

HISTORY OF TUERONG HOMESTEAD AND ESTABLISHMENT OF DROMANA ESTATE

1839 – 1920s

William Thomas was appointed Assistant Protector of Aborigines with responsibility for the Westernport people. Thomas travelled a great deal with the local Bonurong tribe and left a map, drawn in 1841, of some of the routes taken by them over the Peninsula. The map includes some of the names used by the Bonurong for places on the Peninsula and locates Thomas' own hut at the station he established called Tuerong. G A Robinson, chief protector, noted that the Waverong and Tar-doon-yen-ong tribes were also represented on the peninsula.

Thomas estimated that 83 Bonurong lived on the peninsula when he arrived in 1839. By the 1850s, he said there were less than 28. Aside from the name of Thomas' original station, there is little known physical evidence left of the encounters between white and black people in Mornington last century. However, a number of shell middens dotted along the coast, are reminders of the Bonurong's (or Bunurong) pre-contact occupation of the land.

The surveyor, Smythe showed the property Towarang' (Tuerong) in his 1841 plan as the station belonging to Assistant Aboriginal Protector William Thomas. When government surveyor Permein surveyed Mornington for land sales in the early 1850s very little had changed from the time of Smythe's map. Permien notes a number of buildings and fences at The Briars, and four buildings and fences at Tuerong in the vicinity of the track that became the Three Chain Road. Tuerong remained as a 640 acre Preemptive Right, woned by Ralph Ruddell. Ruddell's farm complex is shown here in 1855 on the recently surveyed 'Road from the Heads' (Moorooduc Highway), surrounded by other crown sections owned by Connell, White and Balcombe. The complex is encircled by tracks and borders a stream with a water hole created to the south-east. Two buildings occupy a northern yard and two more a southern yard.

The properties Tuerong and Tuerong Park (also Nedlands) still exist on parts of this Preemptive Right, the latter once encompassing some of the station's early buildings.

A recent owner, Dr Stubbe, is descended from Thomas, although the property has had many owners since Thomas era. He discovered wattle and daub construction behind more recent linings when renovating his kitchen. The consolidated floor at a hut lies further to the south of the house.

An early photograph of Thomas at his protectorate shows a simple vertical slab hut, with a bark roof and boarded chimney, possibly an earlier stage to that of the wattle and daub. However Mrs Thomas became ill from living in a hut at Arthurs Seat which had just been 'mudded' in late 1839. One of Thomas' first acts when he arrived at the station was to make a 'miam' and sleep among the natives, many of which had transferred from the native encampment on the Yarra where there was frequent inter-tribal friction and negative influences from the white settlement. The first man encampment at Arthurs Seat was distributed on both sides of what he called the 'Tubberrubabel' creek where he erected a 'shed of some length ... for teaching the children ... and ... as a place of worship'. The next encampment was 'at a place called Tuerong (5 miles SE from Mount Martha)'. Thomas held a pastoral lease for 12,000 acres there 1840-2.

Later lessees of the run were George Bolton Eagle (1842-6), William Dawson (1846-9), John

McKenzie and Joseph Hall (1849-50), John Miller (1850-2), Ralph Ruddell (1852-60), and Vaughan & Wild (1860-4 canceled). Ruddell acquired the preemptive right.

Later history of the site includes its ownership late last century by the land speculator and politician, the Hon. Thomas Bent (1838-1909) who presumably owned (and built?) the late 19th century timber remnants of the present house. During the 1890s depression, Bent reputedly kept solvent by dairy farming at Port Fairy. William and Louisa Crooks (William of the Adelaide firm Brooker & Crooks, retired 1893) spent 9 years there in the early 1900s, eventually relocating to The Uplands property at Vermont.

A photograph from c1927 shows the front garden with roses, gravel drive and raised and formed garden beds. Another view of 1934 shows the entrance with a timber picket fence either side of the gate and a double row of trees planted along the drive.

Rowland H Richardson and later John Paton of Brighton had it in the 1940s-50s, followed by Vernon Edgar and Charles Kirton, most describing themselves as graziers. Photographs of the site from the 1920-30s show a picketed gateway to the drive, now gone.

The Homestead

Tuerong Park – As Recalled by Gwen Matthews (Nee Clark)

November 2005

The property was purchased by Mr and Mrs E K Clark in 1926 for 15,000 Pounds and consisted of 600 acres, 400 acres on the homestead side of Moorooduc Road (then know as the “Three Chain Road”) and 200 acres on the opposite side of the road beside “Hadlow”, now the Lavender Farm and Tuerong Road. “The Briars” adjoined the property on the West side of the homestead site.

In 1926 the family consisted of Mr and Mrs Clark, Norm aged 18, Alan aged 10 and myself aged 18 months.

We started farming with sheep however the “Depression” lowered wool prices to such an extent that we brought in a dairy herd together with pigs and poultry. Norman kept Barnevelder fowls and his Khaki – Campbell Ducks won a Burnley Award.

We produced our own butter and sold our eggs around the district. Rabbits figured prominently on our menu during these times and Mr Clark shot the rabbits and dried the skins for sale.

Mrs Clark often made scalded cream which was delivered around Mornington by bicycle by Alan at the age of 16 years. During the hot weather the perishables were kept in the Coolgardie safe under the trees in the garden. My main duty was to stand on a box and turn the handle of the separator when my brothers wanted to get away early from milking.

We also cut and sold firewood in Mornington and Melbourne, Alan taking the T Model Ford out into the surrounding scrub, removing the engine from the Ford, using it to cut the firewood, then replacing the engine into the vehicle, loading the wood and then delivering it.

The homestead was triple fronted and facing East with a sleep-out between two verandahs on the North side (now the front entrance) and a conservatory adjacent to the lounge on the South East corner.

There was a horseshoe drive around the house, lawns and roses on the North East side of the house, terraced gardens on the front of the house (facing East). On the North side was a large vegetable garden and orchard.

There were six white marble fireplaces in the house. We had our own generator for electricity and the hot water, which was piped to the kitchen, pantry and bathroom was provided by the

double range “Andrews” stove in the kitchen. Four septic tank toilets were spread around the property, one in the main bathroom, one for staff at the rear of the house and two in the old remaining toilet block near the sheds.

Water was pumped up from a water hole near Moorooduc Road to two large tanks on a high stand near the toilet block. The two water tanks at the side of the house and one attached to the laundry and staff rooms were filled from the roof. The old water well and pump at the rear of the house was available as a backup if water ran short.

Our telephone number was Mornington 37 and the Post Office Box number was 2.

The property was sold for 5000 Pounds in 1934 to Mr Knuckey.

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