



Diggings



THE JOURNAL OF THE MARYBOROUGH MIDLANDS HISTORICAL SOCIETY
VOLUME 37 NUMBER 1 FEBRUARY 2025

VALUABLE RECORD OF OUR EARLY HISTORY

In July 1942 Maryborough-born historian, journalist and naturalist Alexander Hugh Chisholm wrote this book review for the Melbourne Herald on a subject for which he was eminently qualified – Maryborough's heritage.

NEARLY 50 years ago Alfred Joyce, of Maryborough, wrote his reminiscences of pioneer pastoral life, but the manuscript failed to reach publication, and it was not until 1940 that it came into the hands of Professor Crawford, of Melbourne University. Now at last, the reminiscences are in book form, under the title of "A Homestead History." The delay has proved distinctly beneficial. The story as Mr Joyce wrote it was interesting, but it has gained greatly in value by the work of the editor of the book. Mr G. F. James. His inquiries resulted in the discovery of 22 letters which amplify the narrative, and moreover he has added highly useful explanatory notes and an index. The ghost of Alfred Joyce should be grateful. Incidentally, when Mr James visited Maryborough he discovered that only 48 hours earlier all the old records of the local Court House had been sent to a pulping mill. This disaster provides a basis for a strong plea to persons who possess old documents not to sacrifice them until the Public Library or the History Department of the University has been notified.

Alfred Joyce's story begins with his arrival in Port Phillip in 1843. His early adventure in the "village" of Melbourne is recounted, and then the tale moves to "Plaistow", a property which the Joyce brothers acquired, on Joyce's Creek. After that the chief scene is old "Norwood," eight miles from Maryborough. Most of the Joyce material is purely pastoral. Oddly, he has little to say about the blacks [sic], the trees, the mammals, the birds and other features of the landscape of old. He does, however, offer many human touches, including the story of how "Captain" Melville, the bushranger, held up 'Norwood' in 1852. Necessarily, notes on the gold rushes occur. In a letter dated September, 1856. Joyce records 'that there were then about 60,000 people at Dunolly, whereas six weeks earlier there were not more than 500.' His own interest in the rushes was mainly hostile — he liked to do business with the gold-seekers, but, being a dyed-in-the-wool Squatter, he regarded mining as little more than a public nuisance. In general, the Joyce book is a valuable addition to Victorian history.

A Homestead History: being the reminiscences and letters of Alfred Joyce of Plaistow and Norwood, Port Phillip 1834-1864 (Ed G.F. James)

ALFRED JOYCE'S LETTERS FROM NORWOOD

Alfred Joyce writes from Norwood 170 years ago: February 1855



Norwood, 27 February 1855

George [Alfred's brother] and Frederick [Alfred's nephew Frederick Thomas Eager] and I were in town together in the middle of January, the first time all three have been together since our first arrival in the colony. George was in to dispose of his wool and purchase his stores, Frederick to purchase goods and self to get stores and arrange a few transactions ... I have sent my wool home [ie England] this year instead of selling it ... there were fifty-two bales. I have not been doing much since Christmas as the season has been so very dry, in fact quite a drought.

Left: Watercolour of "Norwood" in the 1850s.

Reproduced in *A Homestead History*.

Since I wrote you last, there has [sic] been some new diggings taken up on my spring creek, three miles from here, and which were called "Joyce's diggings", but have since been christened by the authorities Alma diggings, though they still continue to be called by the former name. There have been several different rushes to it and the total population musters now about 5,000. A great deal of gold has been taken from it since it was first rushed.

Continued on P.2

I have discontinued dairying for about a month past as there was no feed for the cows and they were getting in such low condition, but I intend to resume it shortly on a much more extensive scale. I have lately commenced slaughtering sheep at the station, and sending them quartered into the diggings. I find it much more profitable than selling live sheep to the butchers. We are slaughtering at present about ten a day.

We have been visited within this last week with a most abundant supply of rain which is already beginning to change the colour of the ground to a refreshing green, to reanimate the poor half-starved stock... the only available water I had on the run was close to the house and to it every head of stock of all kinds had to come when they wanted to drink. There were a few other water holes a short distance from the paddock, but these were taken possession of by the diggers for drinking and gold washing ... the diggers are cutting up and occupying a considerable portion of this run...

I am just commencing the market garden again which for these four months of drought has been at a perfect standstill. I have got a Cornish farmer who is lately out from home as a gardener. Wages are not as high as they were a short time ago; one pound per week is the rate. I am paying the working hands about the place: until lately it was 30 shillings.

The sheep are much about the same for scab; we manage just to keep it under by occasionally dipping and spotting. I am thinking of clearing off the sheep stock ... and replacing them with dairy cattle, which I think will suit the run better. We are so surrounded with the diggings that dairy produce will be sure to sell well ...

OCTOBER 1855

I have got in about thirty-four acres of hay, three acres of potatoes and about three acres of market garden... during the winter I was very often employed the whole of the evening candle-making, etc. When butchering I convert the whole of the surplus tallow from the sheep into candles, and retail them at 1s 3d per pound on the diggings along with the other produce...

DECEMBER 1855

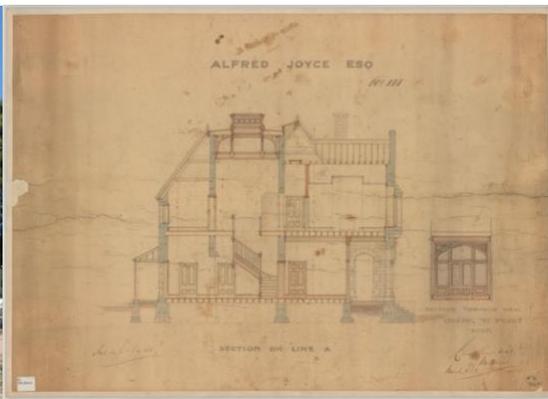
We have just been celebrating Christmas in the good old English style... we had first that most indispensable of all requisites, a good dinner; after that, wine and desert, interspersed with a game of proverbs; next shooting and gymnastics for the gentlemen, and a stroll for the ladies. Then tea, and afterwards a variety of games and charades too numerous to mention. We kept up a succession of novel entertainments until three the next morning...

... With the exception of a little anxiety now and then regarding money difficulties (which I generally manage to get over somehow satisfactorily) we enjoy upon the whole a good share of happiness and comfort. The house is roomy and comfortably furnished, though not perhaps so elegantly as you are accustomed to see at home. We have a good garden of both flowers and vegetables, and we have just enough visits from friends and relatives to give an agreeable change...

As Caroline [Alfred's wife] has no servant for the house, I have endeavoured to make the kitchen as complete as I could so as to save as much labour as possible. The kitchen is in the house, and fitted up with every convenience, a sink, plate rack and complete dresser, clean water led inside with a pipe and tap, and I intend having another pipe to carry away the dirty water into a covered drain; and we have a very complete American cooking stove which Mr Bucknall [Caroline's father] presented to us ...



Norwood 2008 courtesy of Victorian Heritage database



One of Terry's plans: State Library of Victoria

In the 1860s Joyce commissioned the noted architect Leonard Terry to draw up plans for a 21 room homestead in the Gothic Revival style to replace the original house. Unfortunately a succession of poor seasons and droughts ruined Joyce, and the property was sold in February 1887.

Mr Alfred Joyce, J.P., a very early colonist, died at his residence, "Mervyn," Nightingale street, yesterday. The deceased came to Victoria in the early fifties, and took up an extensive selection, now known as the Norwood Estate, at Wareek, a short distance from Maryborough, then called Simpson's [sic] Ranges. Some years ago the property was cut up and sold, Mr Joyce going to Maryborough, where he has since lived privately. He occupied a seat on the first Tullaroop Road Board, and, on the shire being formed, continued to act as a councillor, holding his seat for a number of years. He was 80 years of age, a staunch Conservative, and a strong believer in free trade. The deceased, who was widely known and much respected, leaves a grown-up family of daughters, his wife having pre-deceased him some two years ago. **Ballarat Star, January 21, 1901**

WHAT'S IN A NAME: Confusion!

MELBOURNE, Monday:

After 11 months Maryborough (Victoria) Agricultural Society has discovered what became of two champion Australian axemen who entered for the woodchop events of the 1936 show, but failed to appear. Mr. W. H. Stevenson, the Melbourne representative of the society, has now been informed by officials of the Victorian Axemen's Association that the two axemen went to Maryborough (Queensland) and were amazed to find on arrival that no show was being held there.

News (Adelaide), Monday October 4, 1937

For many years, even after the introduction of postcodes, it was common for Maryborough 3465 mail to be misdirected to Maryborough 4650 and *vice versa*. Even as late as last year a new passport applied for by one of our committee members was posted (by the relevant government department) to Maryborough Queensland.

Recently our Society received a very polite email request from an English author about to publish a book on military history who was seeking permission to reproduce a photograph for which he thought we held copyright. We redirected him.

For the record, it's claimed that Maryborough Queensland was named in honour of Mary, the well regarded wife of Governor Charles Fitzroy. She was killed in a carriage accident in 1847 in Parramatta.

Maryborough Victoria was of course named by Assistant Gold Commissioner James Daly in 1854.

SCHOOL EXCURSIONS 1875-style

[Any teachers about to read this extract should take a deep breath]

One of the largest and most successfully conducted excursions of the season was celebrated in our midst yesterday. This consisted of between 2600 and 2700 children, from the following schools in the Talbot district, viz.,—Talbot, Lamplough (Lilllicur), Narrigal, Mount Cameron, Kangaroo Flat, Red Lion, Stony Creek, Dunach, Amherst, Evansford, Majorca, Craigie, Emu, and their friends, from whom we ascertained that they had started from Talbot in four trains of ten carriages each, drawn from Ballarat by four Ballarat made engines.

The first train left Talbot at 7.30, the journey, including a short stay at Ballarat, having occupied four hours ten minutes—rather a long time for young children to be confined in railway carriages. The Majorca train, it may be added, was six hours on the way, and engines had to be changed at Ballarat, the trains having been drawn so far by the light locomotives in common use on new lines. Three brass bands accompanied the visitors, whose well dressed appearance and orderly demeanour made a decidedly favourable impression.

The Botanical Gardens were, of course, selected as the headquarters of the party, and here the picnic was held. Of course there was the usual variety of enjoyments, but the sun's rays rendered such things as dancing and robust games too fatiguing to be largely indulged in. The streets of the town for several hours were made lively by the presence of so many strangers, and the only thing that militated against the affair was the fact that the distance which the excursionists had to travel and the time taken up in the trains, materially curtailed the period at their disposal for witnessing the scenery of our town and bay and indulging in social pastimes. The excursionists left the railway terminus on their way homewards between 4 and 5 p.m., after having spent about five hours in Geelong apparently to their satisfaction.

Geelong Advertiser, Saturday February 20, 1875

WEDDING PRESENTS

Our late lamented family history researcher Margaret Walkley compiled an enormous collection of information about Maryborough and its residents.

Margaret was obviously amused by this collection of unusual (by today's standards) but practical wedding gifts.

WILKS/GRIFFITHS	30/09/1904	Canary and cage
MILLER/SDMITH	07/05/1902	Canary and cage and "Box of Treasures"
HARTLEY/BRADLEY	16/04/1902	Case of wine, prize poultry
WHITE/WHITE	13/06/1902	Collie Pup. Two geese
HART/QUICK	11/04/1900	Poultry
ROBINSON/VINCENT	13/02/1918	Turkey

Margaret transcribed these lists from the *Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser*. Newspaper reports of 19th Century weddings often listed the guests and the gifts in great detail.

GARDEN RENEWAL



During this year's hot summer break the dedicated members of our Garden Committee have spent hours watering the newly restored garden.

The lagerstroemia (crepe myrtle) planted in front of Worsley Cottage to commemorate the contribution of Betty and Bruce Osborn to our Society looks spectacular.

On a historical note, this genus of tree was apparently named after Magnus von Lagerström, a director of the Swedish East India Company.

The century old grapevine has been pruned and extricated from the clutches of a jasmine, and our flagpole (originally located at the former Army Reserve depot) has been painted.

END OF YEAR LUNCH 2024

In December recently retired Central Goldfields Shire Councillor (and former Mayor) Geoff Lovett presented a very entertaining and informative insight into heritage issues over the years in the shire.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: INVITATION

The Annual General Meeting of the Maryborough Midlands Historical Society will be held on:

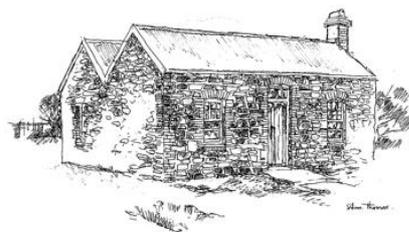
Wednesday March 19 at 2pm in the Research & Resource Centre

3 Palmerston Street, Maryborough

All welcome

NEW DISPLAY CASE

Thanks to a Central Goldfields Shire Council Community grant a brand new museum standard display case will soon be installed in the Museum Room of our Research Centre. The case, incorporating lights and security measures, will be used to house some of our most historically significant exhibits. The Society is grateful for the continued support from the Council.



MARYBOROUGH MIDLANDS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

3 Palmerston Street, Maryborough

P.O. Box 265, Maryborough 3465

Telephone: (03) 5461 2518

ABN: 33610 529 643

Email: mmhs@outlook.com.au

We're also on Facebook/Meta

The Maryborough Midlands Historical Society acknowledges the ancestors and descendants of the Dja Dja Wurrung, traditional owners of the land on which we live and work.
