

The Story of Ashburton Through the Ages

Introduction

This essay is an expanded version of a talk I presented by invitation at the Ashburton branch of the Boroondara Library in September 2014. I decided to cover the story of Ashburton in 30-year segments, from the 1830s to the 1980s and present day, a division that comfortably fitted with Ashburton's significant changes.

Of necessity, because the southern part of Ashburton, south of Dent Street, was previously part of Glen Iris, some relevant pieces of the Glen Iris story are included even though they extend beyond the boundaries of present day Ashburton. Again, because of necessity, I only touch very lightly on some of the events which ensued and the characters who were both the backdrop and often the leading actors of this story. I have occasionally provided references from whence I obtained my information however the internet is available at the finger tips of anyone who wants to extend their knowledge.

In this opening chapter without meaning any disrespect I have used the same words and tribal names that occur in all the contemporary letters and records, regardless of the fact that they have since been challenged by some historians for their 'maleness' and 'whiteness'.

1830s

Available information regarding Aboriginal land use in Port Phillip pre European settlement is scant and relies principally on the weekly, monthly, quarterly, six monthly and annual reports of Assistant Protector William Thomas¹, the Police Magistrate of the Port Phillip District, which were presented to Lieutenant Governor Charles La Trobe, or by his personal notes, drawings and jottings which appear to have been intended for publication on his retirement. La Trobe passed most of them on to Governor Bourke in Sydney and many ended up with the authorities in London. Thomas spent a number of years living in a tent with the Wurundjerie tribe and especially his report to La Trobe in 1849 on the customs and lifestyle of those aborigines, prior to attempts to convert them to European customs, is informative and provides contemporary factual observations.

Until 1849 the Chief Protector of Aborigines was George Augustus Robinson. Some say that he was harsh and clearly he and Thomas frequently argued and disagreed. In 1837, prior to the Protectorate's establishment, a mission and school had been set up on the south side of the Yarra River at a meeting place and corroboree site which is now occupied by Melbourne's Royal Botanical Gardens. However, both the school and the mission failed because the people of the Kulin nation refused to give up their cultural practices of travelling and hunting at certain times of the year.

It would appear that their wandering took them almost in a circle, seldom spending more than three nights in any one location, covering only about 6 miles each day and arriving from time to time, depending upon the seasons, back at their preferred campsites. The favoured sites seem to have been determined by where there were "plenty possums" although the Wurrundjerie's territory was well stocked with many other sources of native game. Water fowl would have been plentiful in the numerous creeks and water holes and in a conversation I had in 1943, an elderly East Malvern resident told me of regularly seeing, when he was a younger person, mobs of kangaroo feeding in the Gardiner's Creek plain. There seems little doubt from other records that the Wurundjerie spent much of the summer season on that plain.

¹ William Thomas's regular reports and personal jottings have been quoted by many researchers and provide a first hand introduction to aboriginal beliefs and contemporary lifestyles, albeit he is not without his detractors. Anyone interested in learning more of the relationships between early settlers and the aboriginals is encouraged to read the many "Letters from Victorian Pioneers" which are held in Victoria's La Trobe Library's collection of manuscripts and is available on the internet. He is regarded by some historians as somewhat benevolent despite ample evidence of his remarkable success in dispelling disputes and maintaining intertribal relationships. He was known as Marminata (Good Father).

Kulin tribes occupied most of today's Victoria. The Wurundjeri-Balluk tribe occupied the Yarra River catchment, i.e. all land covered by the rivers and creeks flowing south from the Great Divide, with the Corhanwarrabul¹ (Dandenongs) their eastern boundary. North flowing streams defined the territory of the Goulburn tribe. The Wurundjerie are reported as being peaceable and tended to live amicably with their nearest southern neighbours the Bunurong or Mornington Peninsula tribe. However they did occasionally have disputes in which the odd warrior was speared, but on others, would frequently swap lubras. This was a well established practice between all members of the Kulin nation. They did have an irritating habit, irritating for the settlers, of killing the occasional beef and digging up the homestead potatoes - Mrs Mary Gardiner makes reference to this in her diary.

But the Wurundjeri were fearful of their northern neighbours, the reputedly warlike Daungwurrung or Goulburn River catchment tribe. On one occasion, Edward Atkyn Walpole, who had leased Gardiner's Run, put this fear to his advantage. Having attempted unsuccessfully to disperse a number of blacks who were hanging around the homestead, he claimed to have seen some of the Goulburn tribe just over the other side of the river. The several nervous Wurundjerie at the homestead fled into the bush but soon returned bringing their entire tribe with them!

When John Batman² arrived in Port Phillip on 8 June 1835, it is widely recorded that he approached eight of the local Aboriginal leaders, which included three brothers all of the same name, sometimes named Jika Jika, on others Jaga Jaga or Billibellary, with a contract, to 'buy' their land. His negotiations were successful, and he walked away with 600,000 acres - some 2,500 square kilometres or 1,000 square miles of prime farming terrain - which included much of the Wurundjerie's ancestral land. Batman claimed that he had negotiated with Aboriginal 'chiefs' who were in charge of this land. But he was actually negotiating with the tribal elders who weren't in a position to sell their people's land, even if they had wanted to. At the time that Batman arrived in the Port Phillip region he had with him Aboriginal translators from New South Wales, who would have spoken a completely different language to the Wurundjerie people. It is believed that they communicated through the occasional word common to both languages together with signs and gestures.

It is also alleged by some historians that the 'marks' Batman claims were made by eight Aboriginal chiefs to sign the contract are identical to marks found in his journal, which raises the question of whether they might have been forged.

However Batman's treaty was almost immediately declared invalid under a Proclamation by Governor Bourke of New South Wales. On 6 August 1835 he declared that the British Crown owned the entire land of Australia, and that only it could sell or distribute land. The declaration further stated that 'every treaty, bargain and contract with the Aboriginal Natives for the possession, title, or claim to any (Crown) lands is void ... etc.' This was the first decree under British colonisation leading ultimately to the myth of "terra nullius", a legal fiction abolished in 1992 as a result of the claim for ownership of their traditional land brought by Torres Strait Islander Eddie Mabo and four others. Eight months later, on 13 April 1836, Baron Glenelg, the Secretary of State, officially ratified this Proclamation and authorised Bourke to form a settlement.

Due to overstocking, pioneering settlers had already begun to flood in from Van Diemen's Land bringing with them boat loads of sheep. Now referred to as the First Overlanders, John Gardiner, John Hepburn and Joseph Hawdon, herded 300 cattle which Gardiner had bought from Hawdon, together with another 100 still owned by Hawdon, down from Yass in New South Wales. On completing their journey they reported that they had found good feed, plenty of water, safety from natives and had surprisingly bumped into Major Mitchell's party near Gundagai. The Mitchell party had left Sydney in March 1836 to trace the course of the Darling but having reached the Murray then continued and ended up exploring the land due south to the

¹ 'Corhanwarrabul' is from the Woiwurrung language of the Wurundjerie. There are suggestions that 'Dandenong' and its several variants, e.g. 'Narrawong', is also from that language.

² One of the more complete sources of information on John Batman, and of his short life, is the Australian Dictionary of Biography.

ocean. They were at that time on their way back from that epic journey.

Gardiner arrived in Melbourne in December 1836 and immediately made good friends with the local settlers by butchering one of his beasts in celebration of the festive season, a welcome change from a diet of lamb for the residents. John Hepburn also mentions this in the fully detailed story of their journey from Sydney where he reports to the Lieutenant Governor, “We killed a bullock, one of the best of course, for the good colonists to keep Christmas in English style”.¹ John Gardiner and his cousin Fletcher then laid claim to occupy some 15,000 acres beyond the ‘settled districts’ in what was termed the Commissioner’s District on Kooyong Koot (*haunt of water fowl*) Creek, - later named Gardiner’s Creek. The run extended from the junction of the Yarra and the creek to approximately the present day High Street, with Robert Allen occupying the creek valley from that point on.

In October 1837 Gardiner was searching for stray cattle further up the Yarra valley and recognised the superior prospects of the fertile land around Mooroolbark. He abandoned the Gardiner’s Creek run to, in his words, “someone else’s beeves”, and, in partnership with his brother David and cousin Fletcher, took out a grazing licence on another 15,000 acres at Mooroolbark. Another Gardiner cousin, Edward Atkyn Walpole, took over the run and renamed it ‘Callantina’. His name is perpetuated in Walpole Street, Kew and he is also credited with finally establishing the source of the Yarra.

John Gardiner was the founder of the Temperance Society in Melbourne and I also want to place on record the location of Gardiner’s home. Most references refer to it being where Scotch College now stands . The Sketcher of 1889 quotes a journalist’s interview with Walpole: ‘...on his return from the position of Chief Magistrate in Hobart, that Mr Walpole dearly wished to see once again this great colony and the site of the homestead of the old station at Gardiner’s Creek

The site of the old homestead at Gardiner’s Creek was turned into the popular tea gardens and resort of holiday makers. Some of the buildings were in a fair state of preservation, notably an old dairy of Piza work, the building of which was designed and supervised by Governor La Trobe a particular friend of Mr Walpole’s. Within the old station boundaries now stand the prosperous and fashionable suburbs of Hawthorn and Kew.’



Hawthorn Tea Gardens at Riversdale Road.

Using the reference to Scotch College can only be respected in general terms for not any of its main buildings, except for the boat sheds, border the river. The most popular tea gardens were the Hawthorn ones at Riversdale Road. The other one, which went through a rather checkered career for some twenty years, was somewhere near Hambleton Road and could quite likely be the one to which Walpole was referring.

Robert Allen (also often spelt Allan) was a squatter who we are told had been evicted from the Narre Narre Warren² Native Police Reserve which had been established in 1837 by Christian de Villiers at the request of Police Magistrate Lonsdale. In 1838, Allen had what has been described as a cattle camp in the corner of Boundary Road and Gardiner’s Creek. This is designated on an early map, somewhat vaguely, as *hereabouts*. The big sweeping curve in that

¹ Vide “Letters from Victorian Pioneers” which are held in the Victorian La Trobe Library’s collection of manuscripts

² In his reports William Thomas spells this Nerre Nerre Warren and both spellings are possibly derived from the native title for the Dandenong Creek - Narra Narrawong.

creek, caused by the southern cliffs of the Ashburton plateau and enclosing the fertile ground of Solway, was for some time named Allen's Creek although it didn't take long to revert to Gardiner's Creek over its full length. Allen's run must have been more than just a 'camp', because from 1839 to 1848 he farmed 6,000 acres titled the Balla Balla run. He later sold that portion of his run above Gardiner's Creek to a William Logie.

It has also been claimed that Allen built the first house on Gardiner's Creek. The site of the house was connected by a vague track to High Street. From there the track continued down over Back Creek and then up to join with Dowling's property which was on the corner of today's Toorak and Glen Iris Roads. That track defines the general path of Victory Boulevard, Markham Avenue, St Georges Crescent, Albion Road and Glen Iris Road; created nearly 180 years ago, it still services southern Ashburton. Regardless of where Allen built his hut, the home of William Logie, the next owner of some of Allen's run, was certainly close to where Captain Henderson (who we'll learn about shortly) built his home.

In March 1837, Governor Bourke arrived in Melbourne Town and having received orders from Baron Glenelg to establish a settlement instructed the Assistant Surveyor-General Robert Hoddle to lay out the town. Even though Governor Bourke disapproved of Hoddle's plan, Hoddle was able to convince him that "wide streets were advantageous to the health and convenience of the future". The survey within what was titled the 'settled district' was drawn on a square mile grid. It was on this grid that the main roads were placed, with subsidiary half mile intervals. The plan was based on an English village concept with a village every 5 miles and with the area of each village covering a 5 mile square with a reserve in the centre. The survey extended to what was logically termed the 'Boundary Road'. Nevertheless, as if to just create some confusion, there was a Boundary West Road which later became Burke Road and a Boundary East Road ultimately becoming Warrigal Road, although the shortened title of 'Boundary Road' persisted on maps and in common usage through until well into the 1950s. When the Port Phillip District was mapped, not only was the English village used as the basis but the various divisions were given the English titles of County and Parish, hence we have County of Bourke, Parish of Boroondara, etc.

Auburn Road, Burke Road, Boundary (or Warrigal) Road were the magnetic north/south main roads at mile intervals and High Street, Norwood (or Toorak) Road, Riversdale Road, etc the east/west. And with what appears to be an admirable disdain for fact, Summerhill Road was named the Five Mile Road even though it was eight miles from the Melbourne Town boundary, however this can partly be explained by Hoddle's 5 square mile concept.

1860s

The colony of Victoria had separated from New South Wales in 1850. Gold had been discovered and the 'rush' had brought a million new settlers. Half the population of Australia was now living in Victoria which was busily conducting its own affairs with an independent parliament. One of the most significant decisions made affecting Ashburton was for the new government to accept responsibility for the development of the road network within the settled districts and established a Central Road Board. In 1853, to provide for local input and control, the establishment of local Road Boards was authorised.

However nothing happened in Boroondara until persistent unrest amongst residents resulted in the calling of a meeting where the decision was taken to finally establish a Road Board and elect its members. The Boroondara Road Board held its first meeting in October 1856 and continued as a Road Board until being created a Shire in 1871.

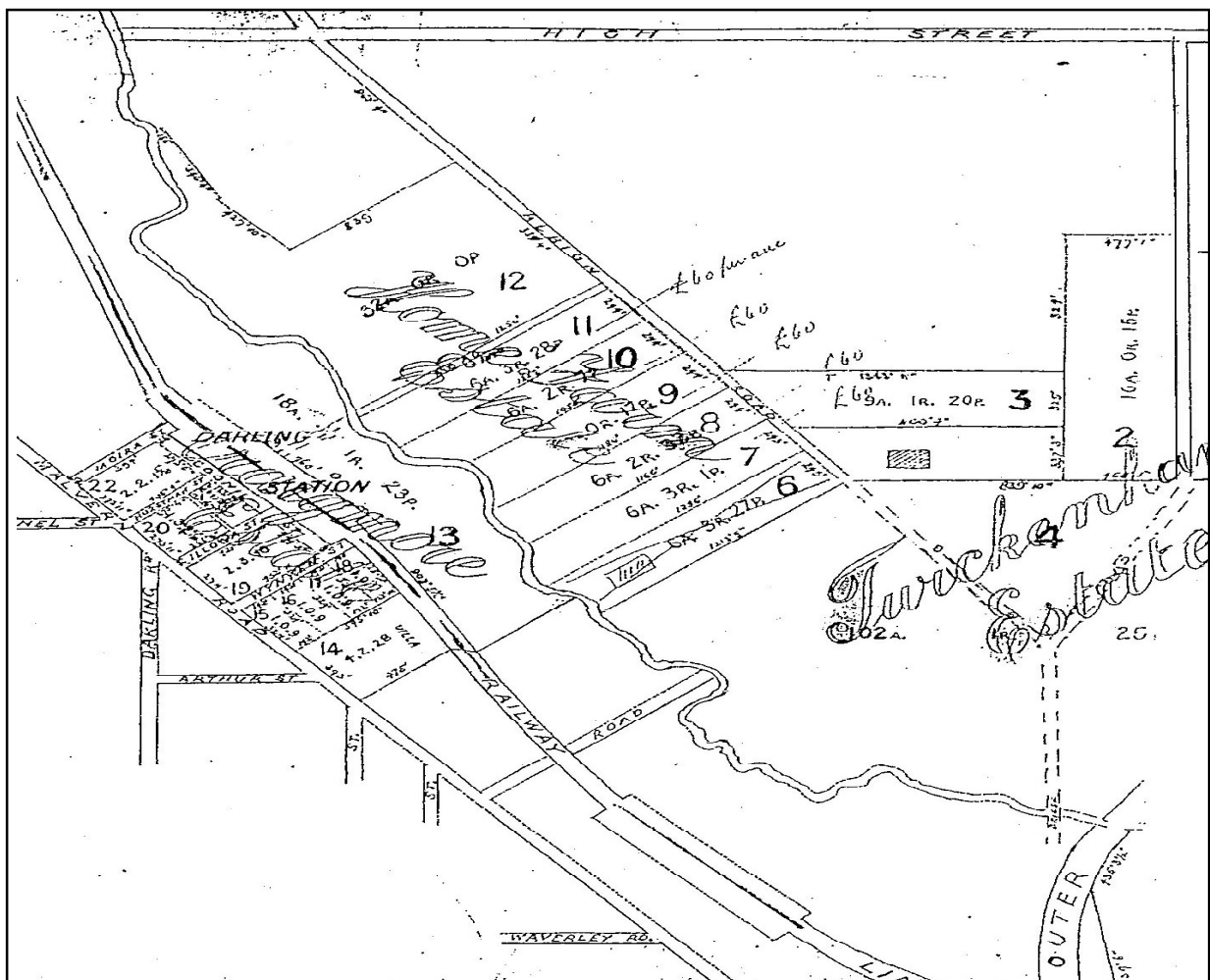
The members of the Board faced constant challenges to attend the meetings, particularly the Gardiner's Creek representatives. Not just the condition of the tracks - even during mild weather with their numerous creek crossings - but the impossibility of safe travel during storms and floodings. On at least one occasion the meeting had to be cancelled when no member at all

was able to be present. The meetings were held in Hawthorn, initially at a house, but then at a hotel where facilities had to be made available by the hotelkeeper for the stabling of the horses, although this did not include provisioning which was just one of the conditions spelt out in the rental agreement.

Early legislation provided for the Central Road Board to be responsible for the maintenance only of 'the Main Lines of Road', but, with none of the tracks sealed, with ruts and deep bog holes causing vehicles to regularly deviate, creating new pathways, the Road Board members faced an almost impossible task of responding to resident's complaints regarding the dangerous conditions of the roads. Each ratepayer would argue that their need was more pressing than that of any other ratepayer. The member's challenge was compounded by the Act leaving them possibly personally liable for some of their decisions. On at least one occasion they were forced to lodge their personal guarantees against a bank advance due to tardy rate receipts.

Despite Melbourne having been surveyed and laid out in accordance with Hoddle's plan as far as the 'Boundary' road in 1837, the early residents had paid very little attention to the grid. Contemporary reports of the 1840s refer to 'dwellings being dotted about in a myriad of styles and materials'.

Neither did the Board members even have a map of their District and it took over three years, until December 1859, for a plan to be compiled. But it was not only the Board that was troubled by not knowing exactly where its boundaries were, property owners also were in constant dispute with their neighbours over individual boundaries. As settlement had expanded, again with disregard to the Hoddle plan, the boundaries of many properties had been loosely defined by ridges and creeks. When the Boroondara Board asked the Central Road Board to give



Estate plans of 'Glen Iris' on both sides of Gardiner's Creek c. 1912. The homestead was on lot 12. The rough shape on lot 6 may have been a guess at the location of either Allen's or Logie's home

them a list of the roads that the Central Board would be maintaining, they learned that neither did the Registrar-General yet have a map. As a result Boroondara was asked to lend the somewhat imperfect one they had compiled. This was passed over on loan but was never seen again!

At the first land sales of 1850, Captain Thomas Henderson had purchased Section 1B which had previously been the Boroondara portion of Allen's run and which was later designated Lot 137B. George Downing, for a time a member of the Road Board and a significant contributor to the development of Glen Iris, owned Section 1A with his home on the corner of Toorak and Glen Iris Roads, the area rather grandiosely titled Downing Hill. Henderson built a substantial six-bedroomed home between the present Winifred and Francis Crescents. The northern boundary of his 100-acre property ran from Gardiner's Creek along High Street Road to Summerhill Road, then an imaginary line running due south from that corner down to Gardiner's Creek and then along the creek back to where it met High Street Road.

There is some evidence, although not strong, that the site of his home was where Robert Allen's homestead had stood, certainly it was close to the site of Logie's home after that settler had acquired a portion of Allen's run. Whether Henderson had financially overreached himself is not recorded, sufficient it is that his impressive 6-bedroomed home, together with 15 acres, was offered for sale in 1852 and designated 'Glen Iris'. That name was adopted for the surrounding district (although an early settler's descendant, also related to the Henty pioneers of Portland, has claimed that the name actually proposed was 'Windebank') and, because subsequent owners also owned land on the other side of the creek - designated in the plan on page 5 as the Craigmere Estate between the Railway and Malvern Road - so also did the name cross the creek. Its use became so popular that it was not uncommon to find advertisements for The Glen Iris Estate, The New Glen Iris Estate and the Great Glen Iris Railway Junction Estate.

Many of the lots in the early subdivisions were bought by speculators registering Melbourne Town addresses, however not all were speculators and the first pioneer settlers both lived on and worked their properties, providing as their address either High Street Road or Gardiner's Creek. In the main they were orchardists, dairy farmers or market gardeners, and the address High Street Road even persisted through until nearly 1900. Why did it have that name? Because it was the road to access the High Street which terminated across the creek in the Gardiner Road Board province.

Settlement expanded and within five years of those first Crown sales the larger acreages were being subdivided into numerous smaller separate allotments. Increased settlement brought with it increased usage of the roads, which were really little more than tracks, all of which had developed *ad hoc* as most of the subdivisions had been created with no thought for road access. Not all letters received by the Boroondara Road Board originated from the southern part of Boroondara nevertheless it is some indication of the state of the roads, and the frustration of ratepayers, that in the 1860s over 75 per cent of letters drew attention to either, quote, the dangerous, the deplorable, or the dreadful state of the roads or bridges. The anger of their ratepayers was well understood by the Board members, particularly when having to travel through the dark to their winter meetings.

One dismissive journalist's comment was that the High Street Road consisted of an abattoir at one end, a blacksmith's forge at the other, with a continuation of bog holes in



Fisher's forge and blacksmithing in High Street Road

between. The abattoir would have been Bainbridge's opposite Glen Iris Road and the blacksmith was Edward Fisher close to Warrigal Road. If a traveller wanted to cross Gardiner's Creek with a vehicle, they would usually cross further down the creek from where the bridge was subsequently built - possibly near the present Kerferd Road - because of the more gradual slope when making the approach. The steep slope coming up from the creek also caused the alignment of High Street to be changed enabling wheeled vehicles to be drawn across the slope.

But, with the best will in the world, the Boards did not have sufficient income to solve all their problems. Residents of Gardiner's Creek wanting to travel to Melbourne, often a two-day trip, would normally tackle the Back Creek and W Creek crossings in either Jaencke's (Summerhill) or Downing's (Glen Iris) Roads. They would regularly have to lay logs over the fords which were virtually impassable during the frequent floods, and cut down ti-tree to place into the bogs. They would then take the diagonal Camberwell Road track to access the only ferry across the Yarra River at Denman Road in Hawthorn.

There was an early bridge in place, possibly near where what was designated as York Road, what is known today as Gardiner Parade, but it was probably only suitable for horsemen and very light carriages; albeit, in mid 1861, the Road Board finally decided that a new bridge should be built across Gardiner's Creek in High Street. The Central Road Board agreed to make a significant contribution with Boroondara and Gardiner each meeting their half of the balance. But matters were put on hold for a time until it was decided whether the bridge should be placed at Tooronga Road - Gardiner's preference - or High Street - Boroondara's preference. The bridge was finally opened on Wednesday 18 December 1861.

The occasion of the opening of the bridge was taken as an opportunity to promote and raise funds for the East Boroondara Mechanic's Institute building, intended to be built on part of the Farmer's Common land. A tea meeting was organised for the Friday and the report by the journalist of the South Bourke Standard is a mixture of amusing tongue-in-cheek comment and interesting detail of that ill-fated Mechanics Institute building. The journalist reports that the function was attended by a large gathering from all over the district and "with the exception that beverage not being particularly strong, everything was in first-rate order." With what appears to be a rather flippantly dismissive reference to that longed for bridge the journalist then comments, "After tea we inspected the new bridge, and it seemed a very creditable piece of work".

Even so, with a bridge finally in place, not all was beer and skittles. The Road Board did carry out some limited gravelling of High Street Road throughout 1861 and 1862, and formed and metalled it in 1864, but it was the flood plain of Gardiner's Creek that provided the continuing headache. It was dotted with the stumps of the trees which had been cut down. On at least one occasion Boroondara asked the Gardiner Board to remove at least four or five stumps in somewhat acrimonious terms - and if the wheels weren't damaged when striking one of these, the drays often sank up to their axles in the mud during winter periods.

In fact, although Boroondara seldom seemed to be at odds with its neighbour Mulgrave, relationships with Gardiner Road Board were often ruffled and exchanges were frequently irascible. These were not assisted when under the Common Act of 1860 reserves were established which gave local farmers the right of common pasture. Boroondara asked the Surveyor-General to furnish a list of such waste lands along Gardiner's Creek as would be suitable for a Farmer's Common. The Government responded by establishing a 98-acre reserve embracing Lot 204 in the Parish of Prahran and Lot 136A in Boroondara. This provoked a huge outcry from Gardiner Road Board claiming that the land was their territory. There seems to have been little justification for their protests, the border of the reserve in each Parish was along High Street, then in Boroondara following Glen Iris Road to Kerferd Road, down Kerferd Road and then along an imaginary line extending to Malvern Road and back to the corner of High Street. So the majority of the land in Gardiner's domain was flood plain with the majority of arable or grazing land excised from Boroondara.

High Street Road residents had a different problem with that reserve. A memorial (petition) was sent to the Public Works Department stating that the water hole in Gardiner's Creek was the only source of water for domestic use for miles around and raising objections to its use also by stock. They reported that cattle constantly now either wandered into it or were driven there to drink making it unfit for domestic use. On at least one occasion two cows drowned and their bodies remained in the water for several days. The residents obviously had rather short memories because at the time of settlement it was access to this water hole and to the Nursery Pond for both their stock and for domestic use which had led to the High Street Road track. The request was for a fence to be erected. But little appears to have eventuated other than for the Department issuing an order, which would have added further grist to the mill, telling Gardiner Road Board to cease removing stone from the quarry - this was presumably the small quarry on the corner of High Street and Muswell Hill near the water hole. From 1866 no licence was ever again issued for stone to be removed from there by anyone.

The ratepayers of both Kew and Hawthorn had now held successful referendums seeking to cede from Boroondara and each had now gone their separate ways. 1861 was the first year of the newly constituted Shire. Robert Kent¹ of Albion Road was chairman together with Geo Dowling and Thomas Robinson, all three living in and representing Glen Iris. The Shire was not yet divided into wards or ridings and what became designated as the South Ward, spreading from Gardiner's Creek to Riversdale Road with Burke Road and Boundary Road the side boundaries, was not created until 1888.

By 1873 some of Hawthorn's ratepayers were apparently unhappy at the way matters had evolved for their city following the referendum for independence. They reportedly made representations to the 1873 Royal Commission 'appointed to inquire into and report upon the desirability of making amendments in the Boroughs and Shires Statutes and Road Districts Act' requesting reunification with Boroondara but without success.

The fact that most of the damage to roads was caused by travellers passing through their district, not by their ratepayers, gradually became resented by most Road Boards and particularly by the burghers of the Gardiner Road Board. There was finally a glimmer of opportunity on the horizon when, in February 1853, the government passed: 'An Act for Making and Improving Roads in the Colony of Victoria' under which District Road Boards were empowered to levy tolls on designated roads after providing a month's public notice..

Although anxious, almost desperate, to seek relief from the financial burden of maintaining their roads, lamentably the Gardiner Road Board didn't even have enough funds to enable them to erect a toll booth. More than a decade passed until in 1864 it finally held a special meeting and made an order for 'levying tolls' deciding to erect a toll house at, or near, both Scotchman's Creek Road and the bridge over Gardiner's Creek leading from High Street to Boroondara. The position of toll keeper, or turnpike keeper, was let by tender, however, over time, the constant challenge to extract the toll, the abuse suffered from travellers, and the interruptions to sleep, meant that very seldom did the keeper renew his tender. The sometimes negligible income from the tolls was shared, although not equally, by the two Boards.

If dodging the floods, the tree stumps or the bog holes had been a problem, a new game



A typical toll gate c. 1860

¹ Robert Kent's biography is recorded in the Australian Dictionary of Biography.

now entered the challenge of crossing the plain, how to avoid paying the tolls! The market gardeners had to make their journey to Melbourne's markets during the night, and they would either try to drive around the toll gate, which sometimes resulted in becoming bogged, or would have to waste time trying to waken the toll keeper who would often be deep in an alcoholic induced sleep. Another favoured trick was for several travellers to approach at the same time with one distracting the toll keeper while making the payment while the others slipped through or went around. Horseback riders would often just gallop through, ignoring the angry shouts of the keeper, and it became quite impossible for the keeper to physically halt a team of bullocks being urged forward under the lash of their teamster.

Although it was believed that the revenue from a toll gate would solve all the problems of maintaining the conditions of the tracks, continuing complaints from Boroondara residents at the burden of paying the tax finally prompted Gardiner Road Board to raise with Boroondara the possibility of relocating the Gardiner's Creek gate. Discussions with Mulgrave resulted in the relocation of the toll gate to near the Australian Hotel on Boundary Road. However it was agreed that there would be no change to the manner of distributing the toll revenue - Gardiner received 9/3 in the pound, Boroondara 6/9^{5/8} and Mulgrave 3/11^{3/8}.

Continuing anger amongst ratepayers finally came to a head when, in an unexpected and decisive move in 1877, on an occasion when the Assembly was poorly attended, the tolls were finally abandoned, however the question continued to be a vexed one. In 1881 a meeting of municipalities was convened at the Melbourne Town Hall to consider the question of reimposing tolls. Boroondara's response was 'While in favour of re-establishing tolls it declines to send a delegate in the belief that no good will result from any conference on the subject'. The site of the Mulgrave toll gate is currently marked by a plaque near the Woolworths Supermarket.

Tollgates were not the only item on the ratepayer's minds, for some time the expanding numbers of settlers along High Street Road had become concerned, firstly at their lack of a church in which to discharge their obligatory Sunday devotions, but also at the lack of any facility for the education of their children. There was that Farmer's Common reserve near the corner of Glen Iris Road and High Street Road where they decided to hold a public meeting in 1862. The meeting was chaired by the Honourable Alex Fraser (of Wesley College fame) in place of the Wesleyan minister who was scheduled for that role, but who ironically lost his way while trying to cross the Gardiner's Creek flood plain.



Former Glen Iris Road Wesleyan Chapel

The noted church architects Crouch and Wilson were commissioned to prepare plans and in January 1865 tenders were called for the construction of the chapel. When it opened for business towards the end of that year, the settlers used the building to also establish a Rural school.¹ The student's names appearing on those early rolls record the names of many of those early settlers. With a commendable demonstration of faith and enthusiasm they rallied around and made the first application for a government school. There were now some 25 families living along High Street Road and, despite only recording 46 enrolments, the application claimed that some 400 could be expected. The claim was so patently absurd that it was rejected out of hand. However, within a few years, by 1872 the enrolments at the Rural school had expanded to such

¹ The history of this chapel, of the Glen Iris School and of its adjoining illfated Mechanics Institute can be read in manuscripts by Gwen McWilliams and by Neville Lee held in the Local History collections at the City of Boroondara libraries.

an extent that the government finally agreed to fund a State School, and so State School No. 1148 was established.

Allen's choice of the site off Albion Road near Francis Crescent for his first homestead, and continued by both Logie and Henderson, was clearly determined by the proximity for his stock during times of drought to what became known as the Nursery Pond¹. Access to a reliable water supply was essential for all those early settlers. Throughout the history of Ashburton and of Glen Iris the name of Stocks proliferated. There were a number living either on Boundary Road or on High Street Road, and Stocks Avenue, Ashburton derives its name from that family's retail dairy that operated there through until the 1960s. Department of Lands' plans of 1874 show one of the Stocks' family holding grazing rites over all the land from Glen Iris Road to Summerhill Road between High Street Road and W (or Back) Creek, the creek providing that essential access to water.

Baker Parade also recalls the dairy herd of the Baker family which grazed on the pastures now titled Liston and Pascoe Streets. The many verdant recreational areas scattered throughout Boroondara are all that remains of the barrelled and reclaimed spiderweb of creeks that were tributaries of Gardiner's Creek or, to the north, the Yarra that watered the settlers' stock. All these settlers were farmers, market gardeners or orchardists, and although there were many vineyards in the north of Boroondara there is a record of only one in the south. This was Foy's, with the address of Bickley Vale, present day Bickley Court, but with his vines on the south side of the Creek running up the sunny slopes to High Street.

Despite Hawthorn ratepayers making representations to the Royal Commission to rejoin Boroondara, in August 1874 the High Street Road resident and Boroondara Shire councillor, Thomas Robinson, adopted the opposite strategy. At the time Robinson was occupying some 25 acres and in a surprising act of disloyalty, he was able to persuade the Gardiner Board that it was 'almost the unanimous wish of the Boroondara residents living on the north side of Gardiner's Creek, to become ratepayers to the Gardiner Shire'. The Gardiner councillors approved of the annexation, however added certain conditions, and placed the question before the Boroondara ratepayers. It was rejected out of hand by the ratepayers and the matter lapsed. Whether the fact that both Gardiner and Boroondara had been elevated to Shirehood only three years previously had any bearing on these disparate actions can only be speculated upon. However it is interesting to note that a similar proposition was recommended during the Kennett government's review of municipal boundaries in 1996 although again not adopted. That was not the end of the matter for Robinson, the following year he sold up in High Street Road, bought 4 acres in Elizabeth Street, Malvern and became a member of the Malvern Shire Council, serving from 1885 to 1895.

1890s

For the first time we find a reference to retail activity in High Street, Ashburton where the shopping precinct now exists. William Gallus has been recorded as a market gardener since 1873 and his wife, Paulina, opened a store, presumably selling produce from her husband's market garden, surprisingly in Fakenham Road. However there is some evidence that Fakenham Road was a popular alternative route other than the High Street Road. On reaching Gardiner's Creek at the end of High Street in Gardiner Road Board, the traveller was confronted with the steep rise to the Ashburton plateau created by the creek's flood plain. Heavy vehicles would take a diagonal route to the right and follow the High Street Road track, essentially the path of today's High Street. A shorter alternative was to skirt around the water hole and take the track which later became Kerferd Road, then travel parallel to the High Street Road, reaching Boundary Road via the track which became Ashburton and Fakenham Roads. This route was generally favoured by horsemen and light carriages. Paulina Gallus ran her store through until the 1920s, but by

¹ This waterhole provided certainty of a supply of water. The Shire of Malvern, subsequently City of Malvern, established their municipal nursery on its banks. The main nursery has been relocated but the name persists for the waterhole.

then having a Warrigal Road address.

The first and only store listed on High Street, still recorded as being in Burwood, was next to the railway station, with John Lee as the storekeeper. It appeared in 1892 but became vacant and finally disappeared in 1899. Until 1872 Fakenham Road had been named Cope's Road - Cope was both a local Member of Parliament and a member of the Road Board despite living in Abbotsford - and it ran from Summerhill Road to Boundary Road. When the Outer Circle railway embankment was built, it blocked the road, so to avoid confusion the western half was renamed Aitchison Road. At the same time council decided to rename Jaencke's Road as Summerhill Road and Downing's Road became Glen Iris Road. That June 1872 renaming of some roads was part of the decision by the Shire to provide a degree of certainty to the voter's roll by naming all of its streets. But it wasn't until 1908 that council decided to adopt a numbering system for the houses and let a contract, leaving it to the contractor to decide on the numbers and to manufacture metal numbers and fix them accordingly.

The Outer Circle railway had first been advocated in 1867 by a group known as the Upper Yarra Railway League who suggested that the Gippsland Railway could be brought into Melbourne via the outer suburbs. Construction of the Gippsland line was finally authorised in 1873. The next phase of agitation for the Outer Circle line, where the line would actually be located, was driven by politics and land speculators. Not surprisingly in what appears to have been the standards of political honesty of the times, by 1885 two parliamentarians who helped approve the line, F. E. Beaver and James Munro (Munro Ave, Ashburton), had purchased much of the land adjoining the proposed new railway. Construction commenced in 1888 and was finally completed by 1891. The portion of the Outer Circle which is relevant to this story connected Camberwell station with Oakleigh Station to the south, passing through Ashburton, crossing the Gardiner's Creek flood plain over an embankment and a 120-yard timber bridge, and opened on 24 March 1890. The timber in the bridge and its trestles, which had been heavily coated with bitumen as a preservative, became a landmark and the bridge was referred to, until it was sold and the timber reclaimed in the early years of the Second World War, as 'the black



Outer Circle 'black bridge' over Gardiner's Creek 1890-1940

bridge’.

The line never carried Gippsland passenger traffic, although it was used by Australian Paper Manufacturers to transport logs from the Gippsland forests to their mill in Alphington. The line was further compromised as the economic depression of the early 1890s saw home building in the area cease. But investors, still in the grip of the land boom fever of the 1880s, before the financial crash, believed in the promise of things to come and the banking community jostled to buy sites adjacent to the planned station. And, as testament to John Gardiner’s successful promotion of a lifestyle of temperance, a site was purchased to establish a coffee palace, still owned, but never proceeded with, well into the 1920s.

104 LOVELY VILLA SITES 104

Ashburton
Terminus Estate
NEAR CORNER HIGH ST. and BOUNDARY ROAD
Just thrown open for Subdivision
SAT., 8th MARCH, 1924

Remarkable
Easy Terms
£5
Deposit

Balance
£1
per Month

You have only to inspect
to find it is just what you
have been looking for . . .

J. S. BARTROP & SON
Auctioneer and Sworn Valuator
EQUITABLE BUILDING, MELBOURNE

and at Camberwell, Balwyn,
Marrubidge, Black Rock
and Ballarat.

Real Estate Agent's licence?

Note the reference in 1924 to the tram to Warrigal Rd.

Lack of passengers led to service cuts, with the Ashburton to Oakleigh section closed on 9 December 1895, and the section from Camberwell to Ashburton closed on 1 May 1897. However within twelve months that section was reopened and operated by a steam locomotive with a single carriage, allegedly known locally as the *Deepdene Dasher* (although many locals recall it being called the *Ashy Dasher*), running between Ashburton and Deepdene at about 90 minute intervals. Although the Railway Commissioners in 1923 decided not to electrify the line to Ashburton due to insufficient traffic levels, their position was soon reversed, with the last steam train running on 29 October 1924 and electric trains commencing three days later. This was the last passenger steam train operating in suburban Melbourne although steam trains continued to use the line to draw trucks loaded with briquettes from Yallourn to the depots at Camberwell and Burwood until the 1970s.

But not everyone viewed the new rail line through rose tinted glasses, nor were they excited by the prospect of new developments, with a *Boroondara Standard* journalist¹ claiming that although the line travelled through some beautiful scenery, it passed around a number of suburbs, but never going close enough to be of any use.

But it wasn't just the railway line that caused residents to become hot under the collar, for the *Argus* reported in November 1911, a *meeting of those interested in the movement for a tramway extension from Glen Iris, along High-street to Boundary Road, Ashburton, was held at Councillor Jordan's residence on Friday evening. The meeting formed themselves into a league, to be called the Ashburton and Waverley Tramway League. A public meeting was scheduled to be held the following Friday at Glen Iris, and another one on the following Wednesday at Waverley.*

Further support for the tramway was obtained when a number of leading residents undertook to guarantee £1,400 against any possible loss on the operation of the tram for three years.² All to no avail, but numerous similar reports have appeared since then, claiming that the extension was imminent, including lyrical promotions by estate agents, although, on one occasion when Camberwell Council was asked to make a financial contribution to public transport, one councillor emotionally claimed that he would oppose it to the death; and there was a surprising claim by current politicians, in advance of the 2014 State election, that the tram will finally be extended.

¹ *Boroondara Standard* 27/03/1891

² *Box Hill Reporter* 02/02/1912

And now the first reference to the name Ashburton occurs with the naming of the railway station. There is some suggestion that Edward Stocks, living on Boundary East Road, occasionally used the address 'Ashburton' because the ship on which the family had arrived in Melbourne in 1850 was the 'Lord Ashburton'. Other sources name the stormy petrel Councillor Dillon¹, a long-term resident of Summerhill Road, as suggesting Ashburton as the name for the new railway station, after 'a beautiful site overlooking the City of Cork, Ireland', whereas others claim another long term resident Councillor Vears suggested the name after a town in Devon, England.

This argument was surely resolved when the retired Town Clerk R.W.Smellie 1893-1933 unquestioningly recalled that it was Dillon's suggestion. But one thing is certain, from Gardiner's Creek to the Outer Circle Railway was still Glen Iris and from there to Boundary Road was Burwood. This persisted well into the 1920s until in 1923, from Summerhill Road to Warrigal Road was given the postal district title of Ashburton, and the southern part of Glen Iris below Dent Street was changed to Ashburton South. Under Melbourne's unique letter and numbering system all was given the postal district designation of SE11 until 1967 when it became 3147.

But whether it was called Ashburton or Glen Iris the area still had a rural charm and the new railway brought many visitors and picnickers. Many schools and church groups held their annual picnics in Ashburton Forest. In the days when newspapers even reported on the activities of Sunday School groups, Melbourne's Argus newspaper reported on New Year's Day 1902, the visit of a Yarraville Sunday school: "*About 400 adults and children were conveyed by special train, which left Yarraville at 8.45 a.m. for the place selected for the picnic which is situated on*



Ashburton forest

A cricket match in progress in the paddock on the corner of High Street and Albion Road

the outer circle railway and proved to be an ideal picnic ground, being well sheltered and surrounded by very pretty scenery, and afforded a pleasant change after visiting Werribee for so many years. Swings, games, races, etc., were provided for the children and on arrival at the Park they at once settled down to thoroughly enjoy themselves Shortly after 2 o'clock rain began to descend and a rush was made for the tent, which was handily spacious enough for such a large company. As many as possible were accommodated and spent the remainder of the day in singing, reciting, etc. The evening meal was served to the children in the tent under great difficulties, after which a start was made for home, which was reached by 9 p.m."

Likewise, in November 1909, Sunday school students from Footscray also made the journey; "*On King's Birthday the teachers and scholars of St. John's Sunday School journeyed by rail to Ashburton for their annual picnic, arriving at the rendezvous at 10 a.m. The picnic ground lies handy to the station and it was not too long before the children found the swings, whilst others ran in races for prizes of a good quality. After lunch the children wandered to the creeks and gullies in search of fern, coming back in time to partake of the appetising tea, after which the happy and contented picnickers could be seen wending their way to catch the train which left*

¹ Dillon was frequently described as a 'stormy petrel', within 9 days of his election in 1867 he was 'solely censured' by the Board for distributing allegations against the engineer and certain Board members that, 'at which time he published the statement knew it was untrue'. Dillon was defeated in 1873 but was back again in 1875.

at 7.15 and arrived at Footscray at 9 p.m.

It wasn't just the picnickers, the sportspersons and the nature lovers who visited Ashburton's forest and fields, it also attracted the presence of the Melbourne Hunt Club. In 1897 it held its opening hunts for the season from the Ranfurlie¹ mansion in East Malvern. A report of the first hunt refers to, '*...the hounds taking off at a sharp trot towards the bridge over Gardiner's Creek where the water lay deep on the low lying lands*². *The hunt crossed Glen Iris Road where they wheeled to cross High Street and continued across the Outer Circle Railway.*' That event ended in a field in Oakleigh.

The report of another hunt records, '*There was great difficulty experienced by the majority in negotiating the first fence, a three- railer at the corner of Burke and Wattletree roads Going through Mr. J.M.Davies's*³ *paddocks, those who had been successful at the first fence met with two of the stiffest jumps encountered during the run, but all emerged safely into the Malvern- road. Jumping into Mr. Turners's*⁴ *paddock the hounds crossed the Glen Iris railway, and a formidable double there had the effect of reducing the number of straight- goers considerably. Reaching the top of a hill the master ordered a check, a move much appreciated by both horses and riders, who had done great things in the way of jumping since starting. Off again, this time with a select field, the hounds led the way across the Twickenham Estate (note this Estate in plan on page 5) out on to High-street, close to the Ashburton station, around the back of which the Outer Circle double was taken, and then the hounds passed through Mrs. Hunt's property, and skirting around the Sherwood Park*⁵ *course across the Boundary Rd and finished close to the township of Burwood*'.

That might sound rather blood thirsty but the hunters obviously didn't have much of an effect on the fox numbers because Gardiner's Creek is described as having the highest density of foxes in the State - not that surprising when the fox population in the metropolitan area is more than twice that in the regions.

It was still just the beginning of the new century but cars were already beginning to make their mark with their attendant problems. In September 1904 Council passed a resolution restricting the speed of cars and requiring them to have a registration plate fixed on both the front and rear of the vehicle, both of which had to be lit at night. In an interesting prescient move, in a motion which was lost, Councillor Beckett moved for the car drivers also to be registered.

1920s

The whole of Camberwell was brightening up when in 1913 the Council rejected the concept of using gas and entered into a contract for the lighting of the streets with electric light. After the First World War had ended in 1918, veterans returning from that terrible event commenced building their homes on the subdivided slopes either just north or south of High Street.

Many would have read of comedian Barry Humphries' father who built a number of the fine homes in the Golf Links Estate off Camberwell Road, but few could quote Clarence Gladstone Ward. Clarence owned the subdivision named 'Ashburton Heights'. In a departure from what was the customary practice, all the roads on that estate, Highgate, Lexia, Ward and Dent, were built of concrete. Ward then commenced building houses, all built of brick and all with six rooms. In a further sign of the times, for the first time the houses included a garage for the family car. He built twelve houses in Highgate Grove, seven in Munro Avenue, and three in Ward Street. He also built five of the shops in High Street and several other homes on the other side of High Street.

His faith in the future of the Ashburton shopping precinct was not misplaced even though

¹Ranfurlie' is today's Korowa Anglican Girls' School

²Contemporary reports refer to Gardiner's Creek being impassable from the Yarra River to Oakleigh during floods.

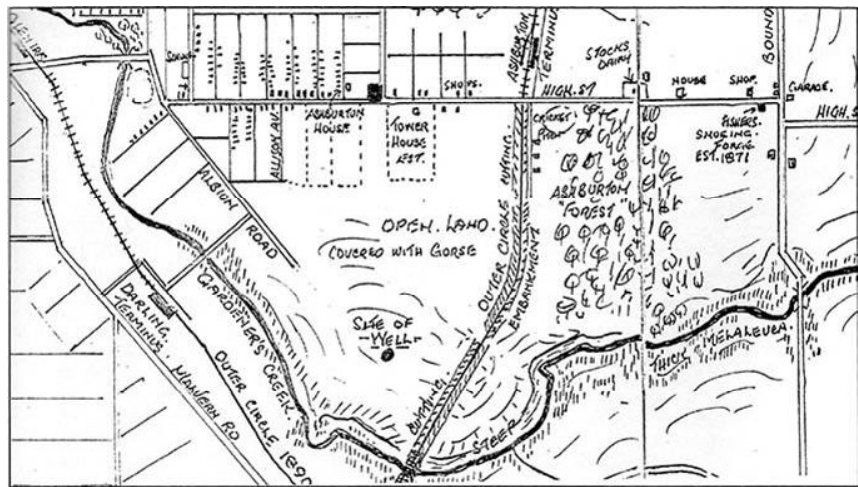
³Mr John M Davies' home was the mansion 'Valentines', today's Malvern campus of Caulfield Grammar School.

⁴John C Turner, solicitor, who owned 'Glen Iris' for some years from 1878.

⁵Sherwood Park was a racecourse in Boundary Road which seems to have hosted meetings only very occasionally.

the side streets between Johnson Street - which later had a T added to it to become Johnston - and Y Streets had been downgraded, perhaps by republican sentiments in the Council, from King and Queen Streets to Duke and Marquis Streets. The centre hosted only one estate agent and a store keeper, although up near Boundary Road were still the long-time residents, Buckland with his store and woodyard, Gallus the dairy farmer and Fisher's shoeing forge and blacksmithing.

Down by the creek, in what is generally known these days as the Solway Hill, the farmer was being moved aside to be replaced by the suburbanite. Although there had been a narrow timber bridge at Winton Road for some years, presumably enabling access to the short-lived Darling East railway station located on the Outer Circle line where it joined the Waverley line, in July 1910



Ashburton forest
including features on High Street and Solway

the owners of the abutting subdivision made application to the Road Board for the construction of a bridge to enable access to the Darling Station. This resulted in the construction of the timber bridge at Dunlop Street, replaced by a more substantial concrete one in 1925 and rebuilt again in 2015. Some interesting, though not completely understood, activities now occurred there. Club rooms for a golf course were built on St Georges Cres in 1915, but the proposed golf club failed to materialise. In 1922 a subdivision plan was lodged of the land from St Georges Crescent to the creek termed the Waverley Golf Links estate, although the present Waverley Golf Club denies any connection with that plan. A 30-foot deep well appears on a number of plans of the era which has been claimed to be near Karnak Road although, from resident's comments, who quote remnants of the well in their front garden, Nicholas Street is the more accurate location.

Ashburton Forest continued to attract its enthusiastic visitors with this typical report appearing in 1924 of a group of native orchid lovers, *'Striking north east from the Dandenong Road, a 2 mile walk brought us to the Ashburton Forest.'* There follows a rather gloomy description of how the forest had deteriorated due to human activity over recent years, nevertheless finishes on the cheerful note that they had found, *'four greenhoods, the Nodding, Trim, Blunt and Maroon Hood with a fifth secured at Mount Waverley.'* Further grist was added to the mill in a letter to the editor in 1925 from an anonymous 'Tree Lover' bemoaning the failure of the Malvern Council to purchase the land on account of the high price demanded, and claiming that it would have become *'one of the most popular reserves around Melbourne on the extension of the High Street tram to Ashburton.'* It must have been offered for sale to Camberwell Council also as their records include an entry that Mr Mahoney's offer was rejected.

Although maps record the 100+ acres of land on the south side of High Street as being owned by Mornane, council records refer to it as Mahoney's Paddock. However it is fairly certain that it was owned by Mornane, and after the two councils rejected its purchase, the narrow curved portion from High Street to the creek, next to the Outer Circle line and now covering Ashburn Grove,¹ was separated and transferred to the name of Malpas. Having rejected the purchase of the land on the south side, Camberwell Council in the 1920s bought land on the corner of High Street and Vears Road, known locally as the Gumtree Forest, and by 1932 had established the Ashburton Park.

¹ Ashburn Grove was an extensive dead end street, terminating at Gardiner's Creek, until 1960 when negotiations with the Victorian Railways enabled the road to cross the old Outer Circle route and join with Ryburne Avenue.

The owner of the Ashburton Forest land, on the south side stretching from High Street down to Gardiner's Creek, from Ashburn Grove to the Ryland family's property, anonymously offered to donate to the St Michael's Catholic parish as much as was needed to establish a church. The parish priest gratefully accepted the offer and their church was built in 1932. However the benefactor was then faced with the challenge of deriving some income from what remained and decided to open a 9 hole golf course.

It was a modest, quiet little course, its greens a bit rough and ready, but it gave those who played there a pleasant feeling of being out in the country and of being out of sight if one made too many errors. The entrance was alongside St Michael's with a small shed to house the employee and to act as a club house. Near the shed were the green for the 1st hole and the tee for the 2nd hole, both fairways running north and south, as also did the fairways for holes 3 and 9. Both 8 and 9 were short par 3s. The fairways for both numbers 4 and 5 ran cross wise and either went up or down the hill. 6 ran down towards the creek and was often rather swampy with 7 coming straight back up the hill towards the tee for 8.

If avoiding paying the tolls was the challenge for an earlier generation, the current generation developed numerous ways to avoid paying the golf course fees. Climbing a fence and playing the lower fairways was popular as well as entering the course when the caretaker was known not to be on duty. The golf course continued throughout the 1930s until the land was acquired by the Housing Commission in the 1940s.

Although estates like the Great Glen Iris Railway Junction Estate were created in the 1890s, little housing was erected until the estate's reopening in 1923. And then, as the vacant blocks of land began to fill up with homes and their families, a sense of community began to emerge. On the corner of Johnston Street in 1927 the Progress Association opened the Ashburton Hall which hosted a variety of community activities including meetings of their Association, of the Rechabites, the Plymouth Brethren and the Red Cross. In the true spirit of ecumenicism, the St Michael's Catholics would first hold their Mass there - until their church was opened in 1932 - and then vacate in time for the Presbyterians to meet. During the 1940s the hall was condemned by the Health Department but it was renovated and then operated for some years as the local picture theatre - very popular in those pre-TV days - until being replaced by the iconic Civic theatre, then a Shell service station, now a Coles Mini Mart. It was this Progress Association that gave birth to Progress Press, the lifetime success story for ex-Herald journalist Charles Holloway and his partner Charles Pearson who, until the paper was launched, had been a gas meter reader. Progress Press was ultimately acquired by News Corporation and continues to be published as Progress Leader.

Education again came into prominence with Ashburton Primary school opening in 1926, although it was not until the 1940s that we find St Michael's Catholic and the Solway and Alamein Primary schools welcoming their students. There were a couple of playgroups but no kindergartens appeared until the 1960s when local fund raising resulted in Estrella Preschool Centre being established on Watson's Park. The community's religious needs were being catered for by both the Catholics and the Pressies at the Johnston Street hall and in 1934 the Ashburton Baptists staked their claim opposite that triangle of land in the unusual configuration of Y Street. The Methodists commenced meeting at the Ashburton Primary School in 1929 and opened their church in 1935. St Matthew's Anglican welcomed its first parishioners in 1952 and the same decade produced the Salvation Army Citadel in Meaden Street and the Church of Christ in St Georges Crescent. The triangular piece of High Street where it met High Street Road, with St Matthew's fronting Warrigal Road and the Presbyterian church at the High Street Road junction, became locally known as 'Holy Island'.

But the ratepayers were still occasionally grumbling, as witness this letter to the editor: *'Ashburton, May 13 1935 Sir, Ratepayers would be pleased if their representatives in the Camberwell Council would indulge in a little self-examination regarding their inactivity or inability*

to deal with the numerous requests that have been made for improved facilities in the Ashburton district. The rat infested, unsightly, and unhealthy open drains adjacent to the railway station are a disgrace to the municipality, a reflection on those who manage its concerns, and a menace to the community. Chalyer street, described by one councillor as the worst street in the municipality, and known locally as Gunn's Gully, is in a deplorable condition. Although this matter has been discussed by the council on numerous occasions, and an inspection of the area has been made by a number of councillors, as yet no finality has been reached.'

Whether they were a Road Board, a Shire, or a City, the roads continued to provide scope for complaint and criticism. The Citizen carried a report which echoed the 1860s critical journalist's comment when it described High Street '*as a continuation of bog holes*'¹.

1950s

As other parts of Camberwell were built over between the wars, Ashburton remained largely a hilly green expanse of dairy farms and orchard trees, with just the occasional cars and carts using High Street to access Glen Iris station and the tram terminus. The Ashburton shopping strip was surveyed in the 1920s with the resulting map showing a few rows of bungalows and Mediterranean villas filling in the slopes from High Street and its burgeoning shopping strip, the legacy of Ward's excellent planning. The diminutive but somewhat infrequent 'Ashy Dasher' train brought commuters to and from Ashburton station.

At the end of the Second World War, the government was faced with the challenge of housing the returning war veterans. The Housing Commission was presented with the task of catering for the needs of some hundreds of families. Port Melbourne, with 374 homes, had been a successful group housing scheme in the 1930s and the open fields of Ashburton and Ashwood were identified as the site for a massive Housing Commission estate. The Holmsglen Munitions Factory, which bordered Gardiner's Creek, now with the war almost ended, was no longer producing munitions so in March 1945 was converted to the production of 962 concrete houses not all of which were destined for the Ashburton estate². By mid-1950, much of the Ashburton Housing Estate had been completed, a combination of brick houses and single-storied concrete, with walk-up blocks of flats. It is hard to understand why they didn't look at the lands to the west of Footscray which was so much closer to the western suburbs' industrial employment opportunities, perhaps it was a political decision to alter the socioeconomic mix of the south-eastern suburbs.

There is a publication in the Boroondara Library titled *The Alameiners*. The stories in this book portray the sadness and loneliness of those residents who had been removed from their social roots, relocated on the opposite side of Melbourne, removed from the close association of family and friends. But it does highlight the genuine source of any community's life blood by recording the emergence of volunteers - people who got on with their lives and worked to improve their local environment, such as Mother's Clubs, school and kindergarten committees, youth groups and the like. Residents were typically families of ex-servicemen from inner suburbs or else European immigrants previously housed in the neighbouring Holmsglen Migrant Hostel.

But not all Second World War veterans relied on government housing and the still vacant, although long ago subdivided fields of Ashburton's Solway Hill, became prime targets for many newly weds. Although subdivided it was still without any drains having been installed nor the streets formed nor paved. This was the period headlined by the popular press as the so called Heartbreak Streets. Camberwell was no different to any of the other municipalities with miles of muddy tracks and, with limited access to finance, with no way of solving the problems in their foreseeable future. In a report to Council in 1957, the City Engineer estimated that under existing Council policies and procedures, it would be twenty years before the last road and footpath

¹ (Hawthorn) Citizen 02/05/1925.

² Of the 930 homes erected on the 180 acres of Commission property, 160 were of brick or brick veneer and 770 concrete.

could be laid in Camberwell.

That report stirred the Council into drastic action. Engineering staff were greatly increased and in a departure from previous policies, outside consultants were employed, to draw up the plans and legal documentation which would enable drainage, and then construction schemes, to be adopted. Council also decided on a dramatically new, unpublicised, possibly questionable, and undoubtedly controversial, policy for road financing. One aspect of that policy was to settle the drainage schemes - that becomes the first phase of road construction - many months before intended commencement. Many ratepayers would pay their estimated contribution in full immediately upon receipt of their notices from the council, using low interest rate War Service loans in place of relying on the more expensive council finance. This pump primed the construction and council would often withhold payments to the contractors, for anything up to three months, providing the finance for further schemes. Unprincipled? Maybe, but it worked. In 1963 the City Engineer proudly announced the completion of the last drainage and road construction scheme - the twenty-year forecast had been reduced to six!

The maintenance and reconstruction of major streets since the early days of settlement had been a constant irritant. Roads had never been constructed to cope with the heavy loads carried by the new breed of carrier's and industrial trucks after the First World War. By the 1950s due to the constraints of the Depression and the Second World War years, most main roads had fallen into almost terminal disrepair. Inner city councils carried out only urgent maintenance works and even then grudgingly. They presented that same old argument that "through" traffic originated from outside their municipality. The body responsible for the construction and maintenance of main roads had become the Country Roads Board (CRB). However, despite the majority of funds being raised from the metropolitan area, the CRB's legislative charter, as its name implies, restricted it to country roads. The boundary of its responsibility to the east of the metropolitan area was Warrigal Road - Ashburton's eastern boundary.

A breakthrough was achieved when Toorak Road was due for reconstruction. The work included both sides of Warrigal Road and the absurdity of Camberwell engineers planning and supervising - and ratepayers having to fund - the work up to Warrigal Road, and the CRB funding and controlling the remainder was obvious. Camberwell vigorously and persuasively made representations to the State Government pointing this out. The argument was accepted and the CRB's subsequent total contribution to that project established a new principle. It wasn't long before its name was changed to Department of Main Roads and its responsibilities followed suit.

The Housing Commission development brought mushrooming new business to the Ashburton shopping strip, and the shopping centre was substantially rebuilt after 1950. The Progress Hall had become the Civic theatre and the shops were occupied by traders with names that were the familiar owners or tenants in major centres throughout Melbourne, some remained for many years. Scattered amongst the smaller shops on the



Ashburton shopping strip 1970

north side there was an S. E. Dickens supermarket, G. J. Coles (nothing over 2/6d), McCauslands pharmacy, Moran & Cato, Snows Men's Wear, Commonwealth Bank, E S & A Bank, Gael Christina (most women would remember that shop), two hardware stores - Williams and Richards, Block's licensed grocery, ANZ Bank, H. Pugh & sons, and the Progress Press office. On the opposite side O'Grady the butcher (doubling on Saturdays as a Starting Price bookmaker!), Crooks National Stores, a State Savings Bank, Lou Cookson's (termed a self service food centre) and the last small shop before the railway - E & S Trading, which was none other than Bob Sinclair's tentative but hugely successful challenge to the big electrical goods stores.

Prior to the restrictions imposed by the onset of the Second World War, a Friday night's shopping trip was a regular family activity. In those days, convenience stores had to be divided into two with one half able to be locked against illegal trading after hours or with weekend customers. Confectionery, milk shakes and the like could be sold in the other half. There was nothing new in that restriction on trading, the son of Mr Rix (Rix Street, Glen Iris) owned a large violet farm which he would open on a Sunday for anyone wishing to pick violets. People were charged 1/- (although another report says 6d.) for the right to pick as many as they wished. This practice was stopped by the authorities on the score that it constituted Sunday trading.

As rationing and the many other wartime restrictions began to be eased, there were many grumbles and attempts to remove the restrictions on trading hours, however these moves were strenuously opposed by the Trade's Union Movement. In another feather in the cap, Ashburton shopping centre housed the first American style supermarket within the City of Boroondara. A small supermarket, on the site that is now occupied by the ANZ Bank, was opened and owned by American-born Lou and Madge Cookson. Lou was president of the Chamber of Commerce and became a passionate advocate for unrestricted trading hours, - particularly on Friday nights. In 1960 he announced publicly that he was intending to remain open the following Friday night, and threw down the gauntlet to the Government of the day to prosecute him. His defiance received extensive media coverage, and Saturday morning's *Sun* newspaper had a picture on its front page of Lou Cookson being 'booked' by Department of Labour inspectors.

His challenge brought no immediate result other than a fine, but it was the first of many such actions that were triggered. The most publicised of these was that of the Hawthorn Road, Caulfield hardware merchant, Frank Penhalluriack, who was jailed for 19 days for trading on a Sunday. This caused such widespread community outrage, not just at the severity of the penalty, but the absurdity of closing hardware stores at a time when so many do-it-yourself home owners would be in need of their products, that ultimately it led to the Kennett government legislating in the 1990s for today's *laissez faire* trading hours.

Then came the most challenging event for the owners and shop keepers of Ashburton: - the opening of the Chadstone Centre. Significant changes were occurring in both community life and its habits, many of them associated with the proliferation of car ownership. Deliveries by shopkeepers declined. No longer were shoppers walking to their local shops, because most of them enjoyed the luxury of driving, and this necessitated facilities for them to park their cars. It was the construction of Victoria's first shopping centre right on Camberwell's southern boundary that not only wrought a permanent change to shopping practices, but highlighted the social challenge, and enabled council to promote the unusual and seldom used proposal of Separate Rating to the owners of commercial properties. Council would buy the land, with the costs being met by a Rate imposed on benefiting commercial properties, and then develop it for off-street parking. This could only be done under petition from the property owners.

The Camberwell Junction owners and their tenants were the first group to petition for a Separate Rate. That project involved close to \$10,000,000 in 2016's dollar terms but the benefits were obvious and the Ashburton property owners, and through their rents, the tenants, were quick to follow. This has undoubtedly maintained Ashburton's viability, enabling it to compete with

the proliferation of regional shopping centres.

As matters settled down, the community was able to turn its mind to catering for community needs and for recreational pursuits. The Craig Play centre and the new Southern swimming pool were constructed on the extensive Warner Avenue space which had been reserved for community usage. An ill-fated RSL hall was built near the corner of High Street which was also used to host the first Elderly Citizen's club. In 1961, at the instigation of the Reverend Peter Stockman of the Ashburton Baptists, as Mayor of Camberwell I called a public meeting and formed and for some years chaired the Ashburton and District Senior Citizens Welfare Committee. An active fund-raising campaign enabled clubrooms to be built for the elderly citizens next to the RSL hall on the vacant Warner Avenue corner block. Since being renamed Ashburton Support Services it has expanded beyond its role as just a senior citizens' club and centre for Meals on Wheels, to create Samarinda Aged Care, the Elsie Salter House, together with a number of independent living facilities in Stocks Avenue. With the community's citizens living longer and retiring earlier the remainder of the space was filled with the Ashburton Bowls Club.

A number of huts had been erected on the railway land during the war and these now provided a temporary home for Ashwood High School. One of them, on Welfare Parade sheltered the Post Office until the since demolished brick building in High Street was opened in 1960, and it then developed a new life for a committee formed to support the Senior Citizens Welfare Committee when in 1962 they opened



"Ashy Op" shop 2014

Ashburton's first opportunity shop. This was at that time an entirely new concept and was probably the first opportunity shop in Melbourne. Well managed, enjoying a huge amount of community support, it was a great success from its opening. The shop has raised some \$20 million and is still the major source of funds for Ashburton Support Services except for government grants.

And in keeping with one of the more popular events of that era, Ashburton held a Miss Ashburton contest which was won by Lyn Slater who later became Mrs Loveless. However not everything was all glamour and beauty. There was a beast lurking around who visited his evil just down the road in High Street by destroying St Oswald's Anglican church and then followed that up by setting fire to St John's Camberwell and to St Mary's in South Camberwell before being apprehended.

1980s and the current era.

One of the most obvious changes of this era is the alteration to the streetscape, particularly in the former Housing Commission area. Throughout the 1960s the government became concerned at the mounting cost for maintenance of the Commission homes. In the belief that home ownership by the tenants would alleviate the problem, tenants were offered ownership of their home, at an attractive valuation, funded by a loan to be repaid at a rate not much more than the current rent. Astute tenants grabbed the offer and have been reaping the benefits ever since. Almost all the between-the-wars California bungalows, and now increasingly the Housing Commission houses, and even the post-Second World War houses, have been demolished and replaced, almost exclusively, by two-storey homes. The term 'McMansions' now enhances our

vocabulary. The present generation of home owners seems to believe that they will never be troubled with arthritic knees or hips! Many of the previously standard 50' x 150' building blocks, with space for children to kick footballs and play cricket, are now being occupied by several units, or two of these two-storey houses. In case you are wondering, 'Ashburton House' has never been in Ashburton, it has always had a Glen Iris address. Built in 1915 by one Percy Owen, although now subdivided and no longer with its High Street frontage, it is still well worth viewing at 2 Hillcrest Road on Google Earth.

As we enter the modern era the gradual but peaceful and gentle changes of the past 150 years are ending. There have been dramatic changes to family income and to personal and family life styles. Many women now have careers and the roads and kerbsides are cluttered with family cars. The Ashburton strip shopping centre remains prosperous, but has seen changes. Coffee shops proliferate, cafes have appeared, there are no hardware stores nor men's wear stores; but there are still queues in the butcher's and greengrocer's stores even though the majority of shoppers will now also additionally patronise the surrounding super markets.

Solway and part of Ashwood, from an analysis of the 2011 census population data, was identified as the demographic centre of the metropolitan area. The 2011 census tells us that there were 7,586 individuals, almost an equal number of males and females, spread over 1,968 households with an average of 1.6 vehicles per dwelling. It may not be the blissful forested area of 60 years ago but it is still one of the most enticing places in Melbourne to live. Ashburton is well serviced with kindergartens and high standard schools. Public transport is at the doorstep - although despite promises and hopes there is no tramway - the main roads and freeways are easily accessible and provide access to all of Melbourne's suburbs and to country Victoria. Back in 1959 I was able to persuade my fellow Camberwell Councillors to agree to authorise the Officers to investigate the possibility of combining with neighbouring Malvern with the object of constructing a pathway on our boundary from Burke Road to Warrigal Road; however Malvern declined to become involved. It was the funds becoming available as compensation through the construction of the second stage of the Monash Freeway which made this a possibility, and is now a popular bike and walking track (although unfortunately the bike riders seem to think it is their preserve). And I was amazed to discover, during my research, that Camberwell had unsuccessfully proposed to Malvern establishing a continuous reserve along our joint boundary back in 1896!

I have lived for most of my 89 years within a stone's throw of Gardiner's Creek, roaming its banks and mostly unsuccessfully fishing its waters, first as a child in Glen Iris, then Ashburton, and in my closing years finally back to Glen Iris. Both my sons developed a passion for what it offers in lifestyle and have followed suit.

Acknowledgements

Some of the images in this document have been used following permission from the Boroondara Library, images on pages 3, 6, 11 and 12; the Burwood Bulletin, image on page 18; and the Waverley Historical Society. These photos and additional ones can be viewed on their websites on the internet. The image on page 8 is from page 38 of 'Cattlemen to Commuters' by Susan Priestley Sydney 1979 illustration by Jane Walker after an etching of the St Kilda Rd toll gate in 1865. The map on page 15 is reproduced from the book, 'The Alameiners - From Mud to Palaces'. Other images are the copyright of the author.

For a detailed breakdown of the property subdivisions in Ashburton and Glen Iris throughout the 1850s to 1920s, a reading of Gwen McWilliams' publication 'Along the High Street - Again' published as a document in 1994 and held in the Local History collection at Boroondara Library is strongly recommended.

Anyone interested in the history of the former City of Camberwell and its environs, before amalgamation with the former Cities of Hawthorn and Kew to form the City of Boroondara, will be rewarded by borrowing a copy of the very readable and informative book 'A History of Camberwell' by Geoffrey Blainey.

Professor Blainey pays tribute to the extensive research evident in J.Alexander Allan's 'History of Camberwell (Victoria) 1841-1950'. This book, although not available for loan, is available on the shelves at Camberwell and contains an enormous amount of detailed information on the operation of Local Government in that municipality throughout the 110 years covered. I have found it to be of significant value both for fact, and as background, on the several occasions that I have resorted to it for information on the subjects I have been researching.

I am grateful to Richard Walpole for his stories of his ancestor Edward Atkyn Walpole and to Michael McGeorge and also to Lloyd Outram for their personal recollections of the short lived golf course in the Ashburton Forest, a course previously not known by me to have existed.

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The bridge over Gardiner's Creek at Warrigal Road by Tom Roberts