

# Blairgowrie

## Some Blairgowrie History

### Blairgowrie History (Jack Ritchie)

#### Introduction

Blairgowrie as a district name is of comparatively recent origin, being introduced (22) in the early post World War II period to define the area in advertisement of sub-divisions. To that time it had always been regarded as part of Sorrento, although in the early lime burning days the eastern section was for a time described as Canterbury and this area was more closely associated with Rye than Sorrento.

The exact limits of the Blairgowrie district are not precisely defined but it does form the eastern end of the Collins Riding of the Flinders Shire, and I believe the Council regards the district as being from Cain Road to Stringer Road. These boundaries do not coincide, however, with the limits of either the Blairgowrie Foreshore Trust or Ocean Beach Reserve. For the purpose of this paper I think we can consider the district as being from about the Canterbury Jetty Road area to Hughes Road.

The name Blairgowrie comes from Blairgowrie House, the square towered limestone residence which occupies the top of the most prominent hill in the district and was a landmark long before there was any significant development by today's standards, Early History

Sorrento has, of course, always been known as the site of the first white settlement in Victoria. This is an honour in which, perhaps, Blairgowrie can share, as the site of Collins first settlement in 1803 on Sullivans Bay close to the Eastern Sister is in fact almost equidistant between the present shopping centres of Sorrento and Blairgowrie. The view from the original landing point (1) close to the present Memorial was along what is now the Blairgowrie beach towards Whitecliffs with Arthurs Seat in the background.

It is interesting to read the descriptions of the appearance of the country in those days: It was early spring (October) and the land was described as park like in appearance. Beyond the sandy beach "was a succession of green-clad gentle hills studded with trees, spaced as though set by the hand of man. While nearer the sward glowed with flowers of every hue" (Lieut. Tuckey) (29). Early settlers all spoke of the relatively large trees - honeysuckles (banksias), she-oaks and probably melaleuca - and the ti-tree seems to have been confined to the ocean coast. It was only after the old trees were cut for lime burning in the mid nineteenth century that the ti-tree gradually spread over the Nepean Peninsula as a secondary growth.

Collins' settlement was, however, a short lived one and was abandoned in 1804 in favour of Risdon, Tasmania. For another 30 years, Sorrento and Blairgowrie were left to the Bunerong tribe aborigines.

#### The Cain Family

After the establishment of Melbourne by Batman and then Fawkner in 1835, it was not long before there was some permanent settlement on the Nepean Peninsula.

In 1842, John Sandle Ford had settled at the "Heads" (as the district of Portsea and Sorrento was then known) and he was closely followed by other pioneering families (1). The activities were grazing, growing crops and, in particular, lime burning. Produce was supplied to ships and lime for buildings in Melbourne, In what is now the Blairgowrie district, this era is closely associated with the Cain family.

Owen Cain was born in 1798 in County Tyrone, Ireland and migrated to Australia with his wife Sarah in the early 1840's via America. It is difficult to appreciate today what hardships must have been associated with such a journey, Their eldest son (Joseph) had been born in Ireland, their eldest daughter Sarah Ann (later Mrs. Rodgers) was born in America and second son (John Cain) on the boat between America and Australia. Four more children were born in Australia.

Owen Cain arrived on the Peninsula about 1842 and settled on a property which, after selection in 1860, was bounded by Canterbury Jetty Road, Melbourne Road and a line approximating to the present location of Whitecliffs Road. His homestead, named "Tyrone" after his home county in Ireland, was a solid limestone building, still occupied and in good repair, and which is near the end of Flinders Street. "Tyrone" must have been quite an establishment in the early days. The property was grazed and cultivated and at one stage there were no less than sixteen horses. Owen Cain also had his own lime kiln, the site of which is still clearly detectable in Sarazen Street, this being worked by local lime burners on a sub-contract basis. Payment was in cash or stores on basis of lime burnt. Lime and firewood were carted to the beach in drays and out into the shallow water at high tide for loading into small vessels either directly or via flat bottom barges,

Apart from lime, Owen Cain also made a rare and more valued product. One of his descendants claims that he produced (I'm not sure whether within or outside the law) a particularly fine Irish whisky. His advice was said to be that one should always take 1/4 lb, of butter after 1/2 pint of whisky to stop the fumes going to the head.

At one stage all of Owen Cain's sons worked on or around "Tyrone", and, when the land became available for selection in the 1860's both John and James Cain secured Crown Allotments, in addition to what was held by their father. In total, the Cain family owned

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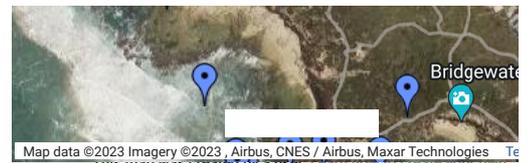
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most of the land from St. Johns Wood Road to Whitecliffs Road.

Owen Cain died in 1896 at the age of 98 years and both he and his wife Sarah (died 1895 aged 96 years) are buried in the Rye Cemetery.

On Owen Cain's death, his holdings were divided between members of his family, James Cain (whose house still remains farmed a property south of the Melbourne Road and running east of Pearse Road. This contained a pond, marked on many of the early maps, which was later in the Possum Park property. It was one of the few places on the Nepean Peninsula where surface fresh water was available. James Cain never married, and on his death, Chomley, a pensioner and rabbit trapper, lived in the house in the 1920's.

John Cain, who had now a considerable holding running along the east side of St. John's Wood Road, lived at "Tyrone" for a period before moving to the Nepean Hotel at Portsea, The hotel had been built for James Ford and John Cain had married his daughter, Julia Ford. John Cain was a striking figure with silver hair in his later years, a local justice with George Coppin, and a shire councillor. He died in 1920, aged 78 years, Mick Cain (born 1846) who worked at Moe and later lived near "Tyrone", was a blacksmith and wheelwright. There are two fine examples of his craft flanking the gate of Mr. Barney Cain's (his son) home in Cain Road.

Joe Cain (another son of Owen) lived in the limestone house still standing in Nepean Highway close to the corner with Murray Street, just east of Canterbury Jetty Road. He had 9 children, one of his daughters marrying Mr. Austin Cooper of the Sorrento Hotel. The youngest of Owen's sons (Tom Cain) lived in Rye in a limestone house just east of Whitecliffs and opposite the foreshore reserve in Nepean Highway.

Mr. J.S. Ford's Account Book (6) records that three of Owen Cain's sons (Mick, Joseph and Thomas) were employed on a wreck in 1869. Ford provided them with board of 2/- (shillings) per day.

## Lime burning

From the 1840's on to the end of the century, lime burning was a major industry on the Nepean peninsula and the early maps show the country dotted with kilns. The working of these and the pioneer families associated with lime burning from Portsea to Rye has been well described in a paper presented in 1958 by Hollinshed (1). Quite recently the book published by Mr. Vic Keating (3) has given a graphic-picture of the social life of the early lime burners and this includes many fascinating sidelights on the development of Sorrento. In the Blairgowrie area, reference has already been made to Owen Cain's kiln near "Tyrone". Others were Sullivan's (south of Brown's Road), James Swan (between Melbourne Road and Tasman Drive), Hughes (Hughes Road) and John Cain's (St. Johns Wood Road). Early maps also show two or three kilns in the area bounded by St. John's Wood Road and Canterbury Jetty Road, but I have been never able to locate these, although there is plenty of evidence of quarrying activities, many of the early ones were small bush kilns and probably completely dismantled when burning ceased.

At the end of Canterbury Jetty Road, just inside the Ocean Reserve were two or three kilns operated around the end of the last century by Messrs, Campbell & Yule, Lime & Cement Merchants of Melbourne. There was quite a settlement of lime burners in this area and it was referred to as the "Back Kilns". This area forms the setting for much of the story in Mr. Vic Keating's "On the Rocks". Some of the characters and the wreck of the "Craigburn", which occurred nearby at the Divide, were described in a previous paper (4).

Perhaps the last kiln to operate on the Peninsula was one owned by John Cain located on the hill just north of what is now Byron Street, Blairgowrie. This was in a perfect state of preservation in the late 1930's when I remember it well, and it was operating to at least 1916. This kiln was worked for John Cain on a "wages and share" basis by George Alexander Hill, who lived in a corrugated iron cottage on St. Johns Wood Road immediately in front of some majestic mulberry trees, two of which are still standing in Byron Street. These were part of an orchard and were big trees 60 years ago.

Mr. Barney Cain remembers working at this kiln up to 1916. The kiln was fired initially with wood and coke breeze, and then filled to the top with alternate layers of limestone and wood/ coke. Burning continued overnight, and there was some skill in securing uniform burning right across the shaft. A cold spot was corrected by pouring in kerosene. The lime was "drawn" at the bottom of the kiln and bagged and this was apparently a very dusty job. The men used crude respirators of cotton waste. Again Mr. Vic Keating's book (3) gives a good account of the working conditions.

Apart from lime burning, Mr. Hill also had crops, a barn for chaff and a steam engine to run his chaff cutter. Mr. Hill's daughter, Mrs. James Watson, is still living in Blairgowrie in Godfrey Street.

James Hughes was also associated closely with lime burning, and he operated a kiln just off Hughes Road. His limestone house "Woodlands" is still in Hughes Road, Blairgowrie about half way between Nepean Highway and Melbourne Road.

The position of some-of-the old lime burners and farmers' homes are still identified by clumps of aloes (Agave Americana or "century plant") which they planted, These come from desert areas of Mexico and North America and their presence on the Peninsula reflects the routes of sailing ships in the early days. It can be used for making highly intoxicating drinks called "pulque" and "mescol" in Mexico. Perhaps this is why the aloes were planted by the lime burners.

## William Allison Blair

A name closely associated with lime production on the Nepean Peninsula in the latter half of the last century was W. A. Blair. William Allison Blair was born in Scotland 1821, married in Glasgow in 1850, and in 1853, with his brother James, decided to migrate to Australia, They sailed from Glasgow in the ship "Catherine Glen" and arrived in Port Phillip after a voyage of 3 1/2 months (5).

Originally William Allison Blair had apparently intended to go to the goldfields, and included in his luggage was "one wooden house, one cart and one barrow" (Argus 18. 8,53). A little different from overseas travel in 1970! Mr. Blair, presumably en route to the goldfields, got as far as Essendon and set up his house on the Moonee Ponds Creek in the vicinity of the Moonee Valley Race Course. Later he built a new and substantial house

"Narvano", which was in Buckley Street, Essendon.

It was a period of boom in building and Blair decided to enter the lime business. Initially, he traded as Blair & Co. at 89 Flinders Lane West, later becoming Victoria Lime & Cement Co, with premises at 452 Little Flinders Street and an office at 7 Queen Street. This was presumably close to Queens Wharf where his lime craft unloaded.

When land on the Nepean Peninsula became available for selection in the 1860's, W. A.

Blair secured considerable tracts of land at the back of Rye on which there were established kilns then operated on an annual licence basis by local lime burners. Most of these kilns were then closed and Blair opened a new "central" kiln which was near the centre of Rye in Napier Street.

To transport his lime Blair operated a number of small vessels, and Mr. J. S. Ford's Account Book (6) records transactions with them from 1889-1891 for bagged fuel. They are listed as: "Gauntlet", "Rosetta", "Victoria Boyds" and "J. McDougall Stewart".

Dr. J. M. Blair (5) remembers his father, then at school at Scotch College, speaking of travelling round the bay on his father's lime craft. He also remembers him referring to Blairgowrie House, then a prominent navigation mark, and associating this with Dr. John Blair.

William Allison Blair, although holding extensive areas of land, apparently never had a permanent residence on the Peninsula. He was a wealthy man in the 1880's but lost most of his assets in the bank crash of the 1890's. He died in 1894,

## Development of Sorrento as a Holiday Resort

The development of Sorrento as a holiday resort in the 1860's and the parts played in particular by Sir Charles Gavan Duffy and the Hon. George Coppin, have been fully described previously (1, 7, 8).

When the land became available for selection, some allotments were taken up by local people, previously farming or lime burning on the same land, but considerable areas were selected by prominent Melbourne citizens of the day. It is interesting to go through the names of those holding the original Crown Allotments and find how many were the parliamentarians, medical and legal leaders, and businessmen of the day. In relation to the Blairgowrie district, let us see who held the allotments in 1875 in the area bounded by what is now Stringer Road and William Road and running from east to west (see attached print).

Allotment: Held By

- 38: S. S. Crispo. A local resident, I believe.
- 39 & 41: James Cain. Son of Owen Cain of "Tyrone".
- 43: John Cain. Son of Owen Cain of "Tyrone".
- 46 C & D: Joanna T. Hughes. I presume she would be of the Hughes family, prominent early lime burners.
- 46B: S. McCulloch (?)
- 46: A W. Lowther. A local resident and a purchaser of chaff from James Ford (6).
- 45 & 48B: H. F. Norton. Of Norton, Graham & Co. Lighter and steam tug agents and coal merchants. 83 Flinders Street West.
- 44: J. T. Harcourt J. P. , Proprietor of Private Retreat for the Insane and Inebriate, Cremorne Gardens, Richmond.
- 47 & 52: Hon, Robert Byrne. Auctioneer, Land & Estate Agent, Colonial Treasurer 1870. Later of Preston Grange, Mornington. Allotment 52 bought 1864 (10)
- 48A: H. A. Caffey, Auctioneer and Maritime Agent, Melbourne Shipping Exchange
- 49A & B: Dr. George Graham. Prominent medical man. See previous paper (4).
- 51A & B, 54B, 55B: Hon. Michael James O'Grady. Member Legislative Assembly and Minister in the Sladen and Gavan Duffy Ministries bought 1872, 51A in 1875 (10).
- 50B: G. B. Kerferd, Attorney General and later a Supreme Court Judge.
- 50A: Dr. J. W. Gunst, Homeopathic doctor of Melbourne, See previous paper (4).
- 53: C. Graham, Possibly of Norton, Graham & Co. (?) Bought 1869.
- 45A: P. Quinlan, Barrister of 19 Temple Court and Esplanade, St, Kilda.
- 55A: J. F. Nolan. His Honour Judge J. F. Nolan of Carlisle Street, St. Kilda.

This list makes quite a distinguished and representative gathering.

In 1932, Sydney H. Wilson (9) recorded his memories of Sorrento and Portsea. In 1870 after visiting with his father. Having referred to his "old friend George Coppin" as "the pioneer of Sorrento", Mr. Wilson went on to describe others prominent in its development as Charles Gavan Duffy, Captains Coffey and Anderson, Mr, Justice Kerferd, J.B. Wilson (of Geelong Grammar School), Mr. Halfey (official assignee), Drs. Graham, Harcourt, Blair and Gunst, and James O'Grady.

Travelling was, of course, very different in those days. The road from Sorrento towards Melbourne only ran to the Eastern Sister, and from there on the coaches drove to Rosebud on the beach, then said to be 100 yards an width and with hard, sandy flats. Most people travelled by boat, the first regular service being by the paddle steamer "Williams" (19), later replaced by the "Golden Crown". She was in turn superseded by the "Ozone" and finally the "Hygeia" and "Weeroona",

## Who Built "Blairgowrie"?

The name Blairgowrie was derived from "Blairgowrie House", and there is no doubt that this must have been given to the house by Dr. John Blarr who owned the property from about 1877 until his death in 1887. He was very prominent in medical circles at the time and had previously built "Kinniel", now in Holyrood Avenue, Sorrento,

The identification of the person who built "Blairgowrie" and the date, are, of course, of particular interest, firstly because of the association which the district name, and secondly because of recent publicity concerning possible demolition of the building and its classification by the National Trust.

Let us see what evidence there is in the Shire of Flinders Rate Records, and referring to the

attached print note that Blairgowrie is on Allotment 52, but very close to the boundary of Allotment 51.

A search of the Rate Books (10) carried out by Mrs. McCraw shows that Lot Numbers were not recorded against names and rate assessments until 1877/ 1878. From the mid 1860's to 1872 the records show some 3 or 4 houses and a number of huts, none of which appear relevant to Allotment 52 (Blairgowrie). In 1872, however, Mr. Michael O'Grady appears for the first time with an entry of 40 acres and 6 room house, net rateable value 150 pounds. In the succeeding years, the acreage was increased but net valuation was dropped back to 70 pounds. Then in 1875/6 the rate records are for Executors of M. O'Grady. In the 1877/ 1878 year, the Lot Numbers were included for the first time and Dr. John Blair is shown with Lots 51, 53, 54 and buildings together with an additional 15 acres and building which would have been "Kinniel"; In the same year, Lot 52 is shown without a building, at a net rateable value of 6 pound as belonging to W. A. Blair. The following year 1878/ 1879, the rates for Dr. John Blair were unchanged, but the name "Blairgowrie" has been written against the property in the Rate Book.

Thus, while we know today that "Blairgowrie" is actually on Allotment 52, the Rate Book evidence shows no building on this lot up to 1878/ 1879, but a 6 room house on the adjoining Lots 51, 53, 54 marked "Blairgowrie" in 1878/ 1879 and acquired presumably in 1877 by Dr. John Blair from the Executors of M. O'Grady. Also, there was in fact no substantial house, as would be inferred by a net rateable value of 150 pounds in 1842, erected on the area we now know to be Lot 51.

I remember this area well in the 1920s, and am certain there was no building between Blairgowrie and the old Melbourne Road.

What other evidence is available? The Melbourne Directory (11), of the period is a fund of information on Melbourne citizens, their professions and residences. This lists Dr. John Blair from 1862 as residing at 41 Albert Street, East Melbourne and later (after 1866) at 101 Collins Street East. William Allison Blair appears from 1860 onwards, and in later years his private residence is given as Buckley Street, Essendon.

Let us now look at the Hon. Michael O'Grady. His private residence in Melbourne in the early 1870's is shown as "Erinagh" corner of Glenferrie and Riversdale Roads, Hawthorn, but from 1874 to 1876, there is an additional address - "Villa Maria", Sorrento. It is my belief that "Villa Maria" was the first name for Blairgowrie and that it was built by Michael O'Grady.

There is one additional piece of confirmatory information. Two of the-oldest residents of Sorrento - Messrs. W. Russell and V. Keating, recall being told by their fathers that "Blairgowrie" was built by O'Grady.

What then is the reason that "Blairgowrie" or "Villa Maria" is on Lot 52 while O'Grady owned Lot 51? There are four factors which may explain this :-

(1) The Shire Rate records may well be in error in respect to Lot Numbers at this period before accurate surveys had been completed. They may even be mistaken in showing Lot 52 as belonging to W. A. Blair as it, with remainder of the Lots 51, 53 and 54, passed together from Dr. Blair's widow to Mr. Terry in 1898. Also there is no doubt that Dr. John Blair resided at "Blairgowrie".

(2) Because accurate surveys had probably not been completed, O'Grady may well have built on the highest point of what he thought was Lot 51, but was in fact just over the boundary on Lot 52.

(3) In assessing the possibility of errors, one must remember it was largely virgin country probably approached from the Melbourne Road, rather than the present Highway. At this period, there was no road beyond the Eastern Sister and coaches are said to have travelled on the beach.

(4) At that time the beach is said to have been up to 100 yards wide. If measurements were taken from high water mark, a boundary today could be further south than it was in 1892 or a boundary have been mistakenly located in 1872.

## Hon. Michael J. O'Grady

Who was Michael O'Grady who bought over 140 acres of land around the Blairgowrie district and built his 6 room house "Villa Maria" in 1872? He was a prominent figure in public life and in Irish circles in Melbourne in the 1860's and 1870's and his career was very fully described in The Advocate (12) after his death.

Michael O'Grady was born in 1821 in County Roscommon, Ireland where his father was described as a "respectable" farmer. At an early age, he left home for London where he became connected, in a salaried position, with the People's Provident Society.

In the latter part of 1855, he was sent to Australia to establish a branch of the Company in Sydney, but decided to settle in Melbourne where he came in July or August 1856.

Following amalgamation of the People's Provident Society with the European Assurance Society, and dissatisfied with a restriction on entering politics in his agreement, Mr. O'Grady severed his connection in 1861. The same year, he was elected M. L. A. for South Bourke and also established the Australian Alliance Assurance Company, becoming its first

Managing Director (13). The meeting forming the Company was held in Scott's Hotel, Collins Street with the Hon. (later Sir) John O'Shannassy in the chair. The directorate also included the Hon. R. S. Anderson M. L. C. who held Crown Allotment 80 on the Ocean Reserve adjoining St. Pauls Road) and the Hon. John Halfey M. L. A (mentioned by S. H. Wilson (9) in his memoirs of Sorrento).

Michael O'Grady represented South Bourke in two Parliaments and was a member of the short lived Sladen Ministry. Defeated at the next election, he was later elected member for Villiers and Heytesbury, and was a Minister in the Duffy administration 1871-1872. This no doubt established a personal contact that awakened his interest in Sorrento.

He was prominent in Roman Catholic affairs at the time. He was one time President and a trustee of St. Patrick's Society, a member of the Roman Catholic Education Committee, organiser of the Donegal Relief Committee. In the 1860's, and active in charitable work and in helping young immigrants from Ireland (14, 15). In 1891, he was created a Knight of St. Gregory the Great by the Pope, and invested with his insignia in St. Patrick Cathedral.

Mr. O'Grady died suddenly on Wednesday evening 5th January 1876 at his home "Erinagh House" Hawthorn and was buried at Kew Cemetery after a Requiem Mass at the Church of

the Immaculate Conception, Hawthorn.

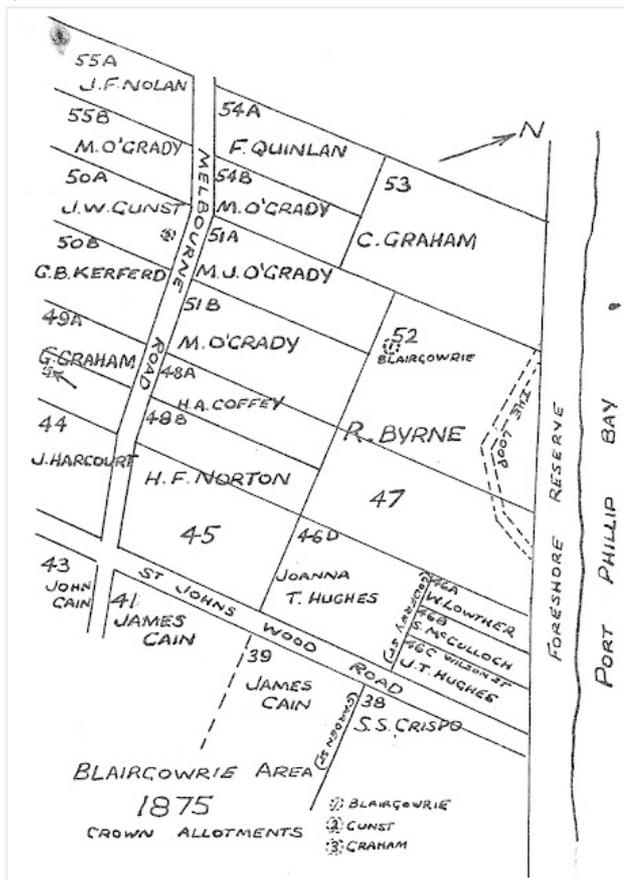
After his death, there were immediate moves for a memorial to perpetuate his memory and, following a public meeting with the Hon. George Coppin M. L. A. in the chair, it was decided to open a fund. Accounts of the progress of this occupy many issues of the Advocate during early 1876. Regular reports of progress of the O'Grady Memorial Fund were given, first under the chairmanship of the Hon. George Coppin and later Sir Charles Gavan Duffy.

Early plans were to devote the entire fund to an ambitious memorial (a round tower with Celtic cross had been suggested), but it soon became apparent that O'Grady's Estate was so heavily encumbered that there would be inadequate provision for his family. His wife having died two years earlier, this consisted of six children, including two daughters. The final report on the Estate (16) indicated total assets of 17,971 pounds 16 shillings and one pence with liabilities of 16,222 pounds 1 shilling and 2 pence, leaving a balance of 1749 pounds 15 shillings and 4 pence. With this background, the Trustees decided on a monumental Celtic Cross on the grave to cost 250 pounds and the balance (over 750 pounds) plus 1,000 pounds donated by the Australian Alliance Co., was invested for the benefit of O'Grady's daughters (21).

The Celtic Cross stands today in the Kew Cemetery in a commanding and yet uniquely secluded position flanked by three tall cypress trees.

It is quite apparent that the Trustees of the Estate would have been forced to sell "Villa Maria", and it passed to Dr. John Blair in 1877.

There is an interesting sidelight on Mr. O'Grady's contribution to the development of Sorrento. In the Museum is a copy of a report dated 18. 7. 78 detailing the amount due on Loan No. 1404 from the Australian Alliance Assurance Co. to the Mechanics Institute. This is signed by George Coppin, so it seems certain that Michael O'Grady was instrumental in procuring finance for building the Mechanics Institute now the Nepean Historical Society Museum.



### Dr. John Blair M.D., F.R.C.S. Edin.

Dr. John Blair was one of the most prominent medical men in Melbourne in his time (16, 20).

He was born in Lanlithgowshire, Scotland and, after studying in Glasgow and Edinburgh, he migrated to Melbourne in 1859. He practised first at Northcote, and latterly resided at 101 Collins Street.

Soon after his arrival, he became connected with the Medical Society of Victoria, of which he was honorary secretary for 10 years and then President. In 1867, when the movement for a Prince Alfred Memorial started, Dr. Blair took a prominent part and the outcome was the foundation of the Alfred Hospital. In 1870, he became one of the honorary surgeons at the Alfred and chairman of the medical staff. For some years, he was also a member of the Medical Board of Victoria.

Dr. Blair was interested and spoke and published on various aspects of hospital management. Amongst his publications is an Address to Nurses (17) which makes interesting reading today. Let me quote :

*"Miss Nightingale did more than any person, living or dead, for hospital nursing.... The example set by this truly good lady has been promptly followed by ladies of all ranks in the United Kingdom; I regret, however, to say, that the fair sex of Melbourne, with a few honourable exceptions, evince a stronger predilection for the "block" than for the*

*hospital. The pleasures of life, indeed, are pursued with much greater avidity by both sexes in this metropolis, than are those duties, the due discharge of which will ultimately afford truer enjoyment and happiness than can ever be attained by perambulating the streets in grand attire.... . Every female should possess some knowledge of nursing, and however agreeable and fascinating the drawing-room accomplishments of life may be, the majority of husbands would, I believe, rather see their wives possessed of the practical knowledge of the nursery. "*

We do not know exactly how Dr. Blair became interested in the Peninsula, but it's certain he must have known Dr. George Graham (4) and possibly Dr. Joanne Gunst (4). In any case, it is certain they all built at Sorrento about the same period, and all were loud in their praise of the climate and the benefits of lime bearing well water (18). Let us hear what Dr. Blair had to say:

*"This favourite watering-place offers peculiar advantages to the invalid, and to the man seeking healthful repose from overwork. The air is pure and invigorating, and on account of topographical advantages, the hot winds of summer, with their enervating effects, are scarcely felt.... . For those having piscatorial proclivities, there are fish in abundance in the land-locked bay; and while enjoying the exhilarating influence of the highly ozonised atmosphere of the Back Beach, refreshingly diffused by the ceaseless roll of the ocean, the pleasure-seeker may amuse himself by catching crayfish, which are here very plentiful."*

The Past sentence makes one certain that Dr. Blair must surely have accompanied Dr. Graham (4) in cray fishing expeditions on the Back Beach.

To Dr. Blair's remarks let us add those of another medical man, Dr. Lempriere:

*"The soil, with its marl formation, imparting to the water for domestic purposes a quantity of lime, so useful and essential to the animal economy, more particularly to growing children, supplying the osseous system with phosphate of lime, a desideratum not to be overlooked. No more rickets, or bandy legged children, so long as our Sorrento is in existence."*

The Shire Rate Books (10) show that Dr. Blair built "Kinniel" in Holyrood Avenue about 1873. This also is a wonderful old home, but it is not hard to imagine Dr. Blair looking with interest at Mr. O'Grady built "Villa Maria" at about the same time on its most commanding hall. In any case, when O'Grady died, Dr. John Blair acquired his house and all his holdings, probably in 1877. The Rate Book of 1877/1878 shows him with Lots 51, 53, 54 and buildings in addition to "Kinniel". It seems certain that shortly afterwards, Dr. Blair must have named his new acquisition "Blairgowrie" and this name appears for the first time in the rate records in 1878/1879.

There is an interesting story concerning a window from the hall at "Blairgowrie". Several older Sorrento residents refer to the donation of a stained glass window from "Blairgowrie" to the old St. Mary's Star of the Sea Roman Catholic Church in Sorrento (demolished 1962). The foundation stone for the church was laid on Sunday April 23rd 1876. It is not difficult to visualize that there was a window selected by Michael O'Grady (possibly made by Messrs. Ferguson & Urie of North Melbourne, stained glass window manufacturers of the day) which was suitable for and presented to the church either by the Trustees of the Estate or by Dr. Blair.

Dr. Blair had no children, but he and Mrs. Blair adopted an aboriginal boy from Northern Queensland - Lani Mulgrave. There is in existence a photograph of Mrs. Blair with Lani. Dr. Blair's private nurse was a Miss Barbour who later married to become Mrs. Loutit. (Loutit Bay, on which Lorne is located, is named after her family). On one occasion, at Lorne, Lani is said to have saved Mrs. Loutit from drowning.

Dr. Blair died March 9th 1887 aged 52 years, and "Blairgowrie" and "Kinniel" passed to Mrs. Hunter Blair,

## "Blairgowrie"

After Dr. Blair's death, it is not clear whether Mrs. Hunter Blair continued to live there, but in any case the Shire Rate Books (10) indicate that both "Blairgowrie" and "Kinniel" were sold to Mr. A. Terry in 1898. The rate notice for that year shows Allotment 52 included with the "Blairgowrie" property for the first time.

The Terrys do not appear to have lived at "Blairgowrie" for long, because for a period at the beginning of this century it was unoccupied, in a state of disrepair, and soon acquired the reputation of being haunted. Mr. Bill Russell speaks of an unearthly screech or howl heard in a high wind which terrified visitors. This was ultimately explained as being due to a dry spindle of the weather cock.

From 1905-1910 ME; Alec Russell (father of Mr. Bill Russell) lived there as a caretaker and during this period built "Bridgewater" (4) and "Watta-mola" (4) on the Back Beach.

During and after World War 1, George Alexander Hill also acted as caretaker for a period, and it was occupied by C. Charlton.

A new lease of life then started for "Blairgowrie". It was acquired by Mr. Prank Hill, solicitor. The Hills apparently held some wonderful parties there. Then it passed in the 1920's to Herbert Adams and in the 1930's to the W. K. Burnside. "Blairgowrie" was in its prime in this period. The house was well maintained, beautifully furnished, and with a long drive through perfectly kept lawns winding up from the Nepean Highway.

The property was auctioned in the Christmas holiday period 1941 and bought by a Mrs. Braund prior to its acquisition by Mr. and Mrs. Bert Scott in 1946. They converted the building to a guest house and flats, and the grounds were sub-divided in the development of the post war period.

Apart from Blairgowrie and houses on the Back Beach described previously (4), there were also other residents and activities in the area.

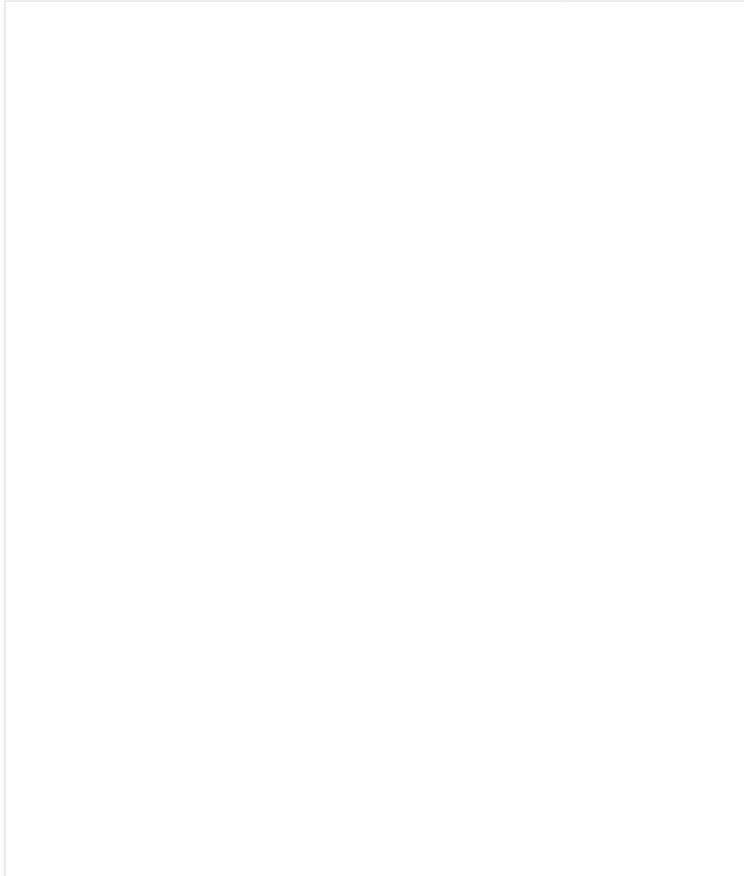
At the corner of Hughes Road and the Highway was the first abattoirs operated by Ned and Jack Clark (sons of John Boswell Clark of the Mornington Hotel) trading as Clark Bros. They had a primitive butchers shop in Sorrento and apparently ran into financial difficulties through extending credit to their customers. Mr. Vic Keating recalls their gory Day Book recording sales.

Mr. H. W. (Henry) Wilson started in Sorrento selling meat from a cart, but when he built what was then a modern shop and traded on a strictly cash basis, the days of the Clark

Bros. were numbered.

Messrs. Wilson later opened new abattoirs about 1901 which were extended to finally run from the Highway through to the Melbourne Road along St. Johns Wood Road (see attached print). In 1956, the abattoirs moved from Blairgowrie to Moats Corner. Their old abattoirs building is now at the back of 17 Maxwell Street, Blairgowrie having been converted to an outside rumpus room. The ceiling was insulated with sawdust and it still keeps very cool in hot weather. At one corner of the abattoirs was a slaughterman's cottage. This is now 3 Charles Street and still occupied.

Other houses of the 1920's and 1930's are also marked on the attached print.



"Lavender Cottage" owned by the Lowthers was on the Nepean Highway and this was demolished for sub-divisional development. There were then three huts. The first was Jimmy Thompson (a half caste), then Charlie Burnham (blacksmith), and one on the corner of the Loop and present Highway built by Rosenberg from salvage timber from the "Craigburn" (4).

In the late 1930's, Major Fraser, a traveller for Messrs, Robert Reld, built "Everness", since converted to a double storey building. Mr. McCarthy built the first half of the store and cottage in the late 1930's. Behind the store in Godfrey Street is the original home of Mr. James Watson, whose widow, a daughter of George Alexander Hill, still lives there.

## Post War Development

The late 1940's and 1950's saw a period of extensive sub-division and opening up of all the Blairgowrie area north of the Melbourne Road, and, east of St. Johns Wood Road, through to the Ocean Park.

While some of these sub-divisions provided roads following the natural contours to maintain scenic interest, others, in particular the various Cain's estates, were sub-divided into small blocks on a rectangular pattern and with no provision for reserves for recreation or public services for the future. It was indeed unfortunate that so much of Blairgowrie was sub-divided in this period before town planning principles were applied. Although the Shire Council has subsequently acquired properties, it has left the civic facilities fragmented. The estates involved in these sub-divisions were Wilson's abattoirs (carried out in two stages), and various sections of the Cain's estates, "Possum Park" and other properties mainly sub-divided by Messrs. T. M. Burke. Street names in some of the areas were devled from Chaucer in view of the name Canterbury applied to portion of the area in the early days,

Up to the early 1950's, the Nepean Highway followed what is now the Loop, but late 1952, the new straight section above the now Blairgowrie Yacht Squadron's Clubhouse was made, and the parking area formed; This left the old highway as the Loop, with Mr. McCarthy's store and Post Office. This was acquired by Mr. J. C. Le Souef in 1953.

The sub-division of the front section of Wilson's abattoirs paddock had provided for a series of narrow shop frontage blocks on the Highway each side of Wilson Street, This area had not, however, been developed prior to introduction of the Town Plan,

In the first version of the Plan, the Loop was to be the shopping area i. e. off the Highway. However, as a result of objections based on the sale of the narrow blocks above, this was altered and the area around Wilson Street has now become the shopping centre - the original store and Post Office, and the garage, being in the Loop.

As indicated previously, the indiscriminate sub-division of the 1950's had deft the district without provision for civic and recreational faculties. This was fortunately recognized by

the Shire Council which acquired the Clayton Reserve in William Road where the Elderly Citizens building is now located. Also, the efforts of Mr, (then councillor) Ken Scott resulted in the acquisition in about 1965 of 12 acres at the corner of Melbourne road and Stringer road as a Recreational Reserve.

The Blairgowrie Yacht Squadron

The origin of the Blairgowrie Yacht Squadron was in the decision of a number of Sorrento Sharpie owners to form a club of their own. A meeting was held on 14th February 1952 under the chairmanship of Mr. Cliff Douglas and it was agreed to form the Southern Yacht Squadron.

This decision was consolidated at a meeting the following month under Mr. Roy Pemberton as Chairman, and the Club got under way with 14 members. Mr. Bert Scott made the Blairgowrie (House) boatshed available as a Club House. This was soon improved with a stove and supply of tank water.

Foundation Commodore was Mr. Cliff Douglas, and he was succeeded the following year by Mr. Roy Tapson. There were now nearly 50 members and the accent was on Jubilee rather than Sharpies.

The first suggestion for a new Club House came from Mr. Roy Pemberton, Club Treasurer, in 1953. In 1954, the Club Constitution was completed and the name changed to the Blairgowrie Yacht Club. Later this year the name became Blairgowrie Yacht Squadron to avoid conflict of the initials with the Brighton Yacht Club.

The next two years saw a period of intense co-operative effort in building the Club House. It was a memorable occasion on the evening of 9th November 1957 when Commodore George Pizzey welcomed Miss Australia to the new Clubhouse.

The club has continued to grow and facilities have been added such as a renewed jetty and slipway, extended boat yard, new gantry and boat racks. Today the Squadron has nearly 1000 members and its facilities for sailing in one of the most sheltered areas of Port Phillip have done much to put Blairgowrie "on the map".

#### Acknowledgements

There are many people who have helped me in the collection of material for this paper and without their help it could not have been prepared. In particular I would thank the following :-

Mrs. E. McCraw Archivist, Nepean Historical Society; Mr, Barney Cain (Blairgowrie) Mr. Gil Watts (Sorrento); Mr J. C. LeSouef (Blairgowrie); Mr. Arthur Trewavis (Australian Alliance Assurance Co. ); Mrs, W. V. Stevens (daughter of Mrs. Loutit who was Dr. Blair's nurse); Mr. W. Russell (Sorrento); Mr. V. Keating (Sorrento); Dr. J. M. Blair (Grandson of Mr. W. A. Blair per Mr, Hollinshed and Mrs. McCraw); Mrs. I. Pietruschka; Mr. H. H. Dimmick.

#### PostScript

Extracts from Details of Estate of Hon. Michael O'Grady Presented for Probate, Sworn 3. 5. 1876.

#### Assets

1. A piece of land consisting of about 5 acres and a half situate in the Parish of Boroondara at Hawthorn at the corner of the Glenferrie and Riversdale Roads in which is erected a brick house containing fifteen rooms 4000 pounds.

2. A piece of land consisting of about 73 acres of land in the Parish of Nepean near Sorrento in which is erected a five roomed stone house 1500 pound.

3. 20 Shares in the Ocean Amphitheatre Company at 2 pound 10 shillings each. 50 pounds

4. 500 shares in the Queenscliff and Sorrento Steam Boat Company (The Golden Crown) at 10 shillings each. 250 pounds

5. Household furniture at Erinagh, Glenferrie Road Hawthorn. 200 pounds

6. Household furniture at Villa Maria, Sorrento. 200 pounds

7. Horses, Cows, pigs, buggy and farm and garden implements. 100 pounds

Schedule "A" 1876. Receipts

\*To purchase money interest of deceased in Advocate Newspaper. 453 pounds

To John Cain, Balance of purchase of cattle. 6 pounds 11 shillings 6 pence.

To Dr, Blair price of furniture. 169 pounds 17 shillings 6 pence.

To Sullivan purchase of cattle at Sorrento. 50 pounds 10 shillings.

Mailford and Graggan deposit on land at Sorrento sold to them. 57 pounds 8 shillings 3 pence.

To Gemell Tuckett and Company net proceeds of sale of Erinagh. 3510 pounds

To Dr. Gunst amount of first Bill for purchase money of land at Sorrento. 56 pounds 6 shillings 8 pence.

To Ocean Amphitheatre Company purchase of ten shares in that Company by themselves. 60 pounds

To Lowther for cattle. 4 pounds

\*Note : Michael O'Grady founded The Advocate as a Catholic weekly about 1868, with Samuel Vincent Winter as editor (15)

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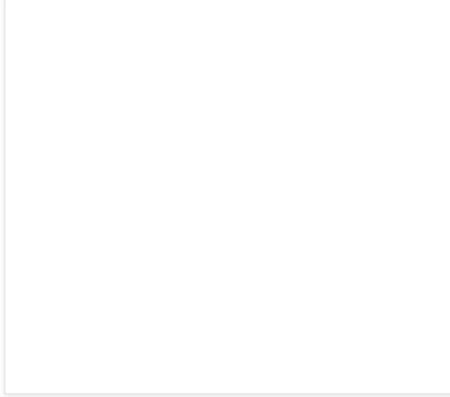
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22. I believe the name as applied to the district was suggested by Mr. McCarthy (of the Store) and Major Fraser (of "inverness") and in preference to the alternative of Sorrento West.

Document provided by Jack Ritchie to Nancy Wills (m. Paterson) (see original scan)



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