



Chapter 9 - Settling the Hunter

(1820 – 1832)

In the early 1820s, interest in exploiting what the Hunter region had to offer gathered pace. It was not only the land hungry and hardworking settlers of the Hawkesbury, but also cashed up and well-connected new arrivals in the colony, and corporate interests who sought land. Of the latter, the Australian Agricultural Company (AACo) was a significant force and influence in the exploitation of the Hunter and north and north-western expansion of the colony.

The AACo was organised in London by John Macarthur the younger. It held its preliminary meeting in his chambers in April 1824. Macarthur had already been in touch with the Colonial Office and learnt that the Secretary of State might be willing to give his blessing, and a very considerable land grant - The Secretary's favour was granted on the proviso that:

- the venture had considerable financial backing,
- was not merely a speculative venture, and
- the directors undertook to retain their holdings and to serve for at least four years.²⁹²

At a more humble level of activity, and indicative of Hawkesbury settlers, were the efforts of David Brown junior. Like many families on their part of the Hawkesbury at that time, the Browns were far from being prosperous landholders. On 17 June 1824, David sent a memorial to the Governor, seeking a grant of land on the Hunter River. This is some two and a half years after his father's expression of interest in being granted land there on behalf of he (David junior) and his brother Thomas. In his correspondence, David junior described the land near Cattai Creek as being 'unsuitable for cultivation or grazing.'²⁹³

It is likely that for some considerable time before this, David junior, like many other Hawkesbury settlers, began fattening cattle in the Hunter region. The cattle would have been driven south periodically to Cattai as a staging point before moving them on to Windsor, Parramatta, and Sydney markets.

David may well have been one of those trying to overcome drought conditions. He is likely to have typically of the time kept someone posted at the Jerry's Plains to tend to any cattle he had there. But by now there was a growing awareness of the need to gain a government allocation of surveyed land.

Within a few days of presenting his memorial, i.e. 22 June 1824, David (II), his father, and brother, Thomas, were each promised by Governor Darling, a modest 150 acres at Jerry's Plains. Thomas' 150 acres was the most easterly of the three grants. Quit-rent on each property was £12s. 6d. per annum starting on 31 January 1831.²⁹⁴

The Browns formally received their grants for Jerry's Plains a short time later. Given the earlier accounts, including James' grant at Cattai, it seems likely the family were in the Hunter region in anticipation of their grants. David senior's grant, Portion 29, was adjacent to land eventually acquired by the Duff family, *Portion 30*, known as 'Balaca', and later 'Hampton Park'.²⁹⁵

Richard Hobden, to be one of David junior's long time neighbours at Jerry's Plains, was granted 620 acres in June of 1824, and promptly set about establishing his farm.

During 1824, George Bowman from Richmond, aged 29 received a grant of 1310 acres of land on the Hunter, near Jerry's Plains that he called 'Archerfield'.²⁹⁶ This would have been in honour of the 140 acre

²⁹² Eliza Macarthur and Her World, p123.

²⁹³ Colonial Secretary's Papers. Memorial - 17 June 1824. AONSW Fiche3080, 4/1836B No. 105 p575, 8

²⁹⁴ NSW GG No 91 of Wednesday, 27 November 1833.

²⁹⁵ Peter Duff junior is likely to have inherited the property from his father.

²⁹⁶ "Archerfield" was on the Hunter River opposite John Browne's Maison Dieu and where Glennies Creek comes in. It was about 10 km downstream of "Great Lodge" and thus about 15 km downstream from Jerry's Plains. According to Ian Ellis in The Ellis of Chaddlehanger in



property his father had owned on the Hawkesbury also called 'Archerfield' on which he had grown up. George Bowman was the brother of James Chisholm's second wife. David, of course, had his connection through his sister, Mary, being James Chisholm's first wife.

Probing a Way to the North-West

Henry Dangar, Government Surveyor, set off with a small party to explore the upper reaches of the Hunter and amongst other things look for a pass through the mountains to the Liverpool Plains. Dangar was accompanied by Assistant Surveyor, John Richards; and two other white men named Williamson and Allen; and an Aboriginal boy. They left the farm of Philip Thorley, on the Patrick Plains on 7 October 1824 and in the afternoon reached the Richard Hobden's farm at Jerrys Plains.

On 12 October 1824, Henry Dangar, crossed over the high Southward jutting spur of the Liverpool Range and camped by what is now known as Wybong Creek. On the morning of 14 October 1824, Dangar's expedition began to climb the range. *'On the crest of the Liverpool Range they were attacked by a large party of natives, possibly a hundred and fifty in number. One of the party was stuck in the head by a spear before they knew the blacks were near. The natives took possession of the horse carrying the provisions, clothes and cooking utensils. After the attack the white men "rallied and made front for about three hours". The natives content with their booty, allowed them to proceed without further molestation. The explorers had their blankets on their saddles and carried about 25 lbs of flour in their saddle-bags.'*

'They camped for the night about four miles from the crest of the range and commenced their return on the following day. Minus the pack horse and its load and with one man bearing a spear wound in his head, Dangar's party eventually reached Dr Bowman's farm, which is the highest on Hunter River.' *'The challenging route of the explorers' return over the mountains became known by the deceptive name of 'Dangar's Pass' and was so described on early maps.'* Word of Henry Dangar's adventures and discovery soon spread.²⁹⁷

Away from the Frontier

A list of those settlers willing to serve as juror was compiled on 22 November 1824 by the district constables of the Hawkesbury. Included was David junior, and his neighbours, the Arndells. Also on this list are Richard and Edward Alcorn of Windsor.

David junior's brother, Thomas, married Mary Ann Bridget O'Neil (or O'Neal) aged 21, at St Phillip's Church of England on 30 November 1824. Mary was an immigrant from Ireland²⁹⁸ who had arrived on the 'Woodman' the year before,²⁹⁹ and daughter of Thomas O'Neal, an ex-convict who has apparently encouraged his daughter to come out to the colony.

It is probable that the one cottage then remaining on the Erskine Street site was divided into two dwellings to accommodate both David senior, and Thomas and his bride in separate quarters. Any other buildings that might have been there as a consequence of it being formerly two allotments would have been used as a workshop for the family's cabinet making business.

It is known that David senior gave much of his time to his family at Cattai and Lower Minto. That may have commenced in earnest about now to make way for Thomas. At Cattai David senior would have taken up residence in his own quarters³⁰⁰ adjacent to son, David junior, on portion 39 where he could assist in the development of the farm. At Lower Minto, he was able to assist his grandson, Jas Chisholm in the establishment of St Andrews.

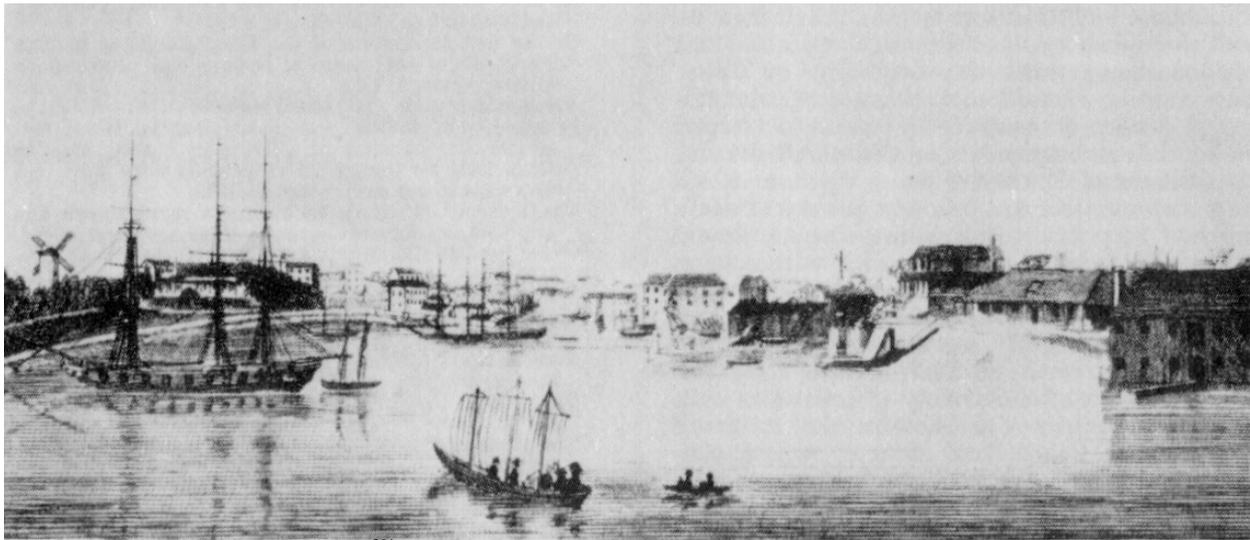
1824, George also purchased 1120 acres upstream of Jerry's Plains which remained relatively undeveloped until he purchased adjoining properties. By 1836 this became known as "Blakefield" and consisted of 7520 acres.

²⁹⁷ Dawn in the Valley, p44,45, 'It was recorded of this so-called pass that when the loads were taken off the pack horses and manhandled to the top, the men clasped both arms round the trunks of small trees to avoid dropping into the ravine below, in their exhaustion.' P43

²⁹⁸ Marriage registration V1824 3461 3B O and V1824 379 8 St Phillip's.

²⁹⁹ 1828 Census Ref B2771. Note: not Mary Ann Dunn as claimed by Blanche Jenkins in her history of 1946.

³⁰⁰ The Sydney Herald of 28 November 1831, Article re bushranger attack on family at midnight suggests David was accommodated outside the family's main living quarters. This could have consisted of an external room built on to the side of existing house or a separate building.

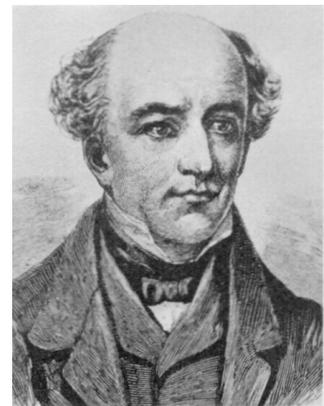


Sydney Cove. View to the South 1824³⁰¹

Working Jerry's Plains in Earnest

The Browns had received their grants at Jerry's Plains, Portions 27 to 29 about the same time Richard Hobden received his allocation, that is, June of 1824.³⁰² David junior began to repeat the process that his family had put in place from Kissing Point for the development of the Cattai Creek property. David junior now used Cattai as a base to develop the Jerry's Plains properties in earnest. Periodically he would have given attention to the construction of buildings and stockades needed for basic farming needs and the family's ultimate relocation there.

However, commuting to and from Jerry's Plains was not a simple process. As testified by Dr Allan Cunningham who set out to explore the Upper Hunter. He was following up on an expedition to the Upper Hunter of May 1823. Cunningham left Richmond Hill on 29 March 1825, with the purpose of making the Hunter River at its nearest bend. He found Howe's route of 1820 very difficult. *'The narrow defiles and abrupt precipices were dangerous to men and heavily laden packhorses, and impassable by cart. The men were forced to unload the pack horses and carry the loads themselves through a gap, and again down an abrupt mountainside to descend lower Wollombi, or Cockfighter.'* *'The party had traveled 100 miles from 500 feet to the valley of the Richmond in 13 days when on 11 April they reached the extensive sheep farm of John Marquet Blaxland on the Wollombi.'*³⁰³



Allan Cunningham³⁰⁴

In April 1825, Cunningham's party observed evidence of a very high flooding at Jerry's Plains. They were especially astonished to see 'the wrack and stubble of a flood 50 to 60 feet above the river level as they saw it.' Unfortunately, Cunningham's reporting of flood levels of the past was ignored by settlers and Government alike. It was a factor of significance that was to catch up with them and later generations several times over.

³⁰¹ An engraving from The Gentleman's Magazine. 1824

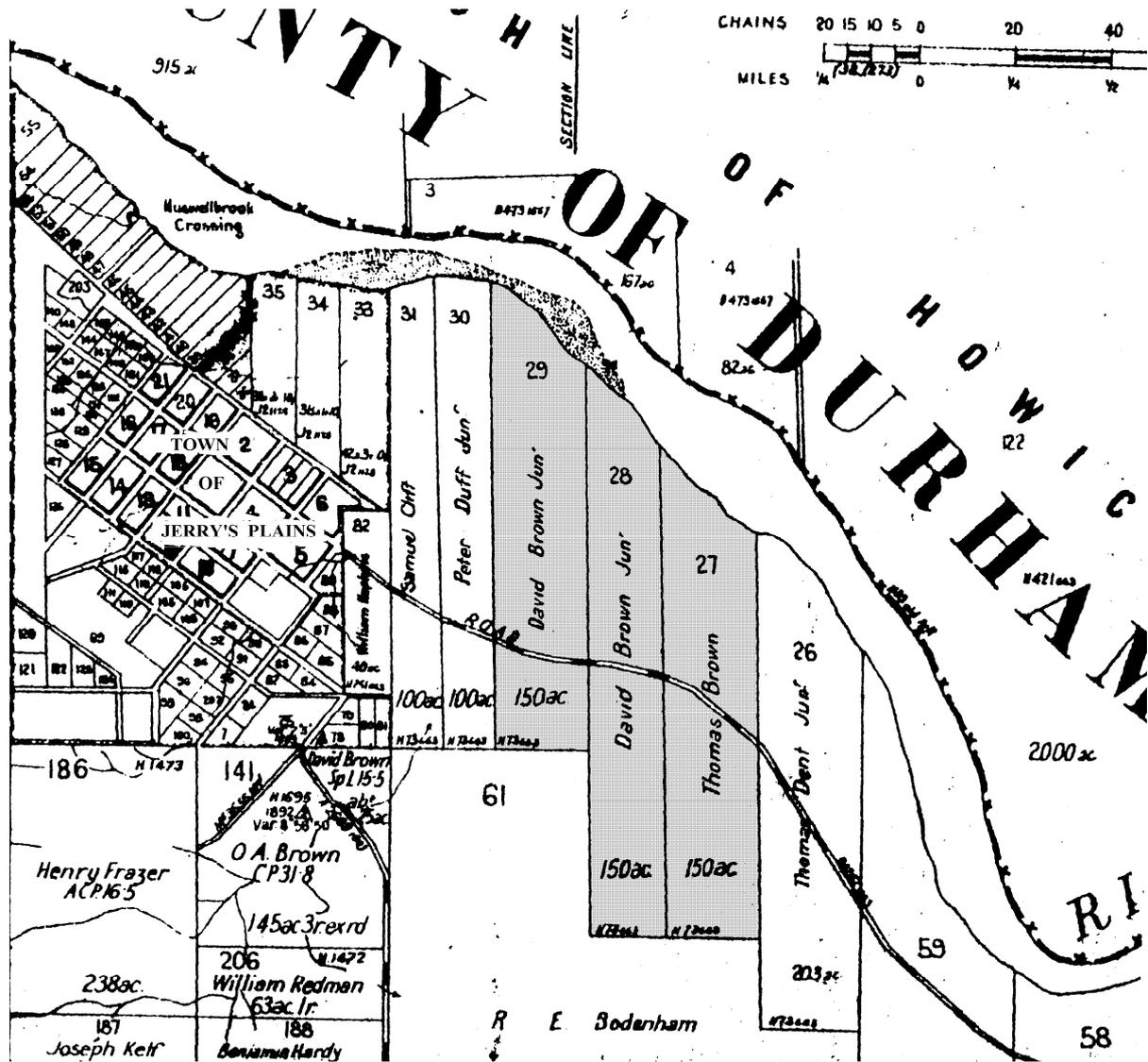
³⁰² In the 1825 'muster' David was described as 'Landholder' reflecting his receipt of, and developing, the Jerry's Plains grant of land (Portion 29). Their neighbour Richard Hobden had received his grant in June 1824, indicating that the land in that area had been surveyed.

³⁰³ Dawn in the Valley, p46.

³⁰⁴ Picture Atlas of Australia



John and James Duff arrived in Jerry's Plains in 1825 to settle on land granted to their father, Peter Duff. It was Portion 30, which was alongside the land granted to David Brown snr. The Duffs had come via what was described as 'the very rough and still difficult Bulga Road' with their cattle, packhorses, and various family members, including women, and children.³⁰⁵ Portion 31 had been taken up a year or so before by their brother-in-law Ann and Samuel Clift (b1791). Clift, a convict transported to Sydney 1818 on CT Neptune, had married Peter Duff's oldest daughter on 8 March 1823. Thanks to Peter Duff's influence Clift was granted Ticket-of Leave which entitled him to own land. Co-incidentally Duff was given Portion 31 that same year as a retirement grant. Samuel and Ann Clift took up residence to effect improvements and attend to the livestock that had been transferred from Windsor.³⁰⁶



This late 19th century map shows the three Portions of land granted on 22 June 1824 to the Browns (cross hatched) in relation to present site of the Town of Jerry's Plains. The original town site centred on Thomas' Portion 27. The Brown's inn was located on Portion 29 on the south side of the highway. Note – Portion 29 was originally allocated to David Brown Senior.

Again, David jnr was included on a list, of those willing to serve as juror, compiled in August of 1825 by the district constables of the Hawkesbury. His neighbours, the Arndells are also on this list as they were in the November 1824 list. Noticeable by their absence are the Alcorns.

³⁰⁵ First village of Jerry's Plains, by Ian Ellis, Hunter Valley News 30 Sept 1992.

³⁰⁶ Who Was Who on the Liverpool Plains 1941, 12



At Little Caddai Creek, in a memorial to the Governor on 5 September 1825, David junior states via a notary:

*“David Brown of Caddai Creek”. “Has received a grant of 100 acres from Governor Macquarie on which he resides with his wife and four children.” However, he “has not received the indulgence on the stores attached to his grant” and solicits his Excellency to be given the indulgence.*³⁰⁷

The reply dated 6 September 1825 came back:

*“I have the honour to request that David Brown, his wife, and four children, together with the Convict Servant may be victualled from her Majesty’s Stores at Windsor for six months from the present date.”*³⁰⁸

It is possible that David junior was using the 100 acres granted to him by Governor Macquarie to gain entitlements to work the neighbouring Portion 39 held by the family since 1806

In response to a petition by settlers, Assistant Surveyor, Heneage Finch, was sent in 1825 to survey a ‘suitable’ northern route from Sydney to the Hunter region, which was to be called ‘the Great North Road’. The road he surveyed followed a series of aboriginal tracks along ridge-tops.³⁰⁹

In the October 1825 Muster, David senior was described as ‘Landholder’ – This contrasts with David’s occupation given by him of ‘Cabinetmaker’ and ‘carpenter’ in the 1814, 1822 musters and 1828 census, and declared on his behalf when he died. The ‘Landholder’ status reflects David having received, and being in the process of developing, the grant of land at Jerry’s Plains (Portion 29) and having given up Cabinet making as a livelihood for himself - Probably because the business had, typically, been the source of much hard work and very little remuneration. The October 1825 Muster shows David’s son, Thomas, as a ‘Cabinet Maker’ of Sydney having come on the ‘Earl Cornwallis’ in 1801.

Richard Alcorn and wife, from South Creek, near Pitt Town, arrived in the Hunter in early 1826 to take up 60 acres of land at Fal Brook granted to his brother Edward. Alcorn had come to establish a farm for a Captain Robert Lethbridge. Richard and Charlotte were accompanied by their baby daughter, Sarah Jane (born 28 January 1826), Charlotte’s brother, Isaac Gullede, and three assigned men.³¹⁰ Not long after arriving, the family was nearly annihilated in an attack by Aborigines that resulted in several assigned convicts being killed.³¹¹

*#A daughter, Catherine, (known as ‘Kate’) was born to David junior and Elizabeth on 22 May 1826 at ‘Little Caddie Creek’. She was baptised on 2 July 1826 in the Parish of Wilberforce, at ‘St John’s, Church of England, Parramatta.’*³¹²

In 1826, David senior made a deed out selling or transferring his Portion 30 of the Jerry’s Plains land and the house on it to David junior.³¹³ An indication that both men had been working the Jerry’s Plains grants in earnest for some time, even then.

³⁰⁷ Colonial Secretary: *Correspondence*, 1788-1825. Memorial from David Brown, 5 September 1825 (SRNSW ref 4/184OC No.87 page 499; SR fiche 3122)

³⁰⁸ Colonial Secretary: *Correspondence*, 1788-1825. David Brown, 6 September 1825 (SRNSW ref. 413515 page 280; SR reel 6015)

³⁰⁹ Explore the Convict Trail: The Great North Road.

³¹⁰ Merry Hope to George Simpson 2008

³¹¹ Dawn in the Valley. Richard Alcorn later to become a neighbour of David, and his daughter, Sarah Jane, later to become the wife of David’s son, John.

³¹² NSW SR 5002, BDM Reference V1826 491 10 0, NLA mfm NX229. There are two registrations for Wilberforce parish and one for St Johns at Parramatta. I presume she was baptised in Wilberforce parish on the Hawkesbury and has registered a second copy of the baptism at Wilberforce. The St Johns baptism could be a second baptism.



However, on 31 October of 1838 it was plain that David had misplaced the deed for in the Government Gazette of that date. The Land Commissioners in notifying of the Crown's intention to grant the land to David junior, note that David senior 'it is alleged, devised to his son, the claimant.' By then, however, David junior was his father's only surviving child.³¹⁴ The official date of transfer of the deed to David was 12 July 1839.³¹⁵

Also about 1826, David senior transferred his right to the Little Cattai Creek property (Portion 39) equally between sons, David junior and Thomas.

During 1826 Benjamin Singleton was the first to take cattle into the Liverpool Plains via the treacherous Dangar's Pass discovered by Henry Dangar in 1824.³¹⁶

Samuel Eather and family at Richmond drove their stock up the Bulga Road in 1826 in response to an advertisement by Benjamin Singleton at Patrick Plains, offering agistment. The Eathers, having settled in the area subsequently applied to the Government for a grant of land, which led them to settle at Jerry's Plains.

Construction of 'the Great North Road', which for many years served as the main road north from Sydney to the Hunter valley, began in 1826. Convict gangs were to take some ten years to build the road through rugged bushland - Some 700 convicts worked on the road at any one time. They cleared timber; grubbed out stumps; made level surfaces; dug ditches; blasted and shaped stone, and shifted it into position (some of the blocks weighed up to 600 kg). Their hard labour cleared a path of about 20 metres wide, constructed various retaining walls, culverts, and 33 bridges.³¹⁷

Solomon Wiseman's ferry service on the Hawkesbury at 'Lower Portland Head' (later known as Wiseman's Ferry), began in 1827 as part of the Great North Road.³¹⁸ It was the first crossing facility installed on the Hawkesbury.³¹⁹

A one-man police presence was established in Jerry's Plains during 1827 to serve that district - He was Constable J. Needham.

Portion 39 was now owned jointly by David junior and Thomas, though it was David junior who was in occupation and had been working the property. Portion 38 of 100 acres became the subject of a 'Bargain and Sale from David to Thomas on 1 October 1827. In return, David junior acquired Thomas' share of Portion 39. Thomas now had a total of 160 acres. Witnesses to the contract were long-time neighbours, Thomas and James Arndell, of Portion 40, sons of Dr Thomas Arndell, to whom Portion 40 was originally

³¹³ Mitchell Library Doc 2197. Letter of 17 March 1914 Emily J Brown of Neutral Bay to genealogist G. R. Nichols: 'About 1906 a deed relative to this property came into our possession but too late for the family to do anything in the matter. ... I don't think the son had possession of it' (the deed and the land). Note: David junior's Will indicates he had possession of the land. Emily was widow of George Brown and daughter-in-law to David Brown junior. 1906 is the year George died.

³¹⁴ NSW GG. P. 961 of Mitchell Library bound copies.

³¹⁵ NSW GG No.441 of 14 August 1839. P. 906 of Mitchell Library bound copies

³¹⁶ Allan Cunningham began his long journey into the Liverpool Plains and the unknown north in 1827 by this route.

³¹⁷ 'Rather than be allowed to languish in gaol many convicts who had committed another offence were sent to build roads in remote areas. They were assigned to Iron Gangs and worked in leg-irons - an iron collar around each ankle was joined together by a length of chain. Weighing up to 6 kg these could only be put on or removed by a blacksmith. After completing a sentence in an Iron Gang men were often transferred to a Road Party, where they undertook the same work, but without having to wear leg-irons.

One overseer was assigned to each gang of between 50 and 60 men. The Surveyor General appointed one of his principal surveyors - called Assistant Surveyors - to supervise construction in each area, with several convict gangs to undertake the work.

The men lived and worked under difficult conditions - the discipline was harsh and the shelter minimal. Permanent camps with timber or bark huts were built where the men were likely to be stationed in the one area for a long while, but in other places men lived in tents which could be moved as the road progressed. Some convicts absconded, but most didn't stay at liberty for long as the bush was wild and forbidding to those unaccustomed to it.' - Explore the Convict Trail: The Great North Road. Tourism NSW (in consultation with the Road Transport Authority), 2001.

³¹⁸ Solomon Wiseman was an ex-convict who settled at Lower Portland Head on a land grant in 1817. He won a government contract to convict labourers working on the road, and opened an inn in 1826-27.

³¹⁹ Australians, Events and Places, ISBN 0 949288 13 6



granted. As barely 10 acres of Thomas' original 60 acres was arable, the swap may have been an attempt to ensure Thomas' overall holding there was more viable.³²⁰

In contrast, the land available for cultivation on David's Portion 39 was one of the richest alluvial flood flats still being farmed in the mid 20th century. There was some 35 acres of Portion 39 that could be depended on to grow whatever market garden vegetables were in demand.

Portion 39 by now was known simply as 'Browns Farm' and identified as such in the 1827 sales documents. It continued to be described as such for most of the 19th century.

A son, 'David,' was born to David and Elizabeth on 3 November 1828 at Cattai and baptised on 14 December 1828, in the Presbyterian Church, a short boat trip across the river at Portland Head (Ebenezer).³²¹ This was during the time of that church's first minister, the Rev. Dr John McGarvie, who served at Ebenezer from 1826 to 1831.

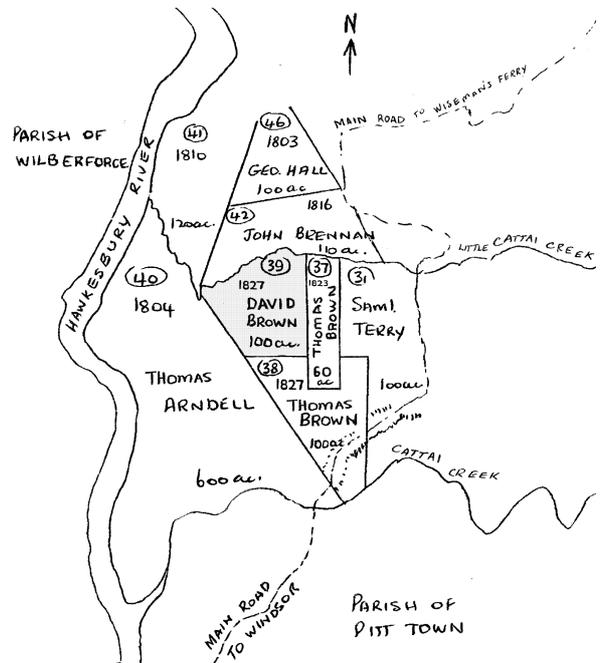
In addition to any private boating facility the Browns could call on, there had been a punt in service on the Hawkesbury River from Pitt Town to Wilberforce up two years prior that had fallen into disrepair.

In 1828, a new punt, 32 ft long and 12 ft wide, was launched at the building yard of Johnathan Grono to replace the other. The right of the new ferry belonged to a farm recently bought by the Trustees of the Ebenezer Church for £320.³²²

The 1828 Census

The 1828 Census, conducted in November of that year, states David junior as 45 years. It also shows him having six individuals, other than his immediate family, at the Little Cattai Creek property (Portion 39)³²³ in his charge. These included:

- David 'Humphreys' 13 yrs and George 'Humphreys' 19 years, 'Born Colony', 'lives with David Brown'. David and George Humphreys were Elizabeth's half-brothers, - For David Brown it was a case of employing and feeding some of his wife's family;
- William Ellon 28 yrs, Labourer, Government Service for 7 yrs, Transported on the Princes Royal, arrived in 1823;
- William Griffiths 27 yrs, Labourer, Government Service for Life, Transported on the Hadlow, arrived in 1818;
- Jane Rogers 46 yrs, servant, Government Service 7 yrs, Transported on the Lord Sidmouth arrived 1822; and
- Henry Vaughan 37 yrs, Labourer, Government Service 7 yrs, Transported on the Florentina, arrived 1828.



Ownership of Brown's Cattai grants as at 1827

³²⁰ Or as suggested by Merryll Hope 2008, 'the swap was done so they could sell off the worst land, or if Thomas was seriously in debt, his creditors would get the worst!'

³²¹ BDM Reference V1828 14 162A 0. Portland Head, Presbyterian Register. David born 3 November 1828 to "David Brown, Lower Pitt Town settler, and Mary Elizabeth McMahon," baptised 14 December 1828 by Rev. John McGarvie. Per P. Booker.

³²² Two Hawkesbury Pioneers, p146-147.

³²³ Location given in census was 'Pitt Town' which was a regional description at the time which encompassed nearby Cattai.



A sorghum crop being harvested on Portion 39's alluvial soil in 2008 ³²⁴

The youngest in his family at the time, David (III), was only one week old.

The 1828 census also reports David junior as having 28 acres of 100 acres under cultivation, 4 horses, and **130 cattle**.³²⁵ To manage this, and the Jerry's Plains property, he had six able bodied male workers including himself, that are known, with some assistance from the older children. Elizabeth would no doubt have used the services of Jane Rogers (and any other female convict help that available to her) for dealing with supporting farm work tasks and domestic chores.



The 'Bird in the Hand' Hotel, built circa 1858 on the opposite side of the road from the original 'Bird in the Hand' operated by Daniel Smallwood in the 1820's and 30's. ³²⁶ (JIG)

For the Browns, or the Humphries boys, family connection weren't far away. Catherine Hopkins (nee Humphries) was living at Wilberforce, Patrick Humphries and son, Thomas, were farming downriver at Kincumber, a convenient boat ride away.

The 1828 Census barely mentions at Jerry's Plains. Only a C. E. Brown with some 2500 acres is the only entry. David Brown's long time friend and neighbour there, Richard Hobden, like some others, seems to not exist. It is known that there was more than the occasional dwelling there. Thanks to Henry Dangar,

³²⁴ Photo courtesy C & R McKenzie current occupiers of Portion 39 Cattai

³²⁵ 1828 Census, B2574 of Appendix 3

³²⁶ Daniel Smallwood who came out in the Matilda in 1791 obtained a licence in 1821 which he maintained until his death in 1839. He traded under the sign of the 'Bird in the Hand'. The Smallwood family held the licence until 1848. It is likely that the 'Bird in the Hand' as a wooden structure until it was replaced by more substantial masonry structure in 1828. Daniel Smallwood had briefly owned a boat called the "Hope" in which he conducted trade on the Hawkesbury up to 1803 when the vessel was wrecked. 'The Maid of Australia' inn, across the road from the 'Bird in the Hand' was licensed to Richard Mawson from 1858 to 1882. Hawkesbury Journey. p68.



Government Surveyor, there is a record of a ‘Hobden’ being established there in June 1824. It is likely that this situation reflects the predominance of absentee landlords – Grants being held mainly by Hawkesbury settlers who fattened their cattle there.



*Sir Ralf Darling (1775 – 1858)
Governor of NSW
December 1825 to December 1831.
Regarded as an efficient administrator.*

There were 616 names returned in the 1828 census for the Pitt Town district. Of those 251 were ‘Born in the Colony’, 184 Labourers, 53 Farmers, 26 Servants, 9 Carpenters, 9 Shoemakers, 7 Stockman, 3 Stockkeepers, 3 Landholders (2 of whom were female), 3 Blacksmiths, 3 Butchers, 2 Coopers, 1 Limeburner, 1 Gunsmith, 1 Constable, 1 bricklayer, 1 Baker, 1 Tailor, 1 Clergyman. The clergyman was M. Devinish Meares who had 5 ‘Pupil’s age between 7 and 14 years living with him.

The Hunter was sparsely populated at the time. Some 500 people are acknowledged as being in the Patrick and Paterson Plains’ Districts. This essentially represents the entire Hunter east of Jerry’s Plains. Even then, there appears to be a few individuals who were registered twice, once in each district. The small population may well have been due the Hunter being in the grip of drought. Rev. J. D. Lang visited the Hunter region in 1828 and observed that ‘in the company of other settlers, those at Patrick Plains had suffered in drought, that ‘no settler had sufficient wheat for his own needs’.³²⁷

1828 Census shows David Brown, 78 years, CF (Came Free) on Earl Cornwallis, residing with Mr. Chisholm, St Andrews, Lower Minto (now known as Narellan, near Camden). The age given for David is consistent with his stated age at time of death.³²⁸ It seems that David senior and a close relative from Scotland of James Chisholm senior, Mr. Alexander Chisholm, were living with and “helping”, young Jas Chisholm, who managed the Lower Minto property on behalf of his father.

Corporate Momentum on the Hunter

In September 1828, the ‘Australian Agricultural Company’ (AACo) was granted exclusive rights by the Colonial Office to mine coal in the Port Stephens area for 31 years, at the mouth of the Hunter. They also got a 2000 acres land grant with the right to mine coal.³²⁹ Until this time coal mining was under the control of the Government with convicts providing the labour. The Australian Agricultural Company relied for many years on convict labour to develop its coal mines settlement at Newcastle. AACo’s advent was a significant factor in the development of the Hunter, and the colony in general.

Work on the ‘official’ road north of the Hawkesbury, began opposite Dural in 1829.³³⁰

Governor Darling attempted to implement a “19 Counties Plan”, largely for administrative convenience, to restrict settlement to a radius 240 kilometres from Sydney.

David junior applied for ‘Government Servants’ in 1830.³³¹

David junior purchased two allotments (No’s 9 and 10) in Pitt Town, which were bounded on the front by George Street, from Robert Hobbs (1764 -1839) on 12 July 1830. He did so ‘In consideration of the sum of

³²⁷ Life & Times of Henry Dangar, p33-4.

³²⁸ However, there was also David Brown, aged 70, cabinet-maker, arrived 1821 on Earl Cornwallis, shown as residing there – perhaps a case of doubling up with confused information (due to eights looking like 2’s or 0’s) rather than another person? Three government servants with David are also entered in the census twice with variations in detail.

³²⁹ Pure Merinos and Others, pages 7 & 8.

³³⁰ Australians, Events and Places, ISBN 0 949288 13 6

³³¹ NSW Governors dispatches 1830 p.329 and 1832 p.177.



£20.5.0 (twenty pounds five shillings) of lawful British Stirling Money'.³³² The allotments were also bounded by property owned by Daniel Smallwood, licensee of the 'Bird in the Hand' inn. Robert Hobbs was an ex convict had been granted 60 acres in the Pitt Town region. He was also the great-grandfather of Ellen Turner who married David's son, Alexander, many years later.

The purchase was the subject of a memorial to the Supreme Court of NSW on 3 November 1836.³³³ One of the witnesses to the sale was John Howe, who had discovered the trail north to the Hunter some ten years before. The memorial describes the property as bounded:

'..... on one side of Williamson's allotment now in the possession of Danial Smallwood, on the other side by Richard Sergeant's allotment, and on the back thereof by a farm granted to James Wilbow the younger now in the possession of David Horton and containing the whole about one hundred and twenty rods, more or less'

Owing to heavy rains, there was minor flooding of the Hawkesbury region during the years 1830 and 1831 following three years of drought. The drought 'had been so severe that the settlers had been obliged to dig up couch grass roots, wash them and feed them to their stock.'³³⁴ The floods in their turn caused property to be damaged, crops and stock lost, and field labour was suspended for a time. Roads were noted to be in a bad state.³³⁵ These difficult conditions caused settlers like the Browns and their neighbours to travel far a field to seek out new pastures. Hawkesbury settlers were driven to head north to the Hunter following the way explored by John Howe. Conditions on the Hunter, due to the heavy rains, had much to offer. In the Patrick Plains region, good crops of wheat were in production.³³⁶

As well as David maintaining properties at both the Cattai region and Jerry's Plains during the late 1820's and 1830's he acquired others in a variety of locations e.g.: Millie, Maitland, Muswellbrook, Singleton, Paterson, and Pyrmont/Balmain in Sydney. It is likely that David left his father to help Elizabeth run the Cattai property while he was becoming increasingly involved in Jerry's Plains.

David had a reputation of breeding horses.³³⁷ It is likely that he commence that activity at his Jerry's Plains property to meet his own needs. Frequent travelling between Cattai and Jerry's Plains and other locations, driving cattle between properties and to market would have encouraged that need. Initially, some of the droving of cattle may have necessitated some of the drovers to be on foot. The 1828 Census only acknowledged the existence of one horse. However, the census states nothing about the family possessions at Jerry's Plains. As pointed out earlier, Jerry's Plains seems to have been largely overlooked by the Census.

Circa 1831, the 150 acres at Jerry's Plains originally granted to David's brother, Thomas, (Portion 27) was purchased by J. J. Peacock at the Sheriff's office sales, who resold it.³³⁸ It is unlikely that Thomas spent any time there at all. It raises a number of questions, including 'why David didn't attempt to purchase Portion 27 for himself', or 'whether David knew about it.' Whatever happened, David managed hang on to the remaining two portions, (i.e. 28 and 29), and develop them in earnest.

Due to a legal dispute between John Duff and an insolvent William Carter, who had lost Piercefield and Martindale in the 1830 depression, the NSW Sheriff had offered the Jerry's Plain's property for sale in 1832. A John Peacock purchased the property at the sale and immediately offered it for resale.³³⁹ Richard Alcorn ultimately purchased Portion 27 on 5 August 1833. The property proved to be the one of the most

³³² NSW Land Titles Office – Book K, No. 493. Application. 39195 (pt.) page 130 refers.

³³³ NSW Land Titles Office – Book K, No. 493. Application. 39195 (pt.) page 130.

³³⁴ Macquarie Country, p18.

³³⁵ Sydney Herald, April - May 1831

³³⁶ Life & Times of Henry Dangar, p35.

³³⁷ Singleton Historical Society Register.

³³⁸ First village of Jerry's Plains, by Ian Ellis, Hunter Valley News 30 September 1992. Ellis refers to Thomas, settling in Jerry's Plains in 1832 but seems to be confusing David's brother with David's eldest son who very much involved himself in his father's business affairs in Jerry's Plains.

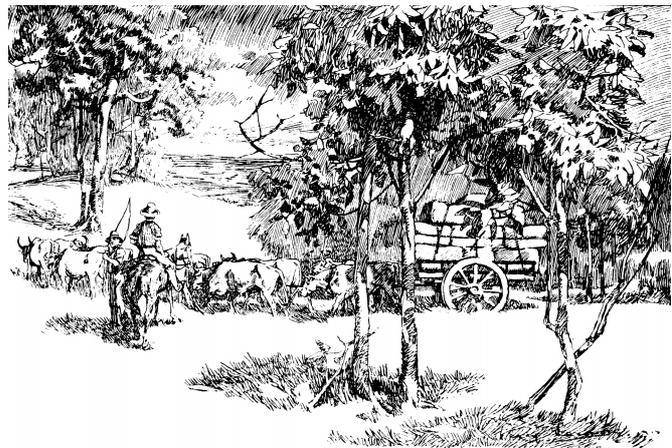
³³⁹ Alcorns – Their Fathers were Convicts. Philip Booker



significant pieces of real estate in the development of Jerry's Plains.³⁴⁰ 'This strategically place could have been even more successful than it proved to be if the highway and railway routes had not eventually bypassed Jerry's Plains'³⁴¹

On 15 October 1831, Richard Alcorn was issued a license to keep the 'Greyhound Inn' at Fal Brook, 18 km North-West of Singleton.

The opening of Bulga/Putty track, the beginnings of Great North Road, and the shipping services from Sydney to the Hunter, the late 20's and early 1830's had a flow-on effect. The 'wheels and hooves of emerging rural commerce,' slowly begin 'to wend their way through Jerry's Plains at a rate of 20 kilometres per day.' The traffic was on its way to the Goulburn River (which flowed into the Hunter near Merton [now Denman]) and beyond to the west and north-west. At Jerry's Plains men camped overnight on convenient private land in the vicinity of the junction of this track and the one that forded the river some four miles upstream and then veered north into the upper valley.' From there settlements spread west and northwest. In the circumstances, Jerry's Plains was a logical place to have an inn. By now David junior was as much a citizen of Jerry's Plains as Cattai and Pitt Town. David and his neighbours would have understood what was drawing people and that the flow had every prospect of not only continuing, but also increasing.



'wheels and hooves of emerging rural commerce,' slowly begin 'to wend their way through Jerry's Plains at a rate of 20 kilometres per day.'

In response to the situation David, and later, Richard Alcorn, his soon to be neighbour, each built a public house there. David's inn became known as the 'Green Gate'.

The Impact of Steamship Service

David Brown and his employees, and sons, commuted overland back and forth between the Cattai, and Jerry's Plains properties to the north, by horseback and moving cattle on the 'Bulga track' pioneered in 1819 by John Howe. Later on the Browns may have very occasionally taken advantage of the better 'Great North Road' route, and the comparatively fast steamship service (once established) for travelling to Sydney with women and young children of the family or the transport of goods, especially where they needed to travel via Newcastle or Maitland. Generally, settlers on the lower Hunter tended to use the 'Great North Road, when rugged terrain was not a concern, and driving cattle to southern markets. Settlers on the Upper Hunter, such as David, tended to use the 'Bulga track'.

The first steamer to service the region 'S.S. Sophia Jane' from Sydney docked at the Green Hills (later known as Morpeth³⁴²) on 12 June 1831. It was also the first steam powered sea going service in Australian waters.³⁴³ A regular weekly service to Newcastle and Green Hills commenced on Friday evening at 8 o'clock, from Campbell's Wharf, on 8 July 1831.

The "Sophia Jane" was a flush-decked schooner rigged paddle ship. Small by later standards at 256

³⁴⁰ First village of Jerry's Plains, by Ian Ellis, Hunter Valley News, 30 Sept 1992. Ellis refers to David and his brother Thomas settling there in 1832 but seems to be confusing David's brother with David's eldest son who very much involved himself in his father's business affairs in Jerry's Plains.

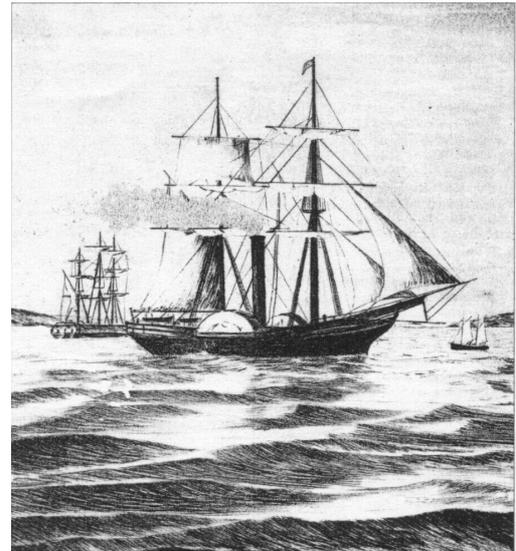
³⁴¹ First village of Jerry's Plains, by Ian Ellis, Hunter Valley News 30 Sept 1992

³⁴² The new town of Morpeth was founded by E. C. Close in 1834 per Readers Digest 'Australian Places' 1993

³⁴³ The Sophia Jane arrived from England on 17 May 1831. Commemorative Plaque by Council of City of Maitland 8 September 1979 at Former Courthouse built 1862 refers.



tons, 50 horsepower, she only drew six feet draught and travelled at eight miles an hour. In 1832, the ‘Sophia Jane’ was joined by ‘William the Fourth’, a locally constructed schooner rigged paddle-driven boat. These two vessels were soon joined by many others, to move goods between Morpeth and Sydney.³⁴⁴ From this point on, travelling by sea between Maitland and Sydney became safer and more reliable than previously possible by sailing vessel – And generally the fastest way to travel to Sydney until, perhaps the advent of a railway service Morpeth’s success was based on the flourishing river trade. Green Hills ‘operated as a funnel for the produce of the rich Hunter region’ from the 1820s, initially by sailing boat. ‘A survey map by G.B. White in 1833 showed as many as eight wharves. It should be kept in mind that Newcastle, at this time, had no port facilities for general cargoes, being merely a loading point for small colliers of light draught, while the road between Maitland and Newcastle, as a means of access, was practically impassable.’³⁴⁵



Sophia Jane, From and Etching by an unknown artist (Mitchell Library)

#David and Elizabeth’s son, George, was born on 12 July 1831 at ‘Lower Pitt Town’, and baptised 24 August 1831 at Pitt Town, Church of England, parish church.³⁴⁶

The Sydney Morning Herald of 28 November 1831 reported on the Hawkesbury:

‘THE CROPS – The crops are in an excellent state on the Hawkesbury, and the several branches; and harvests will commence in a week or fortnight at the most. Some indications of rust were observed long ago, which have increased since the

late rains, and the rust has spread over a considerable portion within the last fortnight. The tares are exceedingly nutritious on the flat lands. The early corn is healthy, and the orchards present a luxuriant display of fruit. We cannot give

an opinion as to the quantity compared with last year, but it is said by good judges, that it will not, be so great as was anticipated in the early part of the season’

Bushrangers

Also evident in the same paper, was the fact that David senior was living at Cattai, not far from his son and daughter-in-law. The Sydney Herald of 28 November 1831 reports:

“Last week, Mrs. Brown of Caddie Creek, was startled at midnight by a cry of murder, which she supposed was occasioned by violent treatment to her father-in-law, a respectable settler of long standing in the colony.

Mrs. Brown called up the government servant, and presented him with a loaded pistol, when he voluntarily proposed to rush out of the house to his rescue. On putting his proposal into execution, he was surprised to see a man standing at a short distance, on which he went boldly up to him, and desired him to deliver himself up. The stranger, however, thinking he had got into hot water, made off for the fence, which he

leaped over, but not till he had received the contents of the pistol, as was obvious in the morning by the marks of blood. The government servant followed hard after him, but when about to leap the fence, he heard a noise behind him, and on looking round, saw another bushranger coming towards him, upon which he resolutely seized the pistol by the barrel, and struck the second assailant a severe blow upon the head, upon which he also followed his companion.

The government servant suspecting that a greater number of bushrangers had assailed the house, returned to the assistance of his mistress, and receiving another pistol, he returned to

the fence but could find no trace of the depredators, who had been thus beaten off without doing any injury.

The cry of murder, it is supposed, was raised by the villains themselves, to induce the family to open the door of the house, when they would have rushed in and plundered it, and perhaps murdered the inmates.

When executions are the daily place of unfortunate men who run into the bush, some mark of approbation should be conferred on so heroic an action as this, in which the property, and perhaps the lives of the numerous family, were saved by the fidelity of a courageous domestic.”

³⁴⁴ Readers Digest ‘Australian Places’ 1993, Item 127. A letter date 30 December 1841 to the Hunter River Gazette argued the need for the steamship service to be extended to Maitland. At that time the writer suggests that that part of the river was only being used by ‘a few sailboats’ – He? acknowledged Morpeth was only five miles by road to Maitland – This geographical factor tended to cause destinations for steamships going to Morpeth to be described as Maitland.

³⁴⁵ Morpeth: Where Bishops and Ships Once Rode Tall, 1989, Shirley Richards and Peter Muller, Published by Kookaburra Educational.

³⁴⁶ BDM Reference V1831 609 15 0 and V1831 10733 1C 0 (NSWSR Reel 5001).



At this time there were likely to be five of Elizabeth’s seven children with her in the house. The article also makes it clear that David (II) was away in some other part of the colony, most likely Jerry’s Plains, or somewhere in between. It is probable, that he was accompanied by his wife’s half-brothers; George, and David Humphries, (who by then were 16 and 22 years old) and possibly sons; Thomas, and James (ages 14 and 12).

This event revealed that David Brown senior, at that time had reason to be near his son’s residence late at night, that is, he had his own accommodation in the neighbourhood. This situation is reflected in the earlier purchase of the land next to his son’s Erskine Street property, some fifteen years earlier. With labour and carpentry skills ‘on tap’, and a plentiful supply of timber available, erecting a small cabin or, adding an outside room to the existing structure posed little difficulty. It was not an unusual occurrence for humble farmhouses to have separate room attached to the house to accommodate visitors. It was sometimes known as a ‘strangers room’.

Having said this, it is interesting to take note of the Brown’s original stone cottage at lot 39. It was partitioned by an original stone wall into two large rooms. Possibly there had been a doorway through the wall. There were probably originally timber partitions in each area. The high roof may have had some mezzanine facility. At some point the north and south ends were made open. Also, it may have at some earlier time, a ‘stranger’s room’.



Brown’s original stone cottage at lot 39

The FE Holden sedan to the left was stored in the south end of the cottage. The car had enough room for it to fit lengthwise with one metre to spare, and both doors to be fully open with one door nearly touching a 60cm wide bench along the eastern wall. *Circ 1956*³⁴⁷

In that same year of 1831, government officials decided to establish a mounted police station at Jerry’s Plains to help control the increasing bands of marauders roaming the district and to help deal with any trouble between the whites and the Aborigines. Barracks and officers quarters were built on the surveyed official village reserve in 1832 to house this branch consisting of one subaltern, one sergeant and 11 rank and file.

Looking south at the Brown’s stone Cottage.

The cottage was covered by native climbing fig tree vine. The northern end was extended eight feet to store produce, hay fertiliser, tractors, bikes, horse tack and trucks.

Pictured in the northern end of the cottage is a 1940’s Bedford truck. Robert Thornton Tolson has his back to the camera. *Circa 1952.*³⁴⁸



³⁴⁷ Photo and recollections of farm courtesy of James Tolson. The length of that model Holden is 4.5 meters. The width with the doors open is 3.1 meters. Pe Lloyd Bracher, Cattai.

³⁴⁸ Photo and recollections of farm courtesy of James Tolson



The Post Offices of Patrick Plains

‘On 1st September 1829 the Darlington Post Office was opened. Darlington was the name of a proposed Government township on the north bank of the Hunter at Singleton. However, the town was never surveyed or inhabited, with the private town of Singleton developing instead. The deputy postmaster was 18 year old Alfred Glennie, who lived with his brother James on their property at Dulwich on Fal Brook, about 16 km from Singleton. James was a magistrate and Alfred was also a clerk to the Bench of Magistrates. It appeared that most of the postal duties were being performed at Dulwich as James wrote a letter on 16th November 1829 complaining that the mounted policeman was only bringing the post as far as Patrick’s Plains (Singleton) and if they couldn’t bring it on to Dulwich then they could get another deputy postmaster.

Early in March 1830, approval was given for the mail to be taken on to Dulwich, but the Dulwich office continued to be called the Darlington Post Office. This resulted in the Dulwich area becoming known to locals as Darlington. By 1831, the residents of Singleton were becoming more vocal about the inconvenience of having their post office at Dulwich. As a result, on 31st December 1831, the Darlington Post Office at Dulwich was closed. The Alcorn’s Post Office, at his inn, about 2 km from Dulwich, opened the next day, still with Alfred Glennie in charge. At the time, the most northerly

Inland Post Office in the Australian colonies. For the first twelve months of operation, the mail between Darlington and Alcorn’s inn was carried by the mounted police.³⁴⁹



Indicative of many a bush inn and post office – On Mail days people gathered from all directions.

There was a problem getting a postmaster for the new post office at Singleton but it eventually opened on 21st May 1832 with John Browne in charge. However, it was still called the Darlington Post Office. This continued to cause confusion with even Government Gazettes being sent to both Singleton and the mythical town of

Darlington. Eventually the post office was renamed Singleton on 1st December 1841. Alcorn’s Inn Post Office closed on 31st December 1834 and Alfred Glennie went to Singleton where he once again became the postmaster at Darlington Post Office until March 1837!³⁵⁰

*‘... Late rains have produced heavy floods, both on the Hunter and the Hawkesbury, the great injury of agriculturists of those districts.’
Sydney Herald,
Monday, 26 March 1832³⁵¹*

Streamships had begun to service the Hawkesbury as well as the Hunter about 1832. Where steamers called in at farms along the river that had no wharf, the procedure was to run the bow of the ship into a mud bank. A long plank was shoved out to the bank, over which the deck-hands carried the produce. Small feeder boats brought produce from the Colo River, MacDonald River, Webbs Creek and Mangrove Creek to the steamers at Wisemans Ferry, Spencer and points downstream.³⁵²

³⁴⁹ Dawn In The Valley. p273.

³⁵⁰ The Postal History of NSW 1788-1901.

³⁵¹ S.H. Domestic Intelligence, P3

³⁵² Hawkesbury Heritage, Stan Stevens, Published Hawkesbury Shire Council 1984. ISBN 0 949694 06 1.