

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

Student: June Bailey
Lecturer: Margaret Henry

The Australian Agricultural Company

The Australian Agriculture Company was a major force in the development and expansion of the Hunter Valley and the large estates under their control. In the beginning they sought only to raise sheep for fine wool, the fleece to be returned to the London Wool Exchange and sold to the various Woollen Mills around England. Because the purchasing agent had chosen the wrong site for sheep, these plans had later to be diversified. They tried to grow a variety of grain, none proving too successful. It was their monopoly on coal mining in Newcastle, and the buying and selling of other estates that gave the Company their ultimate strength in this area up until 1985 when the Company sold its last interest in New South Wales.

After the presentation of the Bigge's report in 1822 which was to encourage settlement in N.S.W. the Australian Agriculture Company was formed in London in April 1824. The Company was established by an Act of Parliament and Royal Charter. It was capitalised to one million pounds ; the major shareholders included the directors of the Bank of England, the East India Company and members of Parliament. Robert Dawson, previously an agent to Lord Barrington of Becket near Faringdon, was sent to New South Wales to choose a suitable site for the Company's one million acre grant. The whole operation was a huge undertaking which was to see many changes to the structure of the Company over the next 160 odd years.

Robert Dawson after his appointment as The Australian Agriculture Company agent in December 1824 and prior to his departure from England, went over to France accompanied by H.T. Ebsworth (a London Clerk) and N.A. Nilson (a Consultant) to purchase some merino sheep, horned cattle and several horses to take with them on the voyage to Australia. Twenty seven chosen men, along with their wives and families, embarked on two ships "York and Brother." They sailed from Plymouth in June 1825 arriving in Sydney in November 1825. After their arrival, Robert Dawson was under immense pressure to choose the site and get the Company's large operation under way. One of the most interesting prospects was at Port Stephens, so Dawson sailed up the Coast on the ship "Lord Liverpool" in January 1826. He was very impressed with this area, particularly

the waterways and their easy accessibility to and from the Port. He was so influenced that he took the whole grant inland stretching from Port Stephen north to the Manning River. He established the main settlement on the northern shores of Port Stephens and named the village of Carrabeen (in 1830 it was renamed Carrington). This village was to see great changes over the oncoming years and was used as the landing place for most all the immigrants arriving to live and work in the area. Robert Dawson began to explore the land north. He had good relations with the local Aboriginal tribes, learning something of their language. He used Aboriginal names, Karuah, Booral etc., although further north the dialect for the Aborigines there was different, and they were not so friendly, so English named places became Barrington, Stroud, Gloucester, and Lakes and Rivers: Myall Lakes, Wallis Lake, Crawford River: names still surviving today. When the Company saw the area was quite unsuitable for sheep, they experimented with crops; wheat, maize, barley, and tobacco; even silk was experimented with. These met with only limited success. The Colonial Company suspended Robert Dawson who, they rumoured, was too extravagant, privately speculated in land and stock and the biggest complaint, his choice of the Grant land was unsuitable. Dawson returned to London and was soon followed by James Macarthur, both explaining to the Directors the problems that faced the Company. They were shocked at the prospect of losing their investment. It was decided a more senior man, and a public figure should head the operations. Back at Port Stephens, John Macarthur himself took on the job of Acting Agent, followed by the young Edward Ebsworth, for a time.

It was Sir Edward Parry who the Company appointed Commissioner in June 1829. Coal was to be a major investment and the Company had tried unsuccessfully the previous year to establish a "Coal Establishment." Assisted by John Henderson, Henry Dangar, Doctor Nibet, Sir Edward Parry negotiated again with the Governor and the Colonial Committee for the exchange of lands. This enabled the Company to obtain an extra 2,000 acres Grant with the right to mine coal at Newcastle. This was finally settled in August 1833 which also included this Pastoral Grant; Western part of the original Port Stephens Estate; the Liverpool Plains "Warra"; The Peel River, "Goonoo Goonoo." For the next

31 years there were no other coal grants nor were convicts assigned to work coal by the Governor; they had a "monopoly protection." Their new pit, A Pit, was situated near the corner of modern King and Darby Streets. Coal was a huge success for the Company and for the future development of Newcastle as a city.

When gold was discovered on the banks of the Peel River in 1852, not far from Hanging Rock, the then Deputy Governor, A.W. Blane, notified London of the find. Once the find was known, the Company's shares rose dramatically on the London Stock Exchange. The Company quickly set about forming a new Company separate from the A.A. Company. They purchased the Peel Estate and renamed themselves the Peel River Land and Mineral Company. Many people came into the area during the Gold Rush and a township had to be built. The township of Goonoo Goonoo was built by 1,400 convicts and still exists today. After the Gold Rush, the Company reverted back to pastoral holdings. It remained so until May 1985, when the Company sold Goonoo Goonoo as a single parcel of land and the other choice farming lots by sub-division, to end the A.A. Company's holdings in New South Wales.

The A.A. Company did not always have success in their operations. At first labour was supplied by convicts. Then it was realised that skilled tradesmen were needed and they tried to entice men from the local areas. When that failed, they imported workers from all over the British Isles, Germany, even China. They came as shepherds, miners, colliers, labourers, blacksmiths, bricklayers, carpenters and settlers, all to try their skills in a new country. The Company, as well as the Colony, went through a period of great hardship; drought, economic depression, scarcity of labour during the Gold Rushes years, strikes at the coal mines in Newcastle. Their sheep were boiled down to make tallow. Prices dropped for fat cattle. However, it was this coal interest that changed the face of Newcastle. Land was sold locally, sub-divided into building blocks as the coal mines closed. The Company's last pit was closed in 1916, and after 85 years the A.A. Company ceased all coal operations in New South Wales.

Buildings and relics of their past still remain in this area. Stroud is very proud of their heritage even to the "wormary" where attempts for a silk industry began. Karuah Valley and Booral including Booral House, churches and inns are there to remind future generations of the Australian Agricultural Company's development in those early days.

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Volume 1. #3.

Karuah Valley and Historical Stroud
Society Members

A U S T R A L I A N H I S T O R Y

Student: June Bailey
Lecturer: Margaret Henry

Transcript of Tape

Mr & Mrs Eggelton

And

Mr Savage

INTERVIEWER:

Can you tell me where you first started working

MR EGGELTON:

Yes. I, my father was a railway man and he suggested to me if I wish to go out over the Blue Mountains try to earn some money by taking drapery over there and selling them. He suggested he buy a motor car for us and I had a mate that could drive and I was only a young fellow then anyway away we went to a place over the Blue Mountains a place call "Sunny Corner" a place about 20-25 miles this side of Bathurst and anyhow I went there and went down into the bush one day and I was talking to an old chap there and he asked me my name so I said Mick Eggelton was my name and he said I am Paddy Barry he said would you have a Dad by the name of Harry Eggelton. I said yes that's my father. Oh well he said I'm his uncle. Well you see anyhow when we were leaving he said "If you don't want to go on any further with the drapery to come back and he'll take me on as a share farmer. Anyhow I went back there and I was only 14 years old then, roughly round about the 14 . So I was share farming on potatoes, peas and turnips and anyhow I could plough when I went there, I could plough when I was nine years old. Anyhow I was there when the opening of the harbour bridge I think that was 1932.

INTERVIEWER:

When did you first start to work in this area

MR EGGELTON:

Yes well I came to a little place called Martinsville out from Morisset and anyhow we were taken to the Wattagan Mountains by bullock wagon and we went into the Onley Plantation - uh - we were working with mattocks, axes, clearing around the pines. Now we worked there for quite a long time anyhow they suggest that or they said the Pines were condemned so we went onto the roads clearing from Martinsville to the Onley Plantation and anyhow we got that done and they sent me from there to Crawford River near Bulahdelah.

INTERVIEWER:

And where um did you continue with this work

MR EGGELTON:

We continued on the Crawford River maintaining old roads and things into the forestry there and thats all we were doing on the roads.

INTERVIEWER:

Going back to the Onley Plantation did you know when that was first commenced.

MR EGGELTON:

Yes well I think that was started in World War One or after World War One they wanted pines, they wanted pines here in Australia I think to find out how they would grow on the mountains. So some of the soldiers that came back were working on that mountain and they got pines from ah I think over in America and they brought different classes of pines out here and ah thats how the pines started on the Onley Plantation.

INTERVIEWER:

Your wife has said she lived all her life in this area can you tell me about her early life at Rosenthal.

MR EGGELTON:

Well yes as far as I know they run around in that area with nothing else to do only home work helping their mother. There was nothing in those days and those days you never seen a vehicle only a horse and sulky or buggy go past those places might be only once a day in those days came cause that's going back 50 odd 60 years ago. They were really old roads in those days but anyhow that's nearly about as much as I can tell you about the wife sort of thing until I have to let her tell you the rest of the yarn sort of thing.

MRS EGGELTON:

In the early days we had one small school and it was taught by one school teacher and taught up until 6th class. There was no work for young people except for boys they worked in mills and bush work the only time I left Rosenthal I went to Sydney for 18 months during my stay there my mother became very ill and I had to return home. My first car I can remember was a taxi a seven seater and then I was married. Yes on my wedding day I walked to the church on a dirt road. Our Sunday school was taught by correspondence and my mother was the teacher. Our correspondence once a month and had to go to Sydney to be corrected. Well now I'll let my husband tell you the rest.

INTERVIEWER:

What was your next job after you were married Mr Eggelton

MR EGGELTON:

Yes, well I decided to leave the road work and I said to the wife I will go and have a go at the bush work. Anyhow we decided again to go into the saw mills and I worked in saw mills for

quite a good many years. And ah anyhow I was hit by a flitch of Timber and it frightened me and I decided to go to the bush again. Eh! in the bush work I got sick and I had Rheumatoid Arthritis and that stopped the bush work and for 12 month at home with my wife looking after me I thought I had to do something so the man that I had been working for in the bush he told me have a crack at the dairy, so he helped me out at the dairying I still wasn't better so the children started to do my work for me, so I was much pleased on that and anyhow as things went along I could give them a spell I went back to it myself on them into the dairy. I must tell you that when I was in the mills, World War 2 started and I was exempt because I was a sawyer. So we did do the VDC.

INTERVIEWER:

Now Mr Eggeleton did you always farm after that

MR EGGELETON:

Yes yes I sent to Booral that about 1960. This property was owned by the AA Company in the first place and anyhow people by the name Lowes were on that property too when we went there. A chap by the name of Arthur Ralph bought the place or part of it so I share daired with him for about 9 years then he was real sick and he decided to sell his portion so he sold it to a chap by the name of Les Savage eh! I still went on with cattle and on this place on this on this old homestead there was a church just built down below it. It was all sandstone so as years went along they shifted the church I think slab by slab to Booral. Um that church is still standing and that is about as much as I know about the church but anyhow back to the place again that Mr Savage has bought we - we did cattle work there and I can't tell too much more about that now only -

INTERVIEWER:

I believe there is still an old homestead there on Booral House property

MR EGGELETON:

Yes yes that is the old homestead from the AA Company built there for some of their men and it is still standing and is a lovely old place to walk into eh! cause in those days they had gardens and everything else around the place which made it very comfortable but still its there for anybody to see and anyhow Mr Savage decided to sell his portion again so we decided to retire and I came down onto the Booral - Bucketts Way Road and I retired.

INTERVIEWER:

Mr Eggeleton wasn't able to tell me anything further about the AA Company and I was able to locate his previous boss Mr Les Savage

and he has consented to give me a further interview about the AA Company. Mr Savage I wonder if you could tell me what you know of the AA Company.

MR SAVAGE:

Eh! as far as I know they were formed by English interests in about 1820 or I've always had the idea that Macarthur was instrumental in that and the ground work was done while he was in England and banished by Bligh I could be wrong in that. Anyway they first came to NSW to select 1 million acres to primarily to raise sheep as I understand. When you deal with land in Newcastle nearly all the old system title deed start off with AA Company grant of 1 million. It was a bad choice from an agriculture point of view, because the land they chose of Newcastle north was simply not sheep country eh! so they um came to Port Stephens to Tahlee and Carrington and established headquarters there I think they call their manager they call him The Superintendent and they did so until just a few years ago. The next place they built very shortly afterwards was Booral House which is a few miles up the Karuah River and shortly after that the manager's residence was at Stroud. I think that was as far as they went in that region. Subsequently they took up or part of their estate may have been cleared but I rather think that it was a new area but they took up and they shifted their operations out to eh near Tamworth now what was the name of that place yes they shifted their operations out to Goonoo Goonoo near Tamworth which was a much better site and their property assumed the proportion of a town they had a church and many buildings there. Goonoo Goonoo was only sold just a few years ago. I've also struck them all in a property up north in Queensland where they have quite a few of these large pastoral holdings, they are still going incidentally and that was called Rothan Park it was a place about 4 million acres where they raise cattle, very profitable and well run enterprise

Now in Newcastle here they got into coal mining and established an office down at Merewether Street and it's still there and now is Fanny's Restaurant and quite a nice building. During the war years they still had old style clerks sitting there on high stools with green eye-shades writing with pen and ink and that's all gone now of course, but they got into coal mining in NSW and manage to get it, must have been round about 1846-47 somewhere in that period getting a monopoly on coal mining in NSW something that the people very much resented, but nevertheless they held it for quite awhile then they had an argument with Rev L Threlkeld for example at Belmont the fellow that started the first Aboriginal mission there. He had started a coal mine at Coal Point in Newcastle called Ebenezer Colliery and AA Company tried to have him stopped because of their monopoly but he'd been granted his "rights" six months before the AA Company got theirs, so he was able to carry on.

Then in about somewhere about the mid 1850's two brother John and Alexander Brown started a mining coal at Four Mile Creek in East

Maitland and they challenge the authority of the AA Company to stop them doing so there was such a public outcry that the Government had to support the Browns against the AA Company and so the AA Company lost their monopoly and that was the beginning of J&A Brown the great probably the largest coal mining Company we have in this region.

INTERVIEWER:

You owned Bowral or Booral House I wonder if you could tell me some history that you may know of in that area

MR SAVAGE:

Yes the house was built in a beautiful location alongside the Karuah River just where it goes through rapids and becomes fresh. It's a lovely valley facing north and reinforcing the likelihood of Macarthur's interest in the Company in fact the house very similar to Elizabeth Farm in fact it was designed by John Verge the architect who designed Elizabeth Farm it was designed on much the same architectural plan and all the details of the joinery are the same as in Elizabeth Farm. It had another wing on at one time that's since disappeared and the convicts have dug a well, incredible depth through this rock, hard rock, with this big crow-bar, which I found down the well, and there are convict's graves there that you can see, outlined, particularly in dry periods, but by a large it's a house built of rendered brick to be in today's terms round about 15-18 squares somewhere about that area. Beautifully appointed place. In fact the first occupant of it was - got himself into hot water over the quality of the house. The company or some members of the company were of the opinion the house was far too opulent for what it was intended for. I think that was Thomas Layman, no, James Ebsworth. I'm sorry, who came out from England. with his new bride and their first child was born in the house. Just down stream from it there's a wharf a stone wharf known as Booral Wharf, this wharf is in remarkably good shape it's a very large structure and extremely well built, it's very high and must be 20 ft high and 60 ft long and it was built by the company and I believe around about the 1830's/1840 but it must be still as good to-day as the day it was built and it was used to carry a lot of goods up to the Port Stephens area because it was just at the limit of navigation of the Karuah River about a mile below Booral House and I've heard tell there used to be a railway actually ran down to it there is certainly sign of stone-pitched embankments there where there's been quite a road going down along side the river to this wharf and heading north.

As to whether the Company is still in existence or not I'm not sure, I know that in later years they concentrated on cattle, particularly in the tropical north of Australia they have done that very well they have got that well organized and they have been very very profitable. As to whether they still exist or not I'm not sure because I remember reading, with regret about 3 years ago that another Company was making a take-over offer for

them I really hope it didn't come off because they've been a great force for the good I think in Australia, Thank you.

A U S T R A L I A N H I S T O R Y

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Summary of Taped Interviews
with Early Settlers in the Port Stephens Estate
and the Australian Agriculture Company

Summary of Interviews
With Early Settlers in the Bulahdelah District
And the Australian Agriculture Company

Arthur Eggelton, like so many other men during and after the Depression years, sought employment in any job offered. Men would go anywhere and do anything for work. Cities had little to offer for the huge number of men who were unemployed during those years. Some men like Mr Eggelton tried their luck in country areas.

Many schemes and ideas were experimented with to give employment, especially to those men who had returned from the First World War. One such a scheme instituted by the Forestry Commission in 1921 was a plantation devised for the cultivation and growing of slash-pine trees, which had been bought from America for the experiment. Onley Plantation was one of them on the Waddigan Mountains and covered 2,000 acres. Men were taken to the Onley Plantation from Martinsville near Morisset by the only form of transportation, bullock wagon. These unskilled workers cleared areas between the trees to keep the undergrowth down and to make fire-breaks.

Onley Plantation by 1935 was declared inviable and closed. One of the many problems was that the native hardwood trees grew through and destroyed the imported trees. Men had worked on the roads to help the logged trees to be brought down to the saw mills or to the rivers for transportation elsewhere. Some of these men stayed in the area to help build roads to open up that area more eg. Crawford River Road, while others filled trees, or worked in the saw mills. A few worked on the farms, especially dairy farms. Some married and settled in the area.

There was no work for women in the bush except to help their mothers in housework or go into domestic service. Children only went to school until 6th class. Up until 1938 the only transportation was by horse or horse and buggy in the Bulahdelah area. Roads were bad and unsealed.

People survived and as time went on work was easier to get and the area progressed as it is to-day.

PART 2 A.A. COMPANY

The Australian Agriculture Company was formed in London in April 1924. The shareholders included members of the British Parliament, directors of the East India Company and the Bank of England. The company was granted 1 million acres in New South Wales. This purpose was to raise fine-wooled sheep with their fleece being sold on the London Market. Once the land was purchased, the first colony was set up at Carrington, Port Stephens in January 1826. This estate covered almost 500 000 acres and extended as far north as Taree. This countryside proved unsuitable for sheep raising, so other ventures were

tried; growing of wheat, maize, barley and tobacco - even silk was experimented with. None of these ventures proved successful. Later other estates were purchased including, Walla (on the Liverpool Plains) and the Peel River Estate. When gold was discovered near the Peel River at Tamworth the A.A. Company formed another company in 1853 named the Peel River Land and Mineral Company. This grant of land was 313 000 acres and became known as Goonoo Goonoo. Goonoo Goonoo was still owned by the A.A. Company until sold in July 1985. A.A. Company also took over coal production in Newcastle 1828.

Over the years the A.A. Company sold off lands by sub-division to smaller holdings. On one of these estates in Booral stands a lovely old homestead 'Booral House', which is situated on the eastern bank of the Karuah River. Booral House was first occupied by James Ebsworth, acting Superintendent for the A.A. Company and later by William Blane. Convict labour erected Booral House in 1831. It was a showplace, a majestic homestead with spacious gardens and much the envy of if the other officers in the company. After years of neglect the present owners have done much to restore this historical home to its rightful place. Les Savage owned Booral House for many years and sold it only recently, to another member of his family. A mile south from Booral is Booral Wharf, a huge stone structure which was originally erected on that site because of steep banks and especially deep water for the ships to dock, so they could transport stock and goods to and from Port Stephens.

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I, *Doris and Arthur Eggleton* give ^{OUR} my
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L. H. Savage

Signed *A. Eggleton, D. E. Eggleton*

Date *11th August 1989*

Interviewer *Mrs June Bailey*