



Editor: Elizabeth Hodson

Newsletter

*The Glamorgan Spring Bay
Historical Society*

VOL 4, ISSUE 3

SEPTEMBER 2008

8 NOYES ST., SWANSEA 7190 PHONE: 6257 9011

Email: gsbhs@tassie.net.au

With helpful comments from the editorial subcommittee of Judie Hastie, Kyrle Hodson, Ros Hunt, Maureen Martin Ferris and Joyce Dunbabin.

Firstly apologies everyone. The last newsletter should have been numbered Vol.4 Issue 2 so this is of course issue 3.

Riversdale

It was Judie Hastie's idea that I focus on Riversdale for this edition. She is always full of great ideas but I inwardly groaned when it was suggested that I interview the present owner to get a different slant on this old home. I did not know the present owner: Ros Hunt. It just sounded like it was going to be a lot of work.

I ran into Ros in the chemist and asked if I could come out and talk to her about Riversdale. Sunday was agreed upon but Ros said it was not a pretty sight. It was like a junk heap. The present owners of Riversdale are Ros Hunt and Jaana Johnstone.

Sunday afternoon arrived and I fell in love within seconds of driving in the gate. Ros was out at the clothesline pegging out the washing and I was immediately swept back to my childhood. The line was smarter than ours but it was a double long line with armed poles either end that allowed you to switch between the 2 'strings.' I used to be so envious of Mum's chores when I was 4 years old. I have since learnt. Anyway as Ros continued to peg out in the sunshine she talked to me about Riversdale and the connection she had with the Heritage group who had shown pleasure in the fact that Ros and her husband were attending to important structural needs and not just tizzying up the superficial elements which whilst they might improve the look of Riversdale, would do nothing to ensure its longevity. As she pegged I turned to look at the roof. It is so beautiful. It is not only the pitch that is pleasing but also the grades between these. Ros said that such variation could only be achieved by small pieces of roofing iron. Old roofs replaced by large pieces of Colorbond lost the subtlety of these changes. Ros explained how they had worked from the only picture they could find to guide them and that the dormer window at the back should not have been there. She is grateful however that it is there as it signified the addition of a bathroom that

had been added by a previous owner.

Ros' little daughter, Lydia, was left to finish the pegging and we went into the nearly completed glassed in deep back veranda, then into a long central passage. A warm sunny kitchen is on the left and just beyond the kitchen door is a narrow staircase that led to a trapdoor in the roof. That had been the servants' staircase and at the moment no longer in use. There are Baltic pine ceilings throughout. At the front of the house are two large reception rooms of lovely proportions. One has the open fireplace and cedar mantelpiece and breakfront cedar bookshelves either side of the chimney. The second room has had the original mantle updated but that will be attended to. The left room has a delightful window seat below a multi-paned window. This was one of the changes made by a previous owner that added to the beauty of the house. Such care had been taken to copy the design of the other windows that you could not guess that it had been added. The glass in the front door is in pristine condition so that at least was one task that had not needed attending to.

Ros talked with appreciation of 'her builder' Andrew Fahey who had been so willing and so careful to get things right. The most startling example of this can be seen at least at the moment but not for long, at the corner of the front terrace. Three ton of concrete had to be removed and a gaping hole was left. The corner of the house was raised by a metal foot: a concrete buttress. Each of the substantial yellow sandstone blocks that made up the terrace edge (see later Louisa Meredith's description of the front veranda) had been moved ready for replacement when the surrounding structural adjustments had been completed. This corner alone shows what work needed to be done to save Riversdale from falling into dereliction.

To return to the inside of the house: we went up a delicately styled mahogany staircase to the bedrooms and bathroom. Much work had been needed there to correct the slope of the floors and they were still not perfectly level but Ros said that what had been done was the best that could be achieved without lifting floor boards, turning over floor joists and floor boards and then relaying the same. All the floorboards upstairs are Oyster Bay Pine.

The windows of each room looked down upon the lovely garden. The winter trees devoid of leaves cast a dappling of shadows on the grass and I realised that it was as much the spaces between the plants, as the plants themselves that made the whole effect so pleasing. Ros said to come back in the spring because the row of three trees would then be covered in three different shades of pink. At the moment however they were beautiful in their nakedness.

From the house we went to the mill and I learnt that most of the original structure for the grinding of flour was still in place. The plan is for the Mill to become a working mill again but this time specialising in gluten free flour. The flour will be packaged in small particular purpose packages. There will be a tearoom and tours.

The Mill itself is amazing. Ros stepped across a gaping space to show me the wheel. There was no way I could have taken that step but it didn't matter because we were able to go below and look up. Original wooden chocks remained in their place in the gears and Ros explained that it was by moving these as needed; different grades of flour could be achieved. The Mill was built in 1830s by John Amos for George Meredith. (GSBHS files: Ruth Amos notes) It felt strange to be staring at something George Meredith had commissioned and unlike the landscape, enough remained unchanged to be able to imagine what it must have been like.

Outside the mill is an old gum stump of extraordinary proportions. The twists, turns and hollows in the grey stump begged the attendance of fairy folk with such persuasion it could have done as a model for a May Gibbs book. It is already half way there as a fairy tree in the Gardens in Melbourne or Kensington Gardens in London.

Riversdale is described in Vivienne Rae-Ellis 1979 book: *Louisa Anne Meredith A Tigress in Exile*, as a solid little house ...built in 1838 by Old Bull (p10). Of the mill Rae-Ellis writes "Quite close to the house stood a large red brick mill, which was a hive of industry..... (The old established flour-milling firm of Gibsons Ltd had its beginning here.)" (107) Elsewhere the mill is referred to as an undershot water mill (Mercury 2.1 '98). The wheel is vertical and the water passes underneath.

From the GSBHS files I discovered the following information about the history of Riversdale. Firstly from Ruth Amos' notes:

A 'Grant (of land) of portion of Riverdale was made to Major Richard Honnor in November 1821 who settled there in January 1822. He left Riverdale in June 1823 his reason being" a large amount of damage done to his property by large herds of cattle belonging to George Meredith and John

Amos." Meredith then acquired Riversdale paying £120.0.0 for Honnor's house and taking his crops at valuation. The present home at Riversdale was built by a well-known convict employed by George Meredith being known to everyone as "old Bull" (Henry Bull). The home (built in) 1838 was occupied for a few years by George Meredith's son Charles and his wife Louisa whilst their house was being built at Springvale.' Other sources say Louisa and Charles were there for 15 months initially (May 1841-August 1842) although they returned at a later time (1853) to stay for longer. A family feud ended their time there. During the initial occupation Louisa and Charles' baby son, their second child, Charles Henry, died of a severe form of diarrhoea.

Ruth's notes go on to describe what a busy social spot it (Riversdale, Belmont and The Springs) became later with a surrounding development of 25 houses, its own post office, and a building used for school, church and hall. There were golf links, tennis court, croquet lawn and even resident policeman. Perhaps it was the drying up of Browns Hole in the 1950 drought that finally ended what must have been diminishing progressively over time.

According to the files, the Gibson family commenced their flour milling in the late 1850s. Gibson's leased the mill from '58 to '66 'Albert Lyne purchased the property during the 1860s and after WW1 it became the home of Mr R Lyne. Shortly before his death he sold the property to Gordon Amos retaining the house for his family. After his death the house was sold to G. Moase. It is not known when the mill ceased to operate but it is thought to be about 1880s."(Ruth's notes again.)

In an article by Helen Boyd (1995) there is reference to a billiard room at the front. I doubt that this was so but perhaps for a time the room was used as such. Helen talks about the work done by Harry Hatfull to restore Riversdale and the work of others who had attempted to restore the Mill but found it too daunting a task. It is of course classified by the National Trust. In the same article Pat Bushby (nee Shaw) is quoted as saying "we had the most wonderful times there." The article also refers to Saturday night dances. For a reasonably small house it must have been alive with activity in its heyday. Helen's article begins "Riversdale one of the East Coast's most loved historic properties....." It certainly seems to have earned this affection and I hope that once it is completed we can all enjoy it as Pat Bushby said, "in another way."

To complete the story Louisa has the last say:

Ref page Meredith, Louisa.1852. *My Home in Tasmania* London: John Murray, Albemarle Street pp 267-269 Facsimile Edition available from the GSBH Society.



Riversdale Mill on top and house during renovation work. This picture shows nothing of the beauty but much of the size of the task.

As soon as our goods were landed, we took up our abode once more at Riversdale, where the commencement of a garden and orchard had brought a pleasant alteration on its former appearance and comfort, and where we have happily passed the last two years, busy in all farm matters, and in effecting every practicable improvement in all around us.....

I could not possibly sit down quietly to write whilst I had my new garden entirely to remodel; and my anxious wish to leave all things in their places that were growing luxuriantly, so as to prevent too much evidence of newness, and at the same time to turn all the straight dirt-walks into graceful curved turf ones, and to have a nice grass plat in front, was not very easily fulfilled, and cost me many runs upstairs, to contemplate the effect of my plans from the upper windows, before my clever old gardener and I could finally accomplish the task, the result now being highly satisfactory. A rustic wooden bridge leading to the orchard over a long fishpond in the garden is also one of our useful embellishments, and a thatched octagonal summer-house, nicely placed beneath a fine old lightwood tree near the pond, will, when covered with creeping roses, ivy, jasmine, and passion-flowers, be very ornamental too, though at present the popular opinion of my taste in erecting it seems somewhat divided. A spacious veranda, erected this summer along the front of the house, is the most important and essential addition of all; in this country, a good veranda is like an extra sitting room; and, as an airy play-place for children on a warm or rainy day,

is invaluable. We hope that some of our numerous families of swallows will take, or rather make, apartments in it next summer.....

Our veranda also forms my only substitute for a greenhouse, and in this climate such partial shelter is sufficient for the cultivation of most plants which must be wholly protected during the English winter.

From the front window of our dining-room, where I now sit, I look through the veranda over the grass plat and flower borders, now past their summer beauty, but still gay with noble holly-hocks, carnations, tiger lilies, and other autumn flowers. A hawthorn hedge, and some graceful white-blossomed acacias, overhang two ranges of beehives, and conceal the paling fence, behind which passes the public road; and beyond its other hedge, which is of gorse, lie sweet fields of clover, where the children's five pet lambs, and some favourite horses or cows, lead a luxurious life. Beyond these again is another gorse hedge, and other large meadows, also fenced with a chevaux de frise of gorse with some emerald bright English willows, forming lofty clumps on one side; and in spring, giving us a pleasant home-like interest in marking their gradually deepening green, amidst the unchanging, dull, olive natives of the soil. Still again beyond flows the Swan River, a noble broad stream, sixty yards or more in width, but only visible to us from the house when a heavy flood spreads it over the meadows.

From our side-window, through the passion-flowers, and jasmine trained round it, and over a gay little flower-garden below, we look up to the public road, through the district. Opposite the entrance to our farm-yard stands our blacksmith's forge, whilst the mill, barn, stack-yards, cow-sheds, stabling, dairymen's cottages, and other buildings, fill up the side-view, and complete the extensive farm homestead. A dovecote on a high wooden pillar, safe from cats, but alas! not always so from hawks, is the abode of a large and handsome family of tumbler-pigeons; and a capacious yard beyond, well stocked with portly porkers, if not adding much to the ornamental character of the scene, gives by no means an unsubstantial promise of creature comforts.

.... Denotes the omission of 4 words or more

(Writing this reminded me that Lydia joined Ros and I as we walked around the present garden and was keen to point out to me the pattern of bulbs in the grass. She's well placed to look after our heritage for the future.)

VALE GEORGE

The Historical Society is mourning the loss of one of its longest serving and most valuable members, George Freeman. Both he and his wife Grace, also a Society member,

were born in this area and lived most of their lives here. Over many years they collected and recorded information on the district and its people. His knowledge of earlier times, particularly in Swansea, was often called on when visitors came seeking information.

George's special interest was in local place names. He was a mine of information on these and was very concerned that the old names would not be lost during the inevitable changes in land ownership and the forming of new subdivisions.

George was a born storyteller, as anyone who has read his memoir, *Then Till Now; a Lifetime of Memories*, will attest. He also contributed to books of family history and the history of his old school, Ravensdale. In these endeavours he was aided by a remarkable memory – how many of us in our seventies could remember the exact wages and conditions of the work we were doing fifty years ago? He had a great sense of humour, and this comes through in his writing, as it did in life. Many times I have suggested we blow up a photograph for display only to have George's dry response,

“I can't, I haven't got any dynamite.”

He had a ticket to work with dynamite though, one of his many talents. He could turn his hand to just about anything. Over a long working life in a variety of jobs he acquired a number of skills, and he added to these in the hobbies he took up on retirement. History House has lasting memorials to George in the cedar cupboard and table he restored so beautifully and the work table he designed especially to meet our needs. Besides these, we have our memories of his cheerfulness, humour and willingness to give a hand will remain with us.

The Swansea Heritage Festival

Programme 15,16,17th May 2009 prepared by the committee: Elaine Rushbrook, Ray Joyce, Brenton Wheare, Jodie and Cameron Finlayson and Brenton Wheare. Just a taste is offered here.

Confirmed programme in the next edition.

FRIDAY

Swansea Heritage Festival opening at the Amphitheatre

“They came by Sea – A Longboat Landing” with the “Sea Shanty Singers”. Open-air theatre telling a story of the experiences of the first arrivals – Convict, Soldier, Settler and Lady. Miriam Cooper – “Louisa” excerpt performance. Warming nosh get together – Trellis.

ALL WEEKEND

Museums and Exhibitions: History House / Heritage Centre / Bark Mill

SATURDAY

Coswell 1828, an historic photographic record by Wally Donne – glass slides presented by Brenton Wheare, with Bessie Donne's oral history recording. Followed by afternoon tea – Town Hall.

Tasmanian domestic architecture in the 19th century – slide presentation by Ray Joyce including some of the restoration work done at Riversdale.

SUNDAY

11.00am Swansea's Historic remnants – a Village Walk and Talk excursion with Brenton Wheare

2.00pm Site visit to Riversdale 1838 a Walk and Talk excursion to view restoration work, with an on site account of the processes and procedures by Heritage Consultant Richard Hawson and owner Ros Hunt.

The GSBH Society offers events as part of its contribution to the National Trusts' celebration. The theme for 2009 is Water.

Web Page

Maureen has our Web page up and running. Please click on <http://members.iinet.net.au/~gsbhs/> **I think it is great and more will be added. Maureen is happy to have comments and the newsletter looks so much better on the web because the pictures are so much clearer.**

Historical record for your delectation.

Brenton must be given the credit for transcribing and typing it up the following report from the Lower Court Records for Swansea. The mention of Riversdale adds to our main story for this edition.

SWANSEA LOWER COURT
OCTOBER 19, 1846
PRESENT E.C. SHAW, ESQ. JP.
CONVICT NO 11808
NAME: WRIGHT, THOMAS
SHIP: ANSON
UNDER SENTENCE: 10 YEARS

Passholder in the Service of the Rev Thomas Dove is charged with Misconduct by Mr John Meredith in taking a Dog through his Father's sheep run at Wobourn Farm on 2nd Instant, thereby ? Having been previously warned against going on the run with a Dog.

Mr John Meredith, sworn, states - On Friday 2nd day of October Instant the overseer at Riversdale, Wm Godbolt,

reported to me that the prisoner at the bar was riding through the Sheep run at Wobourn with a dog at his heels on this our pure Merino sheep are kept. I had reason to suppose before this that some of our Merino sheep had been Killed by a dog accompanying this man – and in consequence of which I warned him about going on the land with a dog again. On Tuesday last I again saw the same dog to which I have alluded running in the paddock adjoining the paddock in which the Merino Sheep were then grazing – and on the evening of the same day I heard a dog barking in the Sheep run, and also saw the dog, and suspecting it was the dog I had seen running with the Prisoner. I rode along the Road expecting to meet the prisoner as I knew he had gone towards Waterloo Point in the morning. I met Prisoner and asked him where the Dog was – he said he did not know – and on my telling him the dog was hunting in the Sheep run – Prisoner said I might ride after him for it was

not his business to go after the dog. I reminded him that I had cautioned him not to allow the dog to accompany him on the Sheep run. Prisoner replied - give me none of your insolence on the road or you will find your match and if you don't mind what you are about I will do something you will be sorry for. The Prisoner at the bar had been particularly cautioned that the dog was a Sheep Killer and Prisoner's Master was also warned by me as a Sheep Killer and not let it off the chain - this was before Mr Dove obtained the dog – The late owner of the dog also warned Mr Dove of the dog being a Sheep Killer. I have not seen you on the run with a dog since I first cautioned you. My overseer saw you. It is about six weeks or two months since I cautioned

William Godbolt, sworn, states – I know prisoner, he is a Servant of Mr Dove's. On Friday 2 October I saw Prisoner with a dog on the Sheep run at Wobourn – the run is where the pure Merino Sheep are depastured. I asked Prisoner if his Master knew that he had taken the dog with him on the run – Prisoner replied the dog would do no damage – I asked Prisoner to take the dog home and tie him up – I told Prisoner

that I was sure Mr Dove was not aware of Prisoner taking the dog on the Sheep run – As Mr Dove had been cautioned about the dog – The dog has the character of being a Sheep Killer.

Michael Fraer, sworn, states – I gave Mr Dove a dog. I told Mr Dove when I gave him the dog that the reason I gave the dog away because Mr Meredith would not allow him to be running about. Mr John Meredith said he had seen him after his lambs. Mr Dove said it would make no difference to him as he wanted the dog to be on the chain as a Watchdog – I cautioned the prisoner not to allow the dog to come on the run, I told him he ought to keep the dog tied

up – I told him that Mr Meredith would shoot the dog if he saw it on the premises – I have not seen prisoner on the run since I cautioned him – it is six or seven weeks since I cautioned Prisoner.

The Revd Thomas Dove. The Prisoner is my Servant. My Cow wanders on Mr Meredith's land in consequence of there being no boundary fences. Prisoner, my Servant has received my instructions to bring the Cow back. My Dog always accompanies my Servant, and having been solemnly assured by the person from whom I got the Dog that the dog was never know to worry a sheep or attack a sheep – I did not think it necessary to order the dog to be chained up – I am quite positive

the man from whom I had the Dog – told me most solemnly that the dog would not attack a sheep. My reason for asking him was that I had lately Killed a much more valuable dog because I knew he would destroy sheep. The man from whom I had the dog told me that Mr Meredith had a dislike to the dog and had threatened to shoot the dog! - but he was convinced that the cause of Mr Meredith's dislike was unfounded – the man from whom I had the dog has not subsequently advised me to keep the dog tied up. Mr John Meredith has had no conversation with me about the Dog. I think Mr John Meredith advised me to get a dog from Riversdale which I think is the Killer and that I should keep him tied up – Mr Meredith never particularly requested me not to let the dog in question accompany the Servant – he did with respect to another Dog over which I had no control. His observations may have applied to any Dog that was suspected to worry sheep. I received no caution from any person on Mr Meredith's establishment Not to allow my Servant to take the dog with him on Mr Meredith's run. My Servant was at Waterloo Point on one day last week – Tuesday – and on that day the dog accompanied the man. I never gave the Prisoner instructions not to take the dog when he went after the Cow relying on the character I had with the dog.

QUESTION MY MR MEREDITH

I recollect you recommending me a Dog – [that Fraer the Miller had] as a Watch Dog. I recollect having a conversation with you Mr Meredith at my house relative to Dogs. You Mr Meredith, then recommended me a dog which Fraer had as a Watch Dog – I recollect you telling me to keep it on the chain as it was a Sheep Killer – the dog I have now got I did not conceive to be the one referred by you Mr Meredith as I received a very different character of it from Fraer – The conversation about the dog took place some time before getting the dog from Fraer. You complained at that time of my Servant allowing a dog to accompany him when in search of my Cow – through the Sheep run – I told you I

was ignorant of my Servant having a dog with him – I told you it was not my wish to have a dog with him. I recollect you requesting me at the same time not to allow my Servant to take a dog with him at any time when going in search of the Cow, as in the event any of your Sheep being Killed.

My Servant could not then be blamed for it. I also said I would caution my man not to take a dog with him when he went into the Sheep run.

PLEA: NOT GUILTY

FOUND GUILTY

SENTENCE: ADMONISHED

WILLIAM CARR SHAW ESQ, JP.

Louisa Walks

The continuing popularity of our Louisa Walks with Judie Hastie, (they are lucky to catch her in the state) has meant the Adult Education event for the 1st of November is fully booked.

Goodbye to Brenton



Brenton hard at work in Eddie Smith's Museum. Ray on his left.

Brenton has resigned as secretary after 3 years of hard work. He was given fulsome applause in appreciation of his dedicated service and hours of work to the GSBH Society. He has a house to build in Hobart and not even he can be in two places at once. We still have months to go and he will assist the two new secretaries who are replacing him on a try and see if they can manage basis. Gloria Willis will be our Minutes Secretary and Marion will be Secretary for all the other duties. (Marion muttered 'I resign' at least three times during the meeting but we know she will do brilliantly and Joyce said, "We'll all help".) As Brenton has a convict suit that was custom made for him by our multi-talented Deputy Mayor: Jeni Crawford, he will have to make guest appearances from time to time so we do expect to keep seeing him even if it is as his alter ego. One would have to think a convict costume has limited use in Hobart but then

again they do those walks through the old sewers in Hobart. I'm sure Brenton dragging his ball and chain would thrill the American tourists who particularly enjoy these tours.

Living Treasures



Maureen on the right with Guy Barnett and David Metcalf GSBC General Manager in the background at the launch of the Errol Arnol book.

It was with great delight that we were able to give Life Membership to Judie Hastie, Ray Lewis and Eddie Smith. Kath Fergusson gave a wonderful little speech in support of Ray who smiled happily throughout. This would not normally be worth noting but Ray is a very shy and unassuming person. Later he said to me, "I couldn't hear even half of what people were saying." Ever deafness has its advantages.

As a result of the AGM we can celebrate that we have Maureen Martin Ferris continuing as our President,

Gloria Willis: Assistant Secretary

Marion Harrison: Secretary

The two Vice Chairs are: 1. Judie Hastie 2. Joyce Dunbabin
Treasurer: Noel Stanley

A tidbit

The lady who cleans History House in Swansea, and she does a top job, said "Forget my payment. I'll have a copy of My Home in Tasmania in lieu. How about that?"

