

BARWON DOWNS AND THE SMALLEST BANK IN AUSTRALIA

The latest event for members and friends of the Forrest and District Historical Society was a history walk around Barwon Downs on March 2nd. It began at Brian & Heather Neale's property in Mahers Rd Barwon Downs. Brian had drawn up a plan showing the position of the former butcher's shop and slaughter house operated by Eric & Katherine (Kit) Gourley from about 1920 to 1958. Brian told how, when his father (Charlie) bought the farm in 1958 from Clare Hurst (also associated with the butcher's shop), Eric Gourley moved his butchery to Forrest.

Not a lot remains, but we did see one of the big iron boilers which were used to render fat. Most of the buildings have been modified over the years. Brian recalled that when his family moved in, there was a huge collection of carts, wagon and harness. His father gave most of this away. Brian & Heather live in Clare Hurst's house, which has seen lots of renovation. Eric Gourley's house which was about half a kilometre further down Mahers Rd. and was demolished about 1985.

Brian pointed out where there once stood a storage shed that had originally been a church school.

We then listened to an entertaining talk by Cindy Maguire, who worked as a butcher for Eric Gourley. Cindy started there as boy of 14. He told of how the bodies of beef, and the sheep were brought up, from the killing pen, on a cart pulled by a horse called "Paddy". Cindy had a love/hate relationship with Paddy, who was "a biter". Cindy was involved in the killing and skinning of the beasts and the hanging of the hides. The "runners" (intestines) also had to be prepared for later use as sausage casings. In addition he served in the shop, and made up the orders, which Eric delivered to Forrest on Tuesday & Friday, by horse and cart. Eric & Kit's daughter, (Marj) used the horse and cart for deliveries around Barwon Downs, on Wednesday and Saturday. Marj (Harrington), and her sister, Val, and her mother, worked in the shop. There was no electricity at the shop, and a petrol engine had to be started up each day to refrigerate the cool room.

Next, we drove 1 km. to "Blackwood" the original Hayden Home. It is on the Birregurra Forrest Road, (Number 1630), near the old tennis courts. Bill Hayden lived here and Jack Hayden next door (No. 1626) with Hayden's Store attached. The tramway, which carried the timber from the bush mill to the Barwon Downs railway station, passed out the front. Loma Cunnington recalled that the shop sold everything needed and orders from workers went back on the tramway to the bush mills. She also recalled that if there was an accident there were only two cars, ('24 Dodges) available between Forrest and Barwon Downs to take the injured to Birregurra.

A little further on, just past the new Barwon Downs Fire Station, at the intersection of Wickham's Lane and Callahan's Lane we discovered the remains of Hayden's saw mill, which in its heyday employed up to 40 men. We also found the nearby kilns, which operated from about 1941 until it burnt down in 1944. It is a substantial concrete structure, and was built to kiln dry timber, using steam. Now its only occupants are Bottle Swallows (Fairy Martins). Ron Cunnington told us how the timber came into the kilns, for seasoning. A trolley loaded with the sawn timber rolled down the tram line to the railway siding. A horse pulled the empty trolley back up to the mill. The mill operated until about 1972.

Nothing much remains of the railway siding. Sad, because from here, in addition to timber, milk, cream, turnips, potatoes and charcoal were dispatched. Also, the mail went out each day. Locals still remember "The Tiger", the last of the passenger trains.

Next, we went to see Charlie Drayton's shop which still stand, (Number 1588) in the main street. It is now a private residence, and has been renovated in such a manner, that it replicates many of the features of the old shop. Drayton's shop also housed the telephone exchange. Charlie worked on the Exchange and was assisted by Lynette Callahan (Faughey) who worked for him as a telephonist in about 1958. Jenny Cunnington (nee Curtis) recalled how, when she worked at the Forrest Telephone Exchange in 1962 she often had to put calls through to Bev Banham (nee

Taylor) who was the telephonist at Barwon Downs . Forrest Exchange operated all night, and was very busy, as the West Barwon Dam was under construction at that time. Barwon Downs Exchange closed at about 8 or 9 pm each evening.

Next door to Drayton's shop once stood what is thought to be the smallest bank in Australia. It was a branch of The National Bank of Australasia, and operated until it closed in 1975. It handled the wages of the men who worked in the three saw mills which operated in Barwon Downs. Houghtons lived in another shop which once stood on the west side of Charlie Draytons.

A great day concluded with afternoon tea provided by John and Elizabeth Barbante beside the tiny bank. The oldest person attending was Loma Cunnington who is 90 and the youngest was Patrick Charles Cunnington who is 7 months.

Report compiled by Society Member John James.