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# Newsletter

The Glamorgan Spring Bay  
Historical Society

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## Coswell

This is the third edition to focus upon a house. However the story of *Coswell* is much more than a story about a house. It is a story about people, of friends and friendships, of holidays and community but most of all, it is a story about people: Letitia Parsons, nicknamed Too-ee, Wally Donne and her paying guests.

I began this item by checking our files at the Historical Society and found them wanting. Maureen did some helpful research about land titles, dates and census figures and then, I set off to speak to Kaye Gill, his wife Claire, his daughter Sandy and her two delightful children: Ingrid and Ben, about *Coswell*. The family collectively told a much-loved tale. Some of the story was part of their personal history.

Claire had met Kaye at *Coswell*. She was staying there as a 16 year old and was bored. She went next door to *Piermont* to see if there were any interesting young men and was introduced to Kaye by his mother who very pointedly told Kaye that she was only 16. As the family argued over names and dates of the history, Kaye and Claire punctuated old history with their history. They have happy memories of their time there. The fact that *Coswell* is now theirs is characteristic of its circular history in which ownership changed frequently although mostly maintaining a connection albeit through *Piermont*, with one of the early owners.

The land that is called Coswell, was in 1826 a 600 acre grant to John and Hugh Addison. In *Hazard's Island* (GSBHS File) the land is described as 'generally stony but fair Sheep Walk.' (p. 95) There is a statement in *Pioneers at Piermont* by Frances Travers, which says that *Coswell* was built between 1827 and 1828 but there is no reference to substantiate this. The only firm information about a four-roomed fieldstone, timber and mortar cottage with a two-roomed attic is in the census figures of 1848. There it is recorded that the completed dwelling housed 13 people, 12 of whom were free. At the time the house was owned by J Addison but in the charge of J.P. Mitchell. The original cottage had two wings added to it and two verandahs but this was quite some time later, perhaps about 1870.

A tour of the house reveals it changes and development.

At one time there was a bread oven that was open to the outside. When this outside area was enclosed, a dining room was built with a tiny extra room alongside which served as another eating area for children who couldn't fit around the dining table. The bread oven then functioned as a chute or servery through which the food was passed. There must have been many times when children couldn't fit around the dining table, as I will explain later.

Christopher Koch in his book *The Doubleman* (1985) models the fictional *Greystones* upon *Coswell*. His words describe the aspect of the house and something of its use. "The house had two verandahs running front and back, connected by a central hall; and these verandahs, with their green painted posts of knotted gum-boughs, had always marked out the two natures of *Greystones*."

The front verandah, with its easy chairs overlooking the sea and its tar paper underfoot, were the guests' territory; the territory of holiday. It looked east, to where the sun rose each morning above granite mountains called the Hazards, across the bay; lavender peaks which always suggested the remote South Sea islands..." (p.60)

Too-ee used to serve her guests scones and tea on this verandah and left over toast and marmalade as Christopher Koch recalls in his account of his time there.<sup>1</sup> The verandah was where everyone congregated and continues to be used in that manner today. I was invited to sit there to listen to the history as the family gathered around, some perched on the verandah rails. The garden slopes down to a freestone garden wall, an iron gate, paddocks, the bay and of course in the distance as Koch says above, the Hazards. I was there for some time and starting to feel that I must have overstayed my welcome but each time I rose to take my leave, one or the other said, "We haven't finished yet". I was led on a tour of the rooms that served to jog memories of other tales.

At the moment this very old house is homely and comfortable. What surprised me most when Claire showed me around were the many bedrooms opening one on to

1 Koch, Christopher 2002 *The Many Coloured Land* Pan Macmillan P.50

another through relatively low doorways. There are no passages. The small lounge and kitchen could not have accommodated the possible occupiers of all those bedrooms and this design dictates how *Coswell* must have been used. Life was lived on the verandah, the park area and the seashore.

Sandy explained that their family had done little to change or restore the dwelling. One room required the ceiling to be replaced and its walls have been papered in a tiny floral print. The beds throughout, most of which are single, are dressed in handmade quilts, all Claire's work. These gorgeous quilts link the rooms with colour and patterns that complement the structural links. An oddity is that the snug lounge has a bedroom opening off it. "That was Too-ee's bedroom," Sandy said. For me this was evidence of oral history in action because it was Claire who had known this to be so.

A further surprise and one that the family delights in, is a cupboard door in the kitchen which opens to reveal a stairway. The stairway leads to a room in the roof. Originally it was without windows. Claire explained that windows were not wasted on rooms designed for use by servants. She said that a baby had been born in the attic but that in the time when she stayed at *Coswell* as a child, it was no longer used for accommodation. Too-ee used the stairs as shelves on which to store preserves, jams and pickles.

An historical account of the occupiers and owners of *Coswell* is available from the GSBH Society's files. The Gill family's recollections need to be written so that we do not lose them. They holiday at *Coswell* so continuing the tradition started by Too-ee. Their pleasure in the history of the house and the property is indicative of the feeling that I had when I first came to Swansea and that is that the history of the area is palpable in a way I have felt no where else. Ingrid, now 16, enjoys her grandmother's memories with an enthusiasm some of us only feel when it is too late. I am confident that she will accept responsibility for this history and will keep it alive for her children.

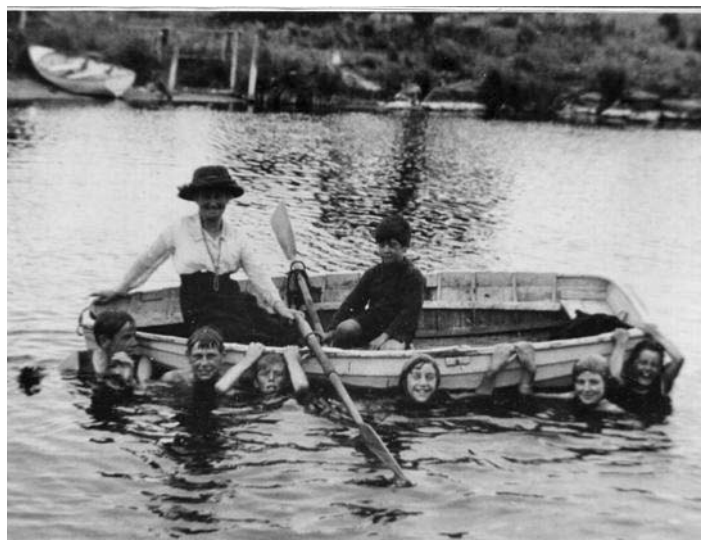
I do need to add that the land entitled *Coswell* and including *Piermont* increased to 1900 acres and extended from the foreshore to the western town boundary, backing onto what was once part of the *Redbanks* property. Sections were gradually sold so that *Coswell* now denotes 130 acres again along the foreshore.

*Coswell* was lived in more often by managers than owners. In 1916 it was bought by a Mrs Samson as a wedding present for Daisy Gill (Kaye's aunt) and Lionel Samson. Daisy and Lionel never lived at *Coswell* but left it to be managed by Harry and Letitia Parsons who had been managing the farm for Percy and Alma Jones, the previous owners. These two were joined in 1920 by Wally Donne who came to work



there as a Jackeroo. The farm seems only to have consisted of a few sheep, cows and pigs and many roaming fowls. The Gill family's story is some years on from this but this is where it began...

Mrs Parsons took a 'small number of paying guests' (Koch p.47) as a way of making extra money. Koch makes the point that she only had guests who were friends or known to her.<sup>2</sup> The property of *Coswell* is written as *Coswell Park* on maps and that is exactly what it feels like as you drive from the front gate to the home. The children who holidayed at *Coswell* were therefore able to roam far and wide over the property. To call them to come for meals, Mrs Parsons would call out Cooee. One little boy could not say the 'c' sound and instead that 't' and so Too-ee or Tooh became the name the children affectionately called Mrs Parsons.



The picture (above) shows Too-ee in a boat on Stony River surrounded by some of the children. She had none of her own. Claire said that all the children loved Too-ee and Wally Donne. Too-ee was cook, housekeeper and housemother and Wally's sunny nature added another dimension of delight. "He was a tall, quiet, balding man with pale green eyes, invariably wearing leather gaiters, who resembled the cowboy film star Gary Cooper. He was always serene and kindly, and always good humoured..." (Ibid p.50).

Claire recalled that treats were afforded by rides on the dicky seats of Wally's Rolls Royce<sup>3</sup> when the mail left space

2 [The Many Coloured Land](#) p. 47

3 Wally Donne used his four cars, a Rolls Royce, a Delage, a Buick and a Packard for the mail run and passenger service from Swansea to Coles Bay and is affectionately remembered throughout the area by those who can, for this service and the stories that were occasioned by it.



*Wally & the Rolls Royce at the "Coswell" Entrance*

and super special occasional treats in the form of rides from gate to door on the car's running board. Claire recalls Too-ee "Too-ee was lovely, she was a little lady and a great cook, her buttermilk scones were to die for. Everybody loved her from the oldest to the youngest."<sup>4</sup>

"For every child- or perhaps I should say for every fortunate child- there is one place on his or her inward map that is marked Paradise. For me this place was Coswell. A farm on Tasmania's East Coast, a few miles south of Swansea, near Great Oyster Bay" (Christopher Koch *ibid*) and many people were upset when Wally quite late in life married Bess. This had nothing to do with an antagonism towards Bess. Up to that point *Coswell* had belonged to everyone. Once Bess and Wally were married, *Coswell* became their home and *Coswell* as a popular holiday destination ended. In Ingrid's final chapter in her project she wrote, "We nearly always spend our holidays at Coswell." For what must be one of the original dwellings on the East Coast, *Coswell* has stood the test of time. The thick external walls are peeling but still mostly solid. The original shingle roof was replaced a long time ago with a tin roof but apart from the addition of modern plumbing and electricity to replace the kerosene lamps, the house remains as it was. There are plenty of examples of grand houses for us to explore as historical museums and so on but *Coswell* is a rarity. The core of the house remains an example of what at one time must have been the most common kind of dwelling that was built. A simple solid little four-roomed cottage was the simplest and fastest home for many of the early settlers to build. Ingrid makes the point in her school project that upkeep is costly. *Coswell* also sits on a glorious piece of land that must be so valuable. Lets hope it can continue to be maintained. It is a precious piece of Tasmania's history.

<sup>4</sup> (Recorded in Ingrid's school project 2007)

## *Maureen found a record about Coswell she thought our readers would enjoy.*

Reference: Glamorgan Lower Court Records.

Date: 22 & 23 May 1845

Magistrate: William Taylor NOYES

Plea: Not Guilty

Verdict: Guilty

Sentence: 3 months imprisonment with hard labour in chains

Act: 15 Sect. 8 Victa. No 13

Thomas Dunn per the ship Asia 6

2028

15 years

22 May 1845 (Plea not guilty)

Passholder in the service of Mr Mitchell is charged with misconduct in leaving his hut on the night of the 21 instant and entering his masters house through the Window and being in the female servant room for improper purposes. Remanded for further evidence until Friday 23 instant

### **23 May 1845 (Plea Guilty)**

Remanded on the 22 instant brought up pursuant to order charged with misconduct (as above). Mr John Phelps Mitchell states yesterday morning I went into the back kitchen in my house and perceived that some person had either got out or entered the window, on enquiring I found that the prisoner Dunn had been caught in the house it was before daylight. The prisoner was found in the house. Prisoner had bent the iron bars entering the house through the window and the woodwork into which the bar was let in I found was broken.

Miss Emily Mitchell states she saw the prisoner in her father's house yesterday morning before daylight - the place where she saw prisoner is the room where the female servant sleeps. I spoke to prisoner and asked him what he did there - The doors of the house were not unlocked. Prisoner was not in the house when it was locked at night. Prisoner could not get in through window without bending the iron bars

Prisoner declines making any statement

Some names from Maureen's files for your delectation.

Roddy ANCLES per the ship 'Orator';

Samuel ATTACK per the ship 'Marion'

Henry ATREE per the ship 'Eden'

John BADBONE per the ship 'Palmyra'

Robert BAMPFIELD per the ship 'Equestrian'

### *Catch Up*

The Society continues to have a busy and successful time. Our books continue to sell, visitors continue to arrive and tours, notably that organised for Tidy Towns 20 April, are a great success. The work done for this event was shared between Brenton and Maureen. Where would we be without them?

Most successful of all was a slide evening organised around Wally Donne's photographs and held at Meredith House. As usual the supper was superb. Two showings have not met the need of those who want to see the photos. Some of those who have missed out have requested another such evening.

You will be notified when this is to occur.

The success of the evening was the result of hours of work on the part of Ray Lewis, Noel Stanley and Brenton Wheare. Brenton's lively presentation was enthusiastically endorsed by all who attended and not the least by the Gill family who were in Swansea for the event. Brenton commented that it was great to have so many locals present who were able to comment on the pictures and who enjoyed sharing stories and arguing over what they recalled.

Maureen has designed a web page for the Society and it should soon be available. It is hoped that our news letter will be offered by these means which will not only save in costs for paper and postage but will allow readers to enjoy all the pictures in much greater detail.

### **Important Notice**

There will be a workshop for document procedures on Saturday August 9, 10.00 A.M. Historical Society. It is expected that this will take a few hours so please bring a plate to share.



*Wally Donne hand feeds a pet bird, 'Minnie' the myna.*



*The Rolls Royce with its Royal Mail sign.*