THE DEMISE OF FOLK CULTURE IN THE RICHMOND DISTRICT, TASMANIA

'YE THUNDERIN' BLOODY DOGS.....'

The People Who Made the Coal River Valley.

Acknowledgement:

Based on a paper by Peter MacFie first published by Tasmanian Historical Research Association in 1982 under the title 'Oral history and the demise of folk culture in the Richmond district, Tasmania.'

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A Branding Iron & a Memory

My interest in the Richmond-Cambridge district began when, in 1973, I moved to Dulcot, a forgotten hamlet four miles from both townships and twelve miles east of Hobart and the Derwent River. Before 1830 the Coal River Valley around Richmond, and the district of

Pittwater centred on Sorell supplied Hobart and Sydney with wheat, hops and mutton. Below Dulcot on the edge of Pittwater, the Salt Pans also provided salt for preserving.

During an afternoon walk near the Belbin Rivulet, a straight iron bar caught my eye. Hanging in a hawthorn bush, nearly bare of foliage in the summer drought was an old branding iron, with a very small capital "K". I took the iron to an elderly friend of mine, George King (born 1892) whose grandfather Denis King had settled on the Belbin Rivulet in the 1850's. We talked and on leaving his memory stirred - Grandfather, he said, had used this iron for branding sheep. "Where?" was the obvious question. "On the face, the cheek," he told me; I cringed at the idea.

Later, reading Widowson's advice in 1829 to would-be emigrants, was the following:

> "Some brand on the forehead, others on the cheek."[1]

Widowson's remarks were with the aim was to stop sheep-stealing which was rife at the time. In 1816 there was an advertisement for lost stock similarly branded.

> STRAYED, about six weeks since, from the Herd of the late MATTHEW BOWDEN, Esq. at the Coal River, about FORTY SHEEP, branded on the left check with a small B and pitch marked on their-right sides with the letters M. B.-Whoever may find the said Sheep, and will bring them to Mrs. Maria Sergeant, or to her Stock-keeper, at the Coal River, shall be handsomely rewarded for their Trouble. [2]

My old friend's memory was correct.

The Yarning with Alf King & Friends - or Oral History

This incident illustrates the advantages which a resident local historian has when trying to build a picture of a district. A social and geographical affinity with the subject gives an edge to authenticity. The historian can document those artefacts for which archives and museums do not yet cater. With the equipment available, the historian can collect verbatim recollections of people unable to commit them to writing.

Through a friend, Peter Wood, I met one of the district's oldest residents, Mr Alf King, (born 1894), the younger brother of George. He was a keen and descriptive talker who wanted to write a history of the Richmond district. A tape recorder seemed an obvious choice with which to collect his years of experience. As a boy, I had always enjoyed farm holidays, especially talking to the old farm hands, and in many ways, talking to Alf King, and later other residents of the Richmond district, was an extension of a life-long interest. My knowledge of the district grew from the information given to me by Alf King, and his wife Mavis. Other old residents were also interviewed to give a broader picture of life at the time. Over five years, 25 people were recorded or interviewed, nine of whom were women. Except for two, all were over eighty years old; the eldest was ninety-three. Nearly half of

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[1] .*Widowson, H., The Present State of Van Diemens Land, 1829.*

[2] *The Hobart Town Gazette and Southern Reporter*, 30 November 1816

these are with my friend, the late Alf King, who willingly shared his knowledge, humour and tragedies with me.

Occupations of people interviewed included a horse-ploughman who worked at *Craigow* for fifteen years, George Joseph the last Richmond blacksmith (whose forge and tools were photographed), large and small property owners, the children of farm-workers, the daughter of a teacher at the Dulcot school who attended there in 1906, and farm workers, whose skills ranged through shearing, haystack-building, bullock-driving, shingle-splitting, thatching etc.

These and other pioneer skills such as charcoal-burning, broom and hay-rake, willow-peg and candle-making tend to be treated as 'craft' or even vanished skills today.

The oral histories recorded by George Ewart Evans in England, Wendy Lowenstein in Victoria, and the opinions of Professor Sackville from the University of Hull spurred my interest. These authors claimed oral history had particular merits, especially when recorded from those with pre-World War I childhoods. [3]

Because World War I was such a water-shed, those traditions existing before were centuries old. The bullock teams that were ploughing around Richmond in 1900 were using the same harness system as those shown in medieval manuscripts. The change from horse to the internal combustion engine economy was not instantaneous: before 1914 there was no real threat to animal-powered farming, particularly that of the Clydesdale draught horses. Sackville and Evans maintain that the unlettered countryman has inherited traditions unblemished by formal education. This is also true in my experience. The country worker with little or no education is the inheritor of old and even ancient traditions. [4]

Local Links & the Historian

Oral records have inter-related with both written record and artefacts. Apart from the branding iron, photographs, diaries and implements have been lent or given to me. These included a number of 19th century farm diaries, showing the yearly routine - crops sown and when, prices received, braces of quail shot, acres ploughed and wheat threshed in a day, plus where each labourer worked on the farm. A saddle-clamp given to me belonged to Henry Thompson, the saddler and Richmond Council Clerk (of *Saddler's Court*).
Photographs of the filming of the 1927 epic, "For the Term of His Natural Life", came from another neighbour whose late husband was a guard in that film.

The Coal River Valley - A Unique District

What was unique about the country worker in this district? What was unique about the Richmond district, its farming methods and land-ownership patterns? What ethnic and cultural affinities and divisions were there? What effect did a convict ancestry 'have?

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[3] *Evans, G. E., The Days That We have Seen, London, 1979, p.17.*

[4] *Ibid, p 26.*

The district was and is probably one of the oldest relatively unchanged rural districts close to an old major town in Australia. Where in Australia is there a rural district within fifteen miles of a pre-Victorian town which until recently was socially and physically intact? After development in the 1820's and 1830's the district suffered as farming spread to other parts of the colony, and the mainland. Socially, commercially (and architecturally) the district stagnated until the 1880's when a boost was given to agriculture with the export of preserved fruit and dairy products.

The stagnation allowed farming methods, community life and relationships to remain dormant. Consequently, the district was the model of a much older society.

Large land grants were based on 640 acres or a square mile. These were allocated to immigrants with assets, or to emancipists who by fair means or foul, acquired wealth, usually through trading wheat and meat through the commissariat. By 1900 some of the former land grants were farmed by the descendants of emancipists, alongside the farms of the free arrivals. Belbins & Hanslows, descended from Norfolk Island settlers, farmed alongside the Murdochs of *Craigow,* whose other neighbour was the McKays of *Uplands*, descendants of a Scots emancipist. The Lords, also emancipists, had acquired huge tracts of land, and in the late 19thC ran *Richmond Park*, one of the most prestigious farms in the district.

Fringe Farmers

The division into large grants also resulted in clusters of poor immigrants and emancipists around the boundaries of the large grants, which I described as 'Fringe Farming' communities. Some were located at formal villages like Dulcot or Enfield or unofficial communities near water supplies, such as those at Malcolm Hut Road, Downham Town and Cambridge. 'Fringe Farmers' like the Kings were established on marginal land on the mud-stone slopes of the Meehan Rangesalong small permanent creeks which flowed into Pittwater. Arable land on these holdings was often under five acres. Other families lived in small cottages on the farms on which they were employed. Steve Cash's family lived in small weather-board cottage on *Greenfields* a farm to which his convict father Michael, another Irish sheep-stealer, had been assigned.

At Malcolm Hut, the fringe farmers grew about the site of the road station which housed convicts (including Martin Cash) building Governor Arthur's deviation over Grass Tree Hill to Richmond.[5] At Dulcot, the town sites were sold in one acre strips. Where possible, the fringe farmers and cottagers built near the creek. Some leased part of the Glebe land attached to the Richmond Church. A similar pattern seems to have been repeated at Cambridge. At Dulcot some small holdings (one to five acres) were bought from the Murdochs of *Craigow*, on a quit-rent basis or were purchased via tenant farming. Their homes were built from local materials - split slab, and paling, wattle and daub with thatch or shingle roof. My interviewees all remember homes with whole or part earthen floor.

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[5] *Jones, E., Richmond - A Crossing Place, Hobart, 1973, p.14*

The most noticeable asset of the families of fringe farmers was their versatility and adaptability, whether it be droving, shearing, trapping & skinning, bullock driving or tractor-driving, or fruit-preserving. Men and women had a range of talents.

Archival records indicate that the majority of permanent residents at these fringe farms were the descendants of emancipists, while the larger property owners were apparently descended from free immigrants. These descendants of emancipists were either a permanent or a seasonal work-force on larger properties, or became carriers, road and fencing contractors etc. Theirs was a cash economy. Some relied on small farms for added income.

An unobserved folk culture developed amongst these small communities. This has not survived, apparently due to the dominating effects of the reserved, popular Victorian culture. The descendants of emancipists were unable to acquire viable larger holdings, and the stigma attached to folk culture because of its equation with an undesirable past, caused the folk traditions to be lost as the popular culture and its education system imposed its own values. I have chosen to answer these observations by using examples given to me by my interviewees, and by appropriate archival records.

'Know Thy Neighbour' - Social Division & Cohesion

One common theme which emerged was the unity of the district, not always in the social sense. But everyone in the eight mile plus district along Pittwater knew the health, wealth and habits of each other. This unity was enforced by the limits of horse, foot or bike travel, and the inter-reliance which existed between worker and employer. The majority of workers didn't own horses for transport, unless being used for droving, road-works or fencing. Once the contract ended, the animal was sold. Although many sons left the district to work on the west-coast mines or hydro schemes, or road-building, seasonal work was chiefly done by locals. The sense of unity was helped by the pace of work. Mrs Ella McKay (88) recalled being able to tell which wagon was approaching *Uplands* near Cambridge, by the sound of the hooves and wheels, and also by the tunes sung or whistled by the driver.[6] Eileen Batt (nee King) (76) remembered her uncle re-blazing a trail from Dulcot through the bush to Risdon so relatives could be visited more easily.[7] This and other foot-trails also acted as short-cuts to home and work cross-country.

All children attended the three small State schools in the area until they were twelve; only *Craigow* had a governess.

All medium to large property owners (i.e. 200-500 acres) worked their farms with hired help. Some had permanent employees who lived in cottages on the farms, others travelled daily from the fringe farming settlements. *Craigow* was unique in having nine families living in weather-board cottages on the farm who were permanent employees.

Mark Jeffrey & Denis King - 'a wild harum-scarum young fellow'

The links with the past came very early on when talking to Mr Alf King. His grandfather, Denis King, whom Alf remembered clearly, was a transported Irish convict from Co. Galway. Denis is mentioned in a ghost written biography, "A Burglar's Life, the life of Mark

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[6] *McKay, E., Tape, 3/3/1979.*

[7] *Batt, E., Tape, 8/6/1979*

Jeffrey, an argumentative but energetic law breaker". Denis became embroiled in one of Jeffrey's many scrapes. A ticket of leave convict, Jeffrey worked for Dr Murdoch of *Craigow* in 1856. Here a love-sick sixteen-year old imposed herself upon the obstreperous reaper, and a complaint over this "relationship" caused Jeffrey to indignantly resign. [8]

Jeffrey then agreed to thresh wheat for Denis King, a tenant farmer of Dr Murdoch's. Denis was described by Jeffrey as "a wild harum-scarum young fellow" who invited Jeffrey to "accompany him to Richmond" . . . (where)

> … having left the watch-house keeper, I accompany King to several public houses. We enter the respective parlours and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves for a time. On starting homewards, King was very intoxicated, whilst I was in a state of merriment and full of life.
>
> When we had got about a mile out of Richmond I commenced to sing a song, and meeting a gentleman - whom I subsequently found to be a police magistrate on the road, accompanied by two ladies, I accosted him and requested his opinion of my song. He called me a blackguard, and with that- I gave him a playful spank on the face asking him jocularly, how he dared insult me. - The gentleman called lustily for the police, and I took to my heels and ran towards Mr. Murdoch's. King followed to the best of his ability.[9]

Alf King enjoyed relating this anecdote involving his grandfather. He remembered him saying that Jeffrey had a lovely tenor voice, and also "My God, that there Mark Jeffrey was a man that could use 'is 'unds".[10]

With Jeffrey, fact and fiction are difficult to separate. Who was the infatuated sixteen-year old at *Craigow*? No part of Jeffrey's career could be called "romantic". How-ever, there is a poignant sequel to this incident. A neighbour at Dulcot purchased a kitchen dresser from the *Craigow* clearing sale. The following is scratched on the back end of a pine drawer from the dresser-

> MARK JEFFREY
>
> 1855
>
> GOING TO WORK FOR DENIS KING
>
> GOODBYE MY LOVE.

The Irish Community at Dulcot

Denis King and his brother John had settled on the Belbin Rivulet at Dulcot about 1856. Memory of his convict origin varied amongst his nephews. Eileen (King) Batt remembered

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[8] *Jeffreys, Mark, A Burglars Life, 1975.*

[9] *Ibid, pp. 117-118.*

[10] *King, Tape, 3A.*

her mother saying that grandfather had arrived in the Derwent on St Patrick's Day, l851.[11] Bateson's "Convict Ships" lists his ship the *London* which arrived on 19 March 1851.[12] The King brothers, from County Galway, were tried in Mayo for stealing two sheep.[13] The Irish famine had struck Galway and Mayo badly, with 15 per cent of the population of these counties dying.[14] Over 65 per cent of men sentenced from these counties were convicted of animal stealing.[15]

Sentenced for the same offence were two Keanes.[16] Roger Keane also settled at Dulcot, and was a life-long friend of Denis King. As children, the late Alf King and his brother George (90) remember Roger Keane as a hot-tempered but good-natured Irishman, chasing them out of his orchard at Dulcot with oaths and threats, chief of which was - "ye thunderin' bloody dogs!" He was also a master of the shelalagh ("of real blackthorn") who could walk from Dulcot to *Craigow* (one mile) tapping a stick in the air without it touching the ground.[17]

Three generations of the Kings were great story-tellers. Both Alf, George, and their father Ted, are famous - or infamous - for their ability! Many and varied are their stories. Ghost stories, "tall" yarns, self-effacing "Irish" jokes, all with a rural setting and involving local people, typify their tales. Fact and fiction are mixed in varying proportions. Most had a factual basis. One story proved to be all fact. It also illustrates the usefulness of archival records in establishing detail at documenting a change in farming technology, from hand to machine shearing.

Big Events - The Cambridge Ploughing Match

The annual Cambridge Ploughing Match and the Grass Tree Hill Sports were the two major social outings for the community. The ploughing match was a mixture of country fair, machinery displays and competitive ploughing, with show-jumping sometimes added.

Alf King described an hilarious incident at one Cambridge Ploughing Match, involving the demonstration of a new petrol-driven shearing-machine, and a local character known as "Hobart Town Jack".

> I can remember the first shearin' machine, a man named Paddy Power had it at the Cambridge Ploughin' Match. He shore old Hobart Town Jack. He used to live in Sorell (said "Obtown Jack") he grabbed "Hobart Town" and swept his hair off on one side ! There was a big stage there where shearin' on so people could see it and "Old Hobart" jumped down. As he did Charlie Hill, who had a bucket of water, and as old "Hobart" shook himself he got the bucket of water and put it straight on top of old "Hobart". There was old

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[11] *Batt, Tape, 9/7/1978.*

[12] *Bateson, C., The Convict Ships, Sydney, 1979, p.370.*

[13] *CON 31, AOT*

[14] *Williams, I., Irish Convicts and Van Diemens Land, T.H.R.A., Vol. 19, No. 3, p.108.*

[15] *Ibid, p.109.*

[16] *CON 31, AOT.*

[17] *King, A., Tape, 21/3/1977.*

> Hobart goin' about with half a beard gone. He run the shearing machine down and "SWOOSH" he took it, took half the beard off ! ![18]

Later I came across this description of the same incident described very formally in the *Tasmanian Mail* for 19 November 1906. Alf King was then twelve years old.

> The scene of the competitions presented an animating sight with about a score of ploughmen at work (many of them having fine teams of horses) Mr. C. Hill's refreshment booth, a round-about (which supplied the music) fruit stall, a Cheap Jack, a sheep-shearing machine in operation, a fortune tellers tent, chopping matches jumping trials, and so on, all contributions to give e life and animation to the day's proceedings, affording the special artist to *The Tasmanian Mail*, opportunities of getting some good snapshots.
>
> Messrs. Murdoch Bros. exhibited one of Moffatt Virtue and Co's shearing machines, with which not only were some sheep shorn, but the tonsorial office was also successfully performed on the head of a Sorellite, who declared he wanted his crinigerous pate lightened of its "wool" and got it taken off without a scratch as close to his scalp as he has probably ever been "hairdressed" before, the operation creating uproarious fun among the crowd.[19]

The Mail's detailed report allowed me to ask Mr King about the fortune teller,, and the Cheap Jack. These reminders prompted his memory further, the fortune teller being "Madame Raymond" and the Cheap Jack a turbanned Indian.

Just Irish

Another story, sworn to be true, was told about Grandfather Denis. One of his sheep had had twins, an incident rarer then than now.

> Well, it was right there, where the old fence came down, when I was with grandfather when Peter Murdoch came to 'im about the ewe and lambs. Grandfather always used to run a few sheep y'know - he used to run quite a lot of sheep. Leicesters nearly all Leicesters. He had one there, that'd had a twin. Well a'course, twins was a thing, before he came out 'ere, - in Ireland - like they wouldn't have. Well he had this 'ere ewe, that had twins lambs. Peter Murdoch came over, jumped over the fence and came over to where grandfather was standing'.' Course I was only about six years old-but I can remember that as if it was only yesterday
>
> "You got a ewe with twins there Denis?"
>
> "I did 'ave", he said, "Paiter" (Slowly spoken with Irish accent)
>
> "What happened? Did one of 'em die?"
>
> "No", he said, "he didn't die. I knocked 'im on the head."
>
> "But the lambs not the one I seen with it; the other was a big lamb."

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[18] *King, A., Tape, 12/5/1977.*

[19] *Tasmanian Mail, 19/11/1906.*

> "Oh yes", he said. "I know, I know it was." But he said, "I knocked the big bugger on the 'ed because the little bugger needed the milk the worst".
>
> That's the Irish all over, isn't it ! That's what he told 'im and me standin' there ! Being only a kid, I wouldn't know different anyway !"[20]

According to one of his grandchildren, Grandfather Denis never regretted being sent out to Van Diemen's Land, and he acquired small farms on land at Dulcot, Risdon and Geilston Bay He always retained a loathing for the military, however.

Although transportation broke traditional ties, some links with Ireland remained. One included knowledge of a "black brother" of Denis in Ireland. This family tradition was explained to a young and puzzled Eileen King as being due to the family's descent from Spaniards. Later, as a middle-aged tourist, she saw the rectangular layout of cottages and out-buildings in Ireland and realised how traditional the small Irish settlement on the Belbin Rivulet was.[21]

Farming for Your Life

Craigow & Other Large Farms

Craigow was, the show-piece, with over sixty acres of apricot orchard, plus apples, pears, blackberries and gooseberries. Originally granted to Dr James Murdoch in 1823, by 1890 *Craigow* was farmed by his grandson Hon James Murdoch, MLC, and worked by a bevy of farm-hands. In summer over one hundred men, women and children picked in family groups. To the small farmer, the success or failure of five acres of apricots or apples was crucial - new cloth, shoes etc., could, or could not be bought. The orchards were not only a boon to farmers; native parrots thrived. Ella McKay recalls her husband, Allan, describing how the birds were netted by Jack Wright and sold to sailors on the "wind-jammers", or tall sailing ships in the port of Hobart.[22]

Riverside and *Greenfields* on Pittwater had established dairy herds by 1900. The Hanslows at *Greenfields*were supplying Government House with cream. The wooden sixteen-stall dairy for the hand-milked Ayrshires still stands. Apart from cereal crops, wool and mutton, eggs and vegetables, farm diaries indicate that bark from the black wattle, used for tanning, and firewood for the Derwent steam ferries brought in extra income on the larger farms. From Risdon and Bellerive, timber carters supplied ferries and Hobartians with fuel.

At *Uplands* Allan McKay experimented with farming equipment, Nichols at *Anglewood* grew grain and ran sheep in the bush blocks as did *Craigow*. In the spring each farm spouted haystacks; a photo reveals thirteen haystacks on *Milnathort* around 1900. These were broken down in the late summer as the oats were put through a chaff-cutter driven by a traction engine, and bagged for sale to feed the horses of Hobart, and district farms. Along the Coal

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[20] *King, A., Tape, 21/3/1977.*

[21] *Batt, E., Tape, 9/7/1978.*

[22] *McKay, E. and A., Tape, 6/7/1978.*

River, similar seasonal farming practices occurred at *Carrington*, *Inverquarity* and *Laburnam Park*.

"It Was All by Hand" - The Dulcot & Malcolm's Huts Communities

By contrast to *Craigow*, the two communities of fringe-farmers at Dulcot, and Malcolm Hut Road, including Denis King's family, tried to be as self-sufficient as possible, rather than purchase hay and produce from the larger farms. Such work depended on communal labour. Alf King recalled:

> (Dad) had a little farm house down the *Swallowfields* - about 80 acres - from Malcolm Hut Road up. They couldn't sow a lot of stuff because they had to do it all by hand. It was all hand work. If you grew hay, you had to mow it with a scythe and if you grew wheat you reaped it with reap-hooks. All by hand - this was before the binder. This scar along my knuckles was done by a reap-hook. I did it while I was reaping what - seven or eight years old. We used to reap it all. This big paddocks by the doctor's house (i.e. present owner) - we used to reap 'em all be hand. When y'cut a handful of wheat, pull it. in two halves on each side. You get y'two pieces like that, and the heads is here (i.e. facing each other in each hand). Well, y'cross the 'eads like that, and shove it underneath. You laid that on the ground, laid your sheaf in, you pulled it over and you twist it round and round like that, and tighten it - just shove it underneath the band.
>
> (Father)'d have 10 acres on the corner, there'd be three acres in the paddock just below the road - used to be orchard - and two five-acre pieces up on the top. Well we used to reap it all, a paddock of wheat, and probably a couple of paddocks of oats. We'd reap all that, tie it up and cart it in and stack it. (We)'d thrash the wheat; the wheat nearly all used to go to the flour mill, to Murdochs on the wharf (at Hobart). Y'see, what they'd do, each one'd send so much wheat - Uncle Johnny used to - they'd send all their what in so many bags they 'ad to grind for them into flour - they'd grind so much for themselves.
>
> (AND HOW'D YOU THRESH IT - WITH A FLAIL?
>
> Yes, with a flail.
>
> Alf recalled the horse-driven chaff-cutter, known as the 'horse-works' which travelled from farm to farm.
>
> Later on, when I was about fourteen then, Clay Brothers used to come around with a peg drum, little chaff-cutter like a hand chaff-cutter; only a little cutter, with one horse and a round-about, and a great big cog. They walked round and round that. One bloke would sit on a seat in the centre of it and drive the horse - go round and round n round n'round. That's how they used to thrash it. A peg drum - you'd put the stuff through and it had a shaker on it, and when it went through it used to shake the stuff clean. Then you'd have to get all the stuff from underneath with shovels and put it through a winnowing machine. Then they'd bag it up - and the straw - they'd fork the straw up to the stack - 'til they brought the big drum with elevators and all.

> (ALL THE FAMILY'd BE IN ON THIS?)
>
> Oh they'd all help one another! Yes, they'd all come to help one another, that's how we used to work, we'd all go round each one. "I'll have the machine t'moora Ted, come and help me." - "Yes."
>
> Then Uncle Johnny'd send over the machine to Dad, and over they'd go n'help 'im. Then Parremores might have the machine - whoever had it, they';d all come and help one another, to do all the jobs, they helped one another. All of 'em no matter who it was. They was very good that time a day - only too pleased to help one another.[23]

Because of the small acreages involved, a binder or seed-drill was not used, unless borrowed, and crops were sown by hand. On Saturday afternoon or Sunday the small-holders borrowed a plough and/or horses to turn their three or five acres. To get ahead, many small farmers and their families worked seven days a week.

Working Bullocks & Draught Horses

The surprisingly common use of bullocks for ploughing in the 1900s further indicates the survival of old farming practices. Ken Dallas in his book Horse-Power describes bullocks as belonging to the "pioneering phase on the outer fringes of settlement."[24] But the Richmond district wasn't on the 'outer fringes'; perhaps the old techniques were also part of the time warp. Three of my interviewees, however, ploughed with bullocks, usually six and sometimes four. On *Craigow* old Bill Manning was remembered collecting wood from the hills, with a pair pulling a bullock cart. His team pulled logs as they were cleared from the Salt Pans on Pittwater. They were huge, fat and "sleek as seals", according to Alf King, obeying his stuttered command. Leaning against them with the butt of his whip he'd order - "p-p-pt-p-put down". And down they'd go.[25] Pulling a double-furrowed plough, six bullocks averaged one and a half acres daily. Gathering them often meant a long walk. As a young lad ploughing on *Seaton*, George King recalled how his break was signalled to him by a white towel hung on the line. Two breaks a day allowed the animals to ruminate.[26]

They Were 'Built For Strength'

The pioneering aspect of the district shows also in the pride men felt in physical feats. Grandfather Denis King and Roger Keane were known to have walked from the store at *Craigow* to Dulcot, each carrying a 200 lb bag of flour on their shoulders. Alf King recalled seeing a fallen load of chaff being reloaded at Shone's Corner, Risdon, by the driver, who restacked the load using one hand at a time.[27] (In Farm at World's End, Thomas Dunbabin recalls similar feats of strength.[28])

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[23] *King, A., Tape, 14/3/1978.*

[24] *Dallas, K., Horsepower, Hobart, 1968, p.57.*

[25] *King, A., Tape, 19/5/1977.*

[26] *King, G., 8/9/1979 (Conversation).*

[27] *King, A., Tape, 5/6/1977.*

[28] *Dunbabin, T., Farm at Worlds End, Hobart., 1964.*

Old Words for Old Ways

When using working horses on *Craigow* Len Hibberd referred to each period of work as a "yoken", and ancient term used for horses and bullocks. Other examples of old words included references to Hobart as "Hobart Town", "cress" for water-cress, and "teem" meaning to pour or empty. The last term was used by old Mrs Ratcliffe from a celebrated family who lived in a two-roomed split-slab thatched cottage with an earthen floor opposite *Milnathort* at Dulcot.

Miss Belle Backhouse, ninety-three in 1979, recalls having tea there as a young girl. The drinking vessels used were handle-less bowls, held in cupped hands, while the old lady told her daughter, "Teem the tea, teem the tea".[29] (Coincidentally I came across this term in "The Harvest Morning" by John Clare, the English rural poet from Northamptonshire: "While some are left to teem the loaded corn."[30]).

Conflicts Old and New

A brief glimpse at an old conflict was given by Mr George Hanslow of *Greenfields*. He recalled his father's description of the resentment among the reapers on the arrival of the first binder. The men with the scythes were to become redundant. Only a few years before, English 'machine-breakers' - farm workers whose livelihood was threatened by chaff-cutters and other automated farm equipment, were transported as prisoners to Tasmania. At *Greenfields* a guard was stationed overnight near the revolutionary binder. At first the reapers wouldn't approach it. One of the older men finally inquired how the machine automatically tied the sheaves with twine. On being shown he replied, "The devil's had a hand in that !"[31]

Relationships between employer and employee varied from affection to dislike. This respect was based on the employer's sense of fairness. None of the farm-workers belonged to a rural trade union. At *Richmond Park* a shearing team did strike for 8 shillings instead of 7/6 per 100. The manager of the farm ordered them off the place "before he set the dogs on them". Another team came in instead, working at the old rate.[32]

Examples of conflict over the conscription referendums during World War I were given. On *Craigow,* the threshing team chalked "Vote Yes" over their hut. Len Hibberd whose father was an employee on the farm changed it to "No". His mother had refused to consent to his enlistment; within two years he had "learnt enough to not want to go". He also made the observation that boys from unhappy homes were more inclined to enlist than those from stable homes where there was doubt about enlisting.[33]

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[29] *Backhouse, B., Tape, 10/4/1980.*

[30] *Robinson, E. (Ed.), Clare, Selected Poems, Oxford, 1966, p.54.*

[31] *Hanslow, G., Tape, 22/3/1980.*

[32] *King, G., Tape, 6/10/1978.*

[33] *Hibberd, L., Tape, 4/9/1979.*

Working and Belonging

Minding Your Own Business - Trackermen & Trackerwomen

The two communities at Dulcot and Malcolm Hut Road were also homes for itinerant workers and nomads. One side of the Dulcot - main road junction is still known locally as "Tinker's Corner". The 'tracker-men' and women - tramps - camped among the wattles near Billy Drew's water-hole at the Back Tea Tree Road junction. They frequently called at homes for food and were treated courteously, but warily, and at night were sometimes pelted with stones by boys who must have sensed their parents' distrust.[34]

Some of the tramps were elderly pauper emancipists who lived on the road, trying to avoid the police and being forced into a government institution in their last years.

Despite work sharing, there was a strong sense of privacy, inherited from the still disappearing days of convict past & the 'Hated Stain.' A few inhabitants were known only by descriptive nick-names. "Johnny Come-Lately", "Jinglin' Johnny", and "Tommy the Round-head," whose real name was Thomas Shaw, an emancipist.

Amusements

Visiting was not frequent, except for a monthly dance and card night at a neighbour's home. Music was provided by a "windjammer" (button-accordion) or violin. Very few families had a piano. Older boys and girls walked or biked to dances held at Risdon, Richmond, Campania or Sorell.[35]

The Grass Tree Hill Sports

The Grass Tree Hill Sports, held every April from about 1902, was the main local event of the year at Dulcot. They were started by three small farmers including Ted King, Alf's father, at Malcolm Hut Road, and later transferred to Dulcot. "It was a great day for the people." Alf King relived. With foot-racing, bike-riding, chopping events and stalls, it was a Fringe Farmers and working-man's sports day. This is evident from the people on the committee and the absence of horse-riding events, as at the Cambridge Ploughing Match as these were only affordable by the affluent. However, people of all back-grounds went to both events, with eagerness and anticipation.[36]

Aunt Marianne's new admirer, a middle-aged 'gentleman' from Sydney, noticed a strangely dressed family group arrive. Not realising they were the family of Uncle Johnny and Aunt Lizzie, Marianne's brother's family, he asked innocently, "Who are these people, are they gypsies?" When told the truth he was mortified, Eileen recalled.

Women's Lives

Some anecdotes hint at greater exuberance and enthusiasm in some of the older residents. At Dulcot old great aunt Eliza, the wife of John King, Denis King's transported brother, was

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[34] *King, Tape, 21/3/1977.*

[35] *King, Tape, 21/3/1977.,*

[36] *Ibid, Tape, 5/6/1977.*

thought to have been in the theatre, and would dance a jig on the table of their earthen-floored cottage on the Belbin Rivulet.[36] The extroversion of livelier ethnic traditions did not last, apparently smothered by the demands of Victorian decorum. Uncle Johnny's daughters on their parents' fringe farm at Dulcot had a life-long battle to be fashionable, always, however, managing to be out of fashion with a veil too many or too long.

There seems to have been a high proportion of unmarried people, and also childless couples. Did the pressure of Victorian morality remove confidence with which men and women approached one another, or was it the fact that there were so few viable small holdings in the district which newly-weds could purchase?

Formal education seemed to have more effect on girls than boys, probably because the old school curriculum catered for domestic handcrafts while not offering those practical skills in which boys were interested. Girls tended to stay at school longer, as jobs were more difficult to find. The boys, especially those from small farms and with agricultural labourer parents, were keen to learn those skills they saw neighbours doing when walking to and from school.

Fringe Farming Women

Work demands on women living on fringe farms were severe. Alf King's mother milked fourteen cows, reared turkeys and fowls, worked in and supervised the cultivation of a two acre vegetable plot, apart from running a household, and rearing a child every eighteen months. She died in 1904, from burns and childbirth. Over eight months pregnant, her long dress caught alight while helping her husband burning undergrowth on the *Swallowfields*.[37] A two months old infant is buried with her.[38] Alf King was nine years old. The family moved to an old hotel on the convict-built Grass Tree Hill road. Phoebe and Ethel, both under sixteen, ran the new house-hold.

Eileen (King) Batt was also reared in a one parent family on the Belbin at Dulcot. Aunt Marianne as her mother was known, became pregnant to Peter Murdoch snr, a married farmer from a large neighbouring property. Eileen's birth caused a scandal in the district and a resentment which occasionally showed. Without a father at home, Eileen had greater freedom as a child than other girls, running messages and walking around the neighbourhood.

Eileen recalled the strenuous life of her single mother. A bag of flour ordered from P. J. Nichols' delivery cart was dropped off on the corner of the main road at Dulcot. Aunt Marianne made three trips to and from her home, carrying a third of the contents each time on her back on the half mile walk. She also cut and carted wood, killed fowls, salted pork and could bring down a pigeon with her long-barrelled gun if they were after newly-sown peas, causing anger from her brother and neighbour Johnny King who owned the birds.

A frail and increasingly senile Denis King was cared for by Marianne, lifting him finally from bed to chair. Eileen remembers the single-horse hearse in which Denis King made his

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[37] *King, A., Tape, 14/3/1978.*

[38] *Headstone, St Johns Church, Richmond.*

final trip to Richmond. At each house along the road relatives and friends fell in behind, walking the four miles to burial at St John's Catholic cemetery.[38]

Eileen also described the shop of Jimmy Anderson, the Richmond wheelwright, and how Si. Shipley the joiner and undertaker lined the coffins with velvet.[39]

The Backhouse girls who lived on *Craigow* don't recall their childhood with quite the same enthusiasm. They remember the hours spent in the orchards during pruning, picking up the cuttings. Farms were places for men and boys, who were free to watch and wander.

The Ploughman's Son

Probably because of this, Mr Len Hibberd remembers his childhood and working life on *Craigow* with unglamourized affection. He proudly referred to the time his father Arthur Hibberd won the 1906 Inter-Colonial Ploughing Match as 'the Old Dad.' Len became an expert ploughman also, although too shy to compete. He described his work and experiences with pride and detail. A ploughman was judged by his skill with horses and equipment, particularly the plough. The Honourable James Murdoch didn't let beginners plough next to the road where crooked furrows would be noticed by neighbours and travellers. Only Arthur Hibberd and experienced hands were allowed this privilege, and it was regarded as a privilege.

In 1977, his farming days which ended with tractors long finished, Len talked of his horses as close friends. His best pair could plough without reins. A photo of his favourite pair hung on the wall above his bed.

The instinctive abilities of the draught-horses was shown on the way to a ploughing match. The previous year it had been held at *Greenfields*, a farm closer to *Craigow* than the usual sites on *La Belle Alliance*, Cambridge. The plough team was allowed to wander ahead with harness jingling and manes plumed. The match-plough was loaded on a lorry and pulled to Cambridge, behind the plough team. Len and his father were amazed to see the team turn down the lane toward the site of the last year's match, which they hadn't been near for twelve months.[39]

At the height of the fruit-picking season *Craigow* had four wagons carrying apricots to Jones & Co., Hobart. To get up over Tunnel Hill, four horses were needed for each loaded wagon. Two of these were left at Bellerive before the trip on the twin-hulled *Kangaroo*, or "Old Double Guts", across the Derwent River to IXL Jones & Co, to be collected on the return trip later in the day.

Len Hibberd left *Craigow* to work for many happy years for the Lewis family at *Milford*, on Pittwater, then not so enjoy able times for Errol Ross on *Cylwin*.

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[39] *Hibberd, L., Tape, 7/7/1977.*

Richmond Township and Society

By the turn of the century Richmond had only two working hotels. Sale days were still a monthly feature with stock being driven through the street. Many cottage owners had milking cows which were licensed with tags to graze the grassy verges. In 1912 Richmond had nine regular wagoners; some businesses like shop-keeper, P. J. Nichols had two. From photographs it appears most large farms had a light lorry, a heavier wagon for harvest and town deliveries, a heavy duty farm cart, and a light chaise-cart for road use. With so many horses, Richmond's three blacksmiths-shops had plenty of business with the nine wagon teams, plus horses from surrounding farms, heavy and light. The two publicans, Burns and Burrell owned smithies opposite their hotels, the *Bridge* and the *Commercial* (now the *Richmond Arms*). Jimmy Anderson, the coach-builder and wheelwright worked in partnership with Bill Green, the third blacksmith, on the corner of Bridge Street and Campania Roads.[40]

Although motor deliveries had started by 1916, the two-horse Richmond to Bellerive coach run by publican Herbert Burns continued until 1926. The same year saw the end of the Sorell to Bellerive railway which had managed only one year's profitable running since starting in 1892.

"Like something out of Jane Eyre."

While farming techniques and customs reflected an older period, evidence suggests that social relationships were also of an earlier period too. This is exemplified by a comment from Mrs Bassett ('Nandy') Dickson snr. An English born nurse, she arrived as a war bride with her soldier husband at the end of World War I to farm *Glen Ayr*. With its class divisions and deferential behaviour, she likened society at Richmond to "something out of Jane Eyre".[41]The formality of the middle-class imposed itself most severely upon wives and daughters, a fact easily observed in photographs of the period. Their husbands and brothers saw their duty in working on the farm and taking on public responsibilities, whether organising the Cambridge Ploughing Match, or becoming Councillors or Members of Parliament.

Going to Church

The social groupings were not only based on ownership of property but also a common cultural background and education. Religious denomination was another factor. The largest land-holders were Protestant, the small-holders and workers mainly Catholic and Anglican. Catholics were unlikely to own large properties and were usually farm-hands and/or fringe farmers. Without their own transport, going to church in Richmond was a major exercise. Miss Belle Backhouse recalled walking half-way from *Craigow* to Richmond staying overnight with friends at the *Long-House*, near Duck Hole Creek. She and her sisters slept "top and toe" with the other children and were ready for early morning Mass in Richmond.[42]

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[40] *King, A., Tape, 20/4/1977.*

[41] *Pers comm, 1979*

[42] *Backhouse, B., Tape, 10/4/1980.*

Cultural contrasts are exemplified in two teachers who served at Dulcot, one in the 1870's, the other in the early 1900's, one Catholic and emancipist, the other, Anglican and middle-class Victorian.

Schools and the "Hated Stain"

Dulcot Schools, 1869-1913

I interviewed Flora Young (nee Ellis), a sprightly ninety-three year old in 1978, who recalled her mother in 1902 teaching at the Dulcot school-house which opened in 1899. The family had been left in a precarious financial position after the unexpected death of the father, Vincent J. Ellis, a young Hobart solicitor. Flora moved from attending a very selective dame school, "Miss Harris's Ladies Grammar School" in Macquarie St, Hobart, to the come-all-ye of Dulcot State School. Like many of the Dulcot teachers before her, she had turned to teaching as a last resort. Mother, daughter and grandmother arrived in 1902 with a piano, crockery (which, when unpacked, was broken), and a collection of Dickens and other Victorian classics.

Compared with their previous standard of living, the Dulcot school house was spartan. Still, her mother insisted on starched aprons for herself and Flora who recalled "Oh dear, she used be starched up to the nines!" Mrs Ellis was shocked by the children at the school, including the Kings, who spat on their slates to clean them, and insisted on little dishes of water and little pieces of rag.' The family was appalled at the poverty in the district. A school-age friend visited the Ellises at Dulcot, and went shooting birds with the Kings. A bullet richoted off a tree, hitting the visitor in the knee, but they kept the injury a secret.

Before being transferred to Dromedary, to see even greater poverty, they socialised with the Murdochs, the Brocks of *Belmont* and other farm-owning families.[43] Like the Misses Tillack, the previous teachers at Dulcot, one wage unofficially supported two 'teachers'. Flora's mother Mrs Ellis, was assisted by her own mother, and the Tillack sisters Louisa and Lena helped each other in the classroom and acted as company.[44]

Louisa and Lena Tillack was the daughter of a Prussian immigrant who arrived from Frankfurt in 1856 on the *Willaimsburg*. Born in 1871, Louisa was one of the few formally trained teachers sent to Dulcot, having trained at the Hobart Model School in 1892. She resented the lesser opportunities extended to her as a woman.[45]

Alf recalled Louisa Tillack introducing netball and the school entering with enthusiasm into "The Hare & Hounds" - pronounced "'are 'n' 'ounds" - or a paper chase across the countryside.

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[43] *The Ellis' returned brielfy to Dulcot in 1907.*

[44] *Young, F., Tape, 1/8/1980.*

[45] *ED2/12/1296, AOT)*

The Mud School - The 'Hated Stain' In Action

By contrast to the middle class and genteel poverty of Mrs Ellis, the first teacher at the original mud-school at Dulcot in 1870, Richard Plummer, was an Irish emancipist, who had been sent to Van Diemen's Land from India in 1847 for forging a cheque when a soldier.[46] After serving in the Richmond Constabulary, he had been forced to resign when nearly sixty years old. This information came in a scribbled note signed by "Arthur Jas. Ogilvy", property owner of *Inverquarity*. In a letter to "my dear Stephen", the school inspector, Ogilvy explained that

> ... the reason Plummer was dismissed (if I remember rightly) was because the thieves used to find out the intentions of the police etc. - through members of his family - I believe his wife is not much good; at any rate he hasn't control over (her) that he ought to have - and it was understood to be through her that matters got about that shouldn't. [47]

Like many colonial era teachers, Richard Plummer had turned to teaching as a last resort. Before 1870, "he had opened night school for those employed at farm work etc., in the day time".[48]

The parents, directed by McKernan, the Catholic priest, petitioned the Central Board of Education for the two-thirds government subsidy for the small school. Plummer lowered his age by thirteen years when applying for the position of teacher. Stephens, the school inspector, thought, despite his lack of qualifications, that "Mr. Plummer (is) likely to make a more useful teacher than many better educated"[49]

Despite the fact that he had received references from the Warden of Richmond, Winston C. Simmons and others, one question remained. This query was confidentially asked of the Richmond Inspector of Police, Forster, by George Richardson, on behalf of the Chairman of the Board of Education, Dr Butler. Information was sought on "his antecedents, more especially whether they came to the colony free".[50] Whether out of ignorance, or to protect an old friend, Forster replied that Plummer came to the colony free.

Was this typical of the attitude of the Board of Education toward the employment of emancipists? Was this process of selection one of the many which discriminated against those people who may have inherited a folk culture, thereby ensuring its embarrassed suppression?

Of the eight fathers who petitioned for the Dulcot school to be funded, five were definitely emancipists.[51] (The family of Samson Johnson was living at the long-vanished *Wheatsheaf Inn* at Dulcot). The school proposal was forwarded by Father McKernan. Many frustrated letters

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[46] *CON 37/4, AOT*

[47] *ED 2/2, AOT.*

[48] *Ibid*

[49] *Ibid*

[50] *Ibid*

[51] *Ibid*

complained of the delay in approving the school. The delay was apparently caused by the inquiry into Plummer's forebears. This cannot have been helped by the large absence when Stephens arrived to inspect the school. Five letters explain the children were helping to take live-stock to the Richmond Sale. In urging approval R. Strachan, Chairman of the Local Board, explained that Mr Plummer was maintaining himself, a wife and six children in the four-roomed pise school-house. The children at Dulcot he said "heretofore, were running around like rabbits !"[52] Stephens the Inspector also wrote of the poverty of the district. For the next thirty years, there was a continual battle for the parents to provide their third of the teachers' wages.

The Wary Tasmanians

What effect did the early history of the district have on this and later periods? The loss of a popular ethnic culture seems traceable to the stigma surrounding the antecedents of many people like Richard Plummer. While middle-class culture was cohesive, with its music, religious, artistic and behavioural mores accepted and understood, folk-traditions were diverse, scattered and informal. The lack of an ethnic unity among labourers and small farmers in this district, the lack of surviving cultural traditions may be due to the fragmenting effect of the transportation system. This prevented the continuation of any old traditions unless, as at Dulcot, when an ethnic group settled together. But with very little room for expansion, the descendants moved on, taking any traditions with them, and leaving the remaining population not strong or cohesive enough to withstand popular culture.

Finally, and probably most destructively, the stigma of convict ancestry silenced folk-culture. Children of convicts were forced to deny not only their parents' origin but also any cultural traditions which they inherited. Centralised religious and educational authorities standardised and formalised both the sacred and secular. While taking they gave, of course, improved health care and literacy. A combination of these factors may help to explain at least in part, why Tasmania has no overt popular folk culture, no bushranger ballads, shearing songs or dance tunes.

The little schools such as those at Dulcot which my late friend Alf King briefly attended in 1898 represented the end and beginning of an era.

World War I

The final change to the district came with the massive changes forced by the loss of men due to the war effort. The war wasn't popular in the Richmond district which voted "No" in

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[52] *Ibid*

both referendums for conscription. The opposition was not just because of the feared loss of labour by farmers. An Irish based community may also explain the resistance.

Labour shortages occurred; Arthur Plummer, a sixteen-year old bullock driver from Campania, was suddenly promoted to traction-engine driver.[53]

Other dramatic effects of the war are also evident. Ill-feeling, even fights occurred; some farm-hands refused to work on properties with a strong pro-conscription employer. Among the names on the Richmond War Memorial were athletes who raced at the Grass Tree Hill Sports; the sports did not continue after the war. Old properties, such as *Glen Ayr*, were subdivided for soldier settlement, but averaging under forty-three acres and with poor planning, most were gradually sold to surrounding farms.[54]

Whatever the motive for enlisting, by 1920 the Richmond district was altered forever.

Post War Changes - the End of Fringe Farming

With mechanisation on farms, brown-spot disease spreading through apricot orchards, the demand for rural labour dropped. Dulcot and the other tiny communities were no longer needed. Relatives moved from the district, and did not keep in contact. A number of brothers and sisters from middle-class as well as working-class families remained single, staying in a community they knew rather than venturing away. Some remained childless. Others moved to Cambridge and Richmond or Hobart, which in 1944 had been linked to the eastern shore by the floating bridge. The Richmond district was no longer isolated. Those small farmers who remained were the last to use horses for farm-work. Some were glad to have the convenience of tractors; others like the King bachelors at Dulcot, kept their horses with pride.

A Village Under threat

Richmond and Cambridge townships and district are sadly neglected. Richmond has no conservation plan; the Grass Tree Hill road, Governor Arthur's road, convict built in the 1830's, was recently realigned and sealed without any conservation study, or interest by government or private body. A 150-year old timber hotel on it was demolished without resistance in 1981. As late as 1994 a small brick cottage c1830 was demolished with council approval.

Regretfully, no systematic attempt has been made in Tasmania to record the views of this - and other -generations, yet it seems such an ideal and vital area for schools and tertiary

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[53] *Plummer, A., Tape, 5/9/1981.*

[54] *Beresford, Q., "Soldier Settlement. in Tasmania'', (Unpublished paper)*

institutions. Oral history archives are urgently needed. Only a few years remain to record this unique generation who knew an Edwardian childhood, and which inherited ancient and pioneer customs and traditions.

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