dale's trail-blazing party of 1831.

So by 1880 there had been no permanent settlement or development of the area between Smith's farm, the old convict settlement and Bilgoman Well and Smith's Mill. In that year Dr. Alfred Waylen of Guildford purchased three blocks of 50 acres each in the area which subsequently, years later, became the heart of Darlington.

Alfred Robert Waylen had been born at his father's property at Point Walter in 1833 and, like his father, who was a Colonial Surgeon, he also became a doctor. In 1859 he had been appointed as surgeon in the convict service and medical officer for the Swan district. He supervised the convict depot at Guildford and its outstations. In 1862 he had married a cousin of R.W. Hardey who was to establish the Glen Hardey Estate. The land in the hills was selected in conjunction with R.W. Hardey with the view of establishing a vineyard there. It was by all accounts a charming spot on a slope facing the rising sun. By 1886 Dr. Waylen had 24 acres planted with vines, a four-roomed cottage and stable built, and a 30 acre paddock fenced for sheep, four acres of which were cleared. He was, at that stage, advertising in 'The West Australian' to open a share list in the property known as Darlington Vineyards, or to go into partnership. A partnership it was - with a gentleman by the name of the Honorable Josceline George Herbert Amherst, a younger son of a British nobleman who had come out to Western Australia in 1885 as private secretary to Governor Broome, after having graduated as a barrister from Cambridge University. He also owned a property at West Midland lying along the southern boundary of James Stirling's estate.



Robert Waylen (left) and Josceline Amherst
(right)
courtesy State Library WA.



It was arranged between the two partners that Dr. Waylen would remain at Guildford to attend to his affairs there and at Perth, while Amherst would look after the Darlington property. In October, 1886 Waylen had purchased one of the Eastern Railway allotments adjacent to the vineyard and Amherst was granted a portion of this block lying on the north side of the railway line. On this land he built a grand stone house named 'Holmesdale' after one of the Amherst family estates in England. This stands today surrounded by other more modern homes built on the sub-divided estate and is home to the Lambert family who settled in Darlington from California.



Holmesdale 1984, large, cool and gracious.

And so Darlington was at last under way. In March of 1884 the second stage of the Eastern Railways was built from Guildford to Chidlows Well and this was to give considerable impetus to the growth of Darlington. The original proposals for the railway had been drawn up by a professional engineer, Henry E. Victor, in 1874, and it was while surveying a route for the railway line through the Helena Valley that he was impressed with the land in the vicinity of the Darlington Vineyards and subsequently took up an area with his son William, naming it 'The Glen' and establishing on it a wide variety of fruit trees and grape vines. 'The Glen' was situated on the south bank of Nyaania Brook and was reached down what is now known as Glen Road and over a rustic log bridge. Today a more modern wooden bridge spans Nyaania Creek by the property of Mr. and Mrs. Vlad James on the left, but there is little to indicate where the homestead and orchard were located.

Late in the 1890's several other settlers had arrived to establish vineyards and orchards, among them Thomas Cockshott whose property 'Bellair' was situated atop a rocky rise opposite 'The Glen' and bounded by what are now Glen and Victor Roads. Both of these properties remained in the possession of their respective families until they were purchased by Albert Prater in the 1930's and sub-divided. Further sub-division and sale of the 'Prater's Farm Estate' occurred several years ago, amid local consternation as to the size of the blocks and the impact it would have on the local environment. Today attractive, modern homes are being

built on these sub-divisions and the ruins of 'Bellair' are being consumed by the gardens and out-buildings of these.

John Allpike was another early settler in Darlington. He was the manager of Padbury's Guildford Stores and had previous experience in growing vines near Mundaring. He purchased Swan Lot 32 of 19 acres on May 15th, 1894 and set about establishing a vineyard and wine cellars on it. He built on the property a large and beautiful home 'Leithdale', which during the years has had a varied and very interesting history as a private home, guest house and the premises of the first Darlington School (in its ballroom). At present it is the private residence of Mr and Mrs A.J. Templeman and their family and remains as lovely as ever.



Leithdale in the 1920's

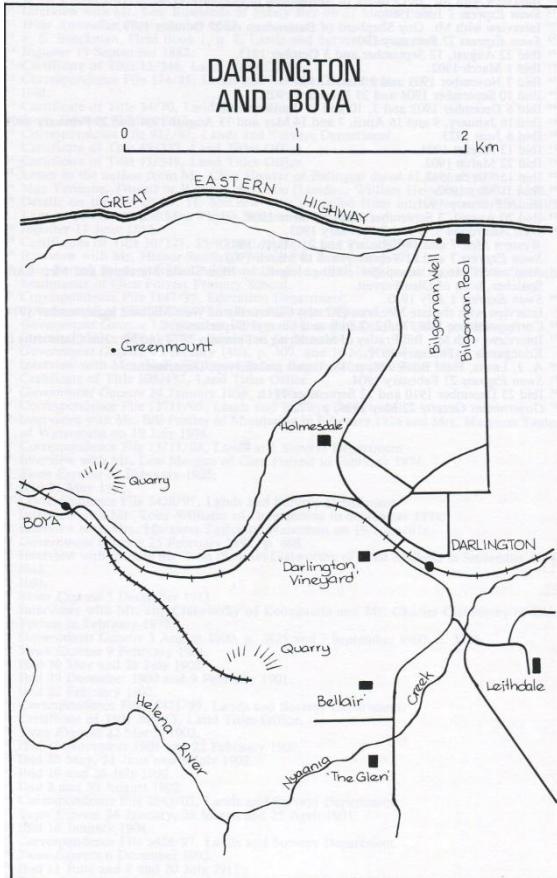


Leithdale Now, 1984



Back row L to R Keith Taplin, Bob Dinning, Faith Maslin, Constance Gibson, Frank Johnson
Second row L to R Ted Walton, Audrey Taplin, Lorna Maslin, Douglas Taplin
Third row L to R Ken Walton, Fred Gibson, Estelle Victor, Dorothy Victor, Marjorie Victor, Edna Johnson, Elsie Walton
Front row L to R Leith Maslin, Neil Taplin, Ivan Johnson

1913 Darlington School children on the steps of 'Leithdale'



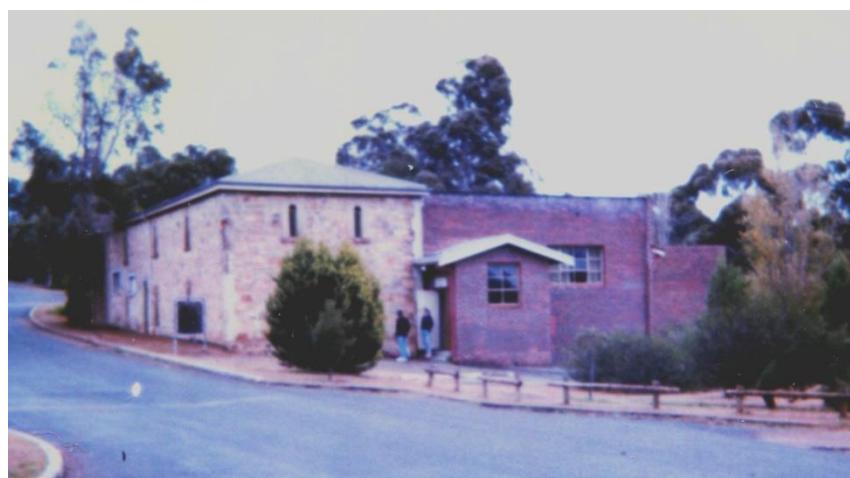
Map of Darlington from Ian Elliot's book 'History of the Mundaring Shire'. Note the railway cuts through the centre of the town

The railway had encouraged more people to make their residence in Darlington; tourism to the area flourished with weekend visitors staying at guest houses such as 'Dalry Lodge' and 'Leithdale'. Many city people also established weekend retreat cottages in the peace of the hills. By the early 1900's both Dr. Waylen and the Honorable Amherst had died and the main part of their vineyard on the south side of the railway had been taken over by Richard Holmes and Co., wine merchants of Perth. Managers of the property came and went as it gradually became run down and ceased operations in the early 1920's. The area was gradually subdivided and crossed by Owen and Orange Roads. Private homes and gardens took the place of the decaying vines. Part of the vineyard near the railway was turned into a sports ground which is today the Darlington Oval, formerly known as 'the Rec.'. It is now adjoined by the Darlington Tennis Club and the former Pony Club grounds.

The cellars which had been established in the 1890's, using blue granite, stood as a reminder of the area's early beginnings and, with later renovations and additions, were to serve the district well as a public hall. Darlington itself remained as a seemingly quiet and sleepy little place which nevertheless boasted a wide variety of leisure activities for its inhabitants. Indeed, the Darlington of today offers a more relaxed and peaceful lifestyle than inner suburbia can offer.



Waylens' Darlington Vineyard 1908, (cellar in the background) courtesy State Library WA



Present Darlington Hall with the original cellar on the left

- Continued in Part Two -