

TRANSCRIPT OF RECORDED INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWEE: Dianne Parnell

INTERVIEWER: Yvonne Wardell

Y. Dianne, could you tell me a bit about yourself?

D. Well my name is Dianne Fay Parnell, I was born at Glen Innes N.S.W., I am a descendent of John and Martha Elliott of Buttai the original settlers of the Upper Hunter, through my mothers side who is Florence Ruth Elliott.

Y. Can you tell us a bit about the Elliotts, who were the first settlers at Buttai?

D. Well, John and Martha came from England on the "Hugh Crawford" in the year of 1824, John lived at Rothbury in England and Martha from Carlisle, England. They had one child, Margaret, when they sailed on the "Hugh Crawford" to Australia, and the remaining eleven children were born to John and Martha in the colony of Australia.

They came to Australia on a seven year contract of McQueen of Segenhoe, as a blacksmith. After the seven years at Segenhoe he returned to Maitland and made the first steam engine at Maitland for Semphills Flour Mill. He also grew grain, wheat. He was always a very well respected man, at some stage of his life he was a constable, courier, he was allotted convict servants. His wife Martha was well liked by the Aborigines, she also educated all the children and the neighbours children, she was also a midwife and all her daughters followed in her footsteps. John and Martha had 12 children and they all grew up to be adults, which was very rare in those days.

From Maitland they moved to Wyabah, which is now called "The Meadows", it is between Tarro and Minmi on Leneghan's Drive, where they used to graze cattle and still continued with their growing of wheat. They had no fences so when the stock used to roam they would go for days looking for them, and they would always find them at a place called Buttai., because Buttai always had ample water. So when John Elliott heard of the land at Buttai, which was owned by T.V. Bloomfield, he decided that because of the water supply, that was the property that he must have.

Y. How did it come to be called "Buttai"?

D. Family stories go that John Elliott stood on top of the hill at Buttai and he said "There is nobody here but I". That's one story, and another story is that they used to have trouble with the Aborigines coming into their cornfields at night and to prevent this from happening, John Elliott cut faces into pumpkins and lit them up every night, and when the Aborigines came along and saw the faces of the pumpkins, they would go running off singing "Buttai";! Buttai;! Buttai;! which means "ghost!"

- Y. What sort of occupations did people have in those days?
- D. They used to cut cedar trees, there were a lot of cedar trees grown in this area in those days, and they used to cut timber and ship it as far as Queensland, Tamworth, by bullock teams or horse teams, or take it to Morpeth to ship to Sydney or overseas. They also cut sandstone blocks from out of "Kangaroo Hill" and the surrounding area, they also cut shingles for the roofs on houses, and they grew fruit, stone fruit or citrus fruit and vegetables, which used to be sold in at the Maitland Markets.

Grandfather, Wilfred Henry Elliott had the largest orchard in the Maitland district. I can remember family stories when money was in short supply at Christmas time, the elderly of the family used to go and pick quinces off the trees and put them in bags and decorate them with ribbons as a novelty for young children to wake up to on Christmas morning.

The Price's Boiling Down Works started in approximately 1860, their main product was tallow, or lard.

- Y. What difference did that make to the area?
- D. Well it brought a lot of different families to the area, new names appeared on school records where it showed that the fathers were butchers that worked at Price's Boiling Down Works, and occupations were butchers, farmers, labourers, and I believe that there was something like 150 homes at Buttai in itself.
- Y. How did they get the tallow out to wherever it was going?
- D. They had a big tanker, it looked something similar to a tanker of today, where they used to put the tallow in it and tow it with bullock teams and that would go as far as Tamworth, Maitland and all over the district.
- Y. Maybe Sydney too?
- D. Probably Sydney as well!
- Y. Was there any coal at Buttai?
- D. They did dig a mine shaft looking for coal, we believe that it was too far down and in years later R. & A. Brown did survey the land for coal but they didn't seem to get any either, although there was coal in the hills around which today has been mined and been successful.
- Y. Tell me about what people did in the 1900's, that would be the third generation of Elliotts wouldn't it?
- D. Yes, well there were approximately four or five mines in the area and the descendants all had jobs as miners, and there was a stage during the depression when there was road gangs, and then they all had their crops and timber cutting and splitting, props and telegraph poles. My mother tells me a story of when she was ten years old, her and her three younger sisters used to take my grandfather his lunch up into the bush, and to find him he used to put markings on trees to tell them which way he had gone.

Grandma used to wrap his dinner up into a tea towel to keep it warm and it would stay hot until they arrived with it.

- Y. What did they do for social life around that time?
- D. Social life was always fun. They played cricket, they used to play matches between Buttai and Black Hill and it always turned out in a real good day. Then they also had social dances at the school, and all the members of the family were musical minded and a lot of them liked to sing, they had choirs.
- Y. Was there ever any sort of a village, was there any shops or business premises that were a central thing?
- D. Well the closest shop used to be Avis's shop at Buchannan, Buttai had only a Post Office from about 1940, it was run by Florrie Elliott.
- Y. Dianne what about Buttai as it is today, can you describe it as it is today?
- D. Well, what have we got at Buttai, we have the Buttai Barn, that came approximately five, six years ago which was built on the site of the old Buttai School. There are no orchards at Buttai now although there is still a lot of fruit trees that are still bearing fruit. There is a gravel quarry, which is owned by Darakon now. John Renshaw Drive came through Buttai at end of the 1960's, followed by the electricity. Before that we had tilley lights or generators. The telephone came to Buttai in the the 1950's, although there was only one at the Post Office, if you wanted to make a phone call you had to go to the Post Office, and now everybody has a phone.
- Y. John Renshaw Drive is quite close isn't it, how far away from your house is it?
- D. Approximately 100 metres.
- Y. Your property goes over the other side of John Renshaw Drive too doesn't , John Renshaw Drive sort of cuts through it, and there is more land over the other side.
- D. Yes, that's right, there is approximately 20 acres over the other side of John Renshaw Drive, and it is very valuable in respect to the Elliott family, because there are private cemeteries up there. Our very first John and Martha are buried up there, their headstones date back from John who died in 1874 and Martha in 1877.
- Y. Is the cemetery still being used now?
- D. Up till last year, when my Uncle Jack passed away, It is still in use now.
- Y. Dianne at this point, I think we might take a drive around your property so you can show me some of the sites you have been describing!

Well, we've stopped the car where the road passes below a very steep hill. What's the hill called Dianne?

- D. Well they used to call it either Kangaroo Hill or Lemon Tree Hill. There are still lemon trees growing up there.
- Y. Would they have been planted?
- D. No, I think they are just from seeds come up from before, but he used to have a lot of trees up there, and because it is so steep he has built contours of rocks, and rock hedges all the way along the side of the hill, and there are steps and tracks for horse and sleigh. They used to cart water every day on a sleigh.
- Y. And what sort of things did they grow there?
- D. Vegetables, peas, it's so unbelievable because, to me it looks just like rock and you wouldn't grow anything on them.
- Y. You would think some of these flat areas would have been better, but he must have had his reasons!
- D. I think it's out of the frost. Well we have planted citrus trees around our place and mum used to always say "Grandfather said you will never get citrus trees to grow around your house" and everyone of them died. But stone fruit, we can get to grow, and that's what he had all in the paddocks.
- Y. Because of the frost?
- D. Because of the frost I'd say.
- Y. That's incredible, so they used the horse and sleigh to get water up there, and suppose to get the crops down too?
- D. I'd say so, yes.
- D. This is where the Boiling Down Works used to be. My mother reckonsthat the stockyards used to be on the opposite side of the road, to what it is now, but when we came here, or as far as I can remember, it was here still. If you drive up a bit further I can show you where the..... in the paddock on the right hand side of the stockyard is where the well for the Boiling Down Works is. It's all bricked around inside the hole, and there are a lot of remains that you can tell there has been some kind of buildings of some description there.
- Y. Would that be just over that rise there?
- D. Yes, just where that sort of thistle is. There used to be a house where that peppercorn tree is there, and where those feed troughs are there was a house there. The one up there, William Groves used to live there, I think he used to rent it off Prices but this one here, Prices lived in there and the original old house here, the oldest one used to be up further in the bush.

- Y. I suppose that at the time the Boiling Down Works was here, there would have been quite a few houses around here?
- D. Yes I know of a home over there, McCormacks used to own that, and they are all descendants of the Elliotts. This dam here, over the years somebody had populated it with fish and we had a lot of rain, and I remember the fish coming out over the dam wall and flowing on to the paddocks and people were just picking up the fish and taking them home for tea.

Back where the old house was, out the front of the old house, the story in the Elliott family is that in front of the old house is where the son of John, Wilfred and he were up in the bush one day and they came across an Aboriginal girl, that had broken her leg, and they took her home and looked after her for a couple of months or so and, when they returned her to the Aborigines, because she had had contact with the white people, they built a fire in front of that old house and burnt her to death. They threw her in the fire.

What I've been told through family, is that Martha Elliott had a very good relationship with the Aborigines. She used to give them the bones out of the stew, that she used to cook, and they would think that was lovely - she used to be able to have a good relationship and contact with them, as wild as they were, she seemed to be able to communicate with them this way.

- D. The Prices land at Buttai, stories tell that all the waste from the Boiling Down Works, the bones, the intestines - they used to dig large trenches and bury all of these remains in the trenches and cover them up, and they formed "blood and bone", and in results the paddocks were lush with grass.
- Y. Well they are even now aren't they? They look pretty good now and we haven't really had much rain, it looks good even now.
- Y. That's the Buttai Barn over there on the hill?
- D. No, this is the Buttai Barn here, that's the home belonging to Buttai Barn here. All around the Buttai Barn there used to be orchards, this was going back forty odd years ago. There are still trees from the original orchards, stone fruit, beautiful fruit, you have never tasted anything like it. Where the Buttai Barn is, used to be the site for the Buttai School, and it was leased to the Education Department from a Mrs. Crutch and they used to live here in this area here, and are related into the Alcorns. The Buttai School might have gone about forty years ago. A tragedy there one day with a young boy of Brown. They were chopping trees down to clear the land, and unbeknowns to the teacher in charge, every time recess would come they would go and cut a little bit more, and a tree fell, hit a little boy and killed him.
- Y. How long ago was that?
- D. Browns, probably forty odd years or so ago. It was at the time when Mum was at school, so it might have been fifty odd years ago, maybe more.

- Y. And why was it closed down? Because the population wasn't able to support it.
- D. Yes!
- Y. And you would have gone to the school at Buchanan?
- D. I started at Buchanan.
- Y. And that's now the Buchanan Gallery?
- D. Yes!
- Y. So there are plenty of signs that there was quite a population here at one stage?
- D. Yes, Pullins used to build the schools, they were carpenters by trade, I've got references to them building the classrooms, amenities block.
- Y. Isn't there Pullins on the original maps?
- D. Yes!
- Y. I thought the name was familiar!
- D. My grandfather built Gary Maddison's house at Buttai, he also built Maudie's shed, he built Mert Elliott's house at Buttai and a laundry that they had there, so that's why all the houses look the same.
- Y. So how long ago was Garry Maddison's - he owns the Buttai Barn doesn't he - how long ago was his house built?
- D. Fifty, sixty years ago. They have done over it.
- Y. Do you remember the people it was built for at the time?
- D. Alcorns!
- Y. I didn't know the Buttai Barn was on the site of the Buttai School?
- D. Yes, or close enough to.
- Y. So with a school there, and one at Buchanan, and there used to be one in our road wasn't there? Did they call that the Black Hill School?
- D. Stockrington!
- Y. And then the Black Hill School itself goes back some time doesn't it?
- D. Yes it goes back into the 1870's I think.

- Y. So there must have been a fair few kids around?
- D. Well I've got letters at home when they applied for the school at Buttai. My grandmother went to Stockrington School, my mother went to Buttai School, and Maudie went to Black Hill School.

We come to where Shirley Bennett lives, part of her farm was Jack Pullin's, he owned the original old house that Shirley Bennett used to live in before it burnt down. There are still some remains of fruit trees in the paddocks.

- Y. They look very old, don't they?
- D. They are old.
- Y. I can't recognise what they are.
- D. I think there are persimmon trees there, and plum trees.
- D. Persimmons used to be a big thing around Buttai.
- Y. Really, you don't seem to hear much about them nowadays.
- D. No! and behind Shirley's place there, there are tracks leading up to the mines. Shirley tells the story, she found out somebody had a still, and we have often been going up looking for the still!
- Y. Was that the tracks to the Beninerrin Mines, or the mines were older than that?
- D. No, the older mines, old grappa mines.
- D. On the top end of Price's block on the corner of John Renshaw Drive and Buttai Road - in the paddock on the right hand side there are deep holes where they have sunk shafts looking for coal. Coal used to be a big thing in those days. In the early 1900's if you had coal on your property you were wealthy.
- Y. You'd never think so now, it is a lovely green paddock.
- D. That's right, I hope it stays like that! It was in that paddock where the - he was the only fellow in Buttai that used to have a bull, and everytime the cows used to come in season, the young girls - mum and her three sisters - used to take the bull for a walk.
- Y. I'll bet he was a very happy bull!
- D. Probably!
- Y. We are now on the top of the hill where the Elliott's cemetery is. There's a magnificent 180° view from the top of this hill. It looks pretty windy out there, but we came to see John and Martha's grave, so here goes.

- D. John and Martha Elliott, they are the oldest graves up here. He died on the 5th. August 1874 aged 84. Martha, she was born on 1st. June 1798, died April 25th. 1877. Their son William is buried beside them, it states on his headstone he was born at Buttai Creek, departed this life on June 1890 aged 64. Behind them there is another son, Edward died 3rd. July 1903. George - I'll have to go around there to George -
- Y. There is lots of wild blackberry here isn't there?
- D. George Elliott another son, departed his life 7th. December 1918 aged 79. And then Wilfred, another son, Wilfred died the 9th. October, 1913; that's my great, great, grandfather!
- Y. We are back in the house, out of that incredible wind on the cemetery hill, although that howling wind did give appropriate sound effects and atmosphere for a cemetery, didn't it, very fitting!
- D. Oh, that reminds me of a family story, the Elliotts used to dig their own family's graves, and there were three of the Elliotts digging a grave for one of the family that had passed on, as they were digging they come across bones. Well, they didn't know what to do with the bones which they had found, so they put them into a bag and took them down the paddock and hid them behind a tree until the funeral of the person who had died was over, and then they put the bones back into the hole, with the coffin, and re-buried it.
- Y. Buttai has recently changed quite a bit hasn't it, from when it started 150 years ago, and then to its "hey day" with its Boiling Down Works, and everything that was happening at that time, now its back to a really quiet rural area again.
- D. Yes, well there are two blocks which comprise approximately 120 acres that have been in the Elliott family for 150 years - and we hope to keep it in the family for eternity!
- Y. Yes, that sounds great, yes - thank you.

YVONNE WARDELL

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EARLY SETTLEMENT IN THE BUTTAI-BLACK HILL AREA

EARLY SETTLEMENT IN THE BUTTAI AND
BLACK HILL AREA.

Buttai and Black Hill are in the Parish of Stockrington, County of Northumberland, and come under the control of the Council of the City of Greater Cessnock.

The first settlers at Buttai were John and Martha Elliott.

John and Martha had migrated to Australia aboard the "Hugh Crawford", arriving in the colony on 3rd. April, 1825. On the same ship were other free settlers who as with John had been selected as workers on the 20,000 acre grant to Thomas Potter MacQueen in 1825. The property was the famous "Segenhoe" at Scone.

Martha was a descendant of Sir Ralph Sadlier, born 1507. He was a liquidator of the Monasteries of England and Wales for Henry VIII and jailer of Mary Queen of Scots for Queen Elizabeth. In contrast to this distinguished lineage, (which included subsequent marriages with exalted families of the peerage), John Elliott was a blacksmith, son of a miller. Martha's father disapproved of the alliance and the match was forbidden, but Martha, being of age, ran away, and she and John were married on 14th. February, 1823 at Newcastle-on Tyne. Martha was disinherited and never forgiven by her father.

John and Martha stayed at Segenhoe until 1832, when they moved to Maitland where John leased a 50 acre farm on Wallis Creek. Whilst there he constructed a steam-powered flour mill for Hamilton Collins Sempill. The inventiveness and expertise of John Elliott made him a much sought after man in the district.

At this time he received the services of some convicts, and a further grant of convicts in 1836.

In about 1838 the Elliotts moved to Wyabah, a small village near present Beresfield. Wyabah is now known as "The Meadows" and is a "new" subdivision of small acreages and expensive homes.

On the farm the Elliotts raised cattle as well as growing crops. There being no fences erected, the cattle sometimes strayed. On these occasions the cattle could always be found some few miles away at a place called "Buttai". John and Martha decided to live at Buttai and bought a property from T.V. Bloomfield. They were the first people to settle on this land and a dwelling was erected, land was cleared, crops planted, cattle numbers increased well, orchards planted, and butter and cheese making occupied all hands. As the children matured most of them took up lands surrounding the original homestead.

John and Martha are buried in the family cemetery in native bushland on a hill on their property, overlooking the original homestead. John died in 1874 aged 84 years and Martha died in 1879 aged 79 years. The Elliott cemetery, still in current use, contains a range of monuments tracing the family history, "the achievement of the Elliott family was their successful pioneering of the Hunter Valley District, which is illustrated in the continuity of their association with this cemetery". 1.

The Lanaghans (later Leneghan) lived at Wayarraba on land through which the main road from Minmi to Beresfield passed. This road is now known as Leneghans Drive. Patrick Leneghan arrived in the colony on the "Eliza" in 1827, a convict. He was pardoned in 1843 and being an industrious man, accumulated enough cash to buy two allotments of 640 acres each.

At the junction of Black Hill and Old Minmi Roads, Patrick Leneghan erected a Wine Saloon which became a famous watering place for travellers and teamsters plying between Minmi, Tarro, Black Hill and Buttai. Brisk business was no doubt generated by the drovers taking sheep and cattle to Mr. Price's Boiling Down Works at Buttai. The Saloon was a landmark for many years. 2. Some huge old Silky Oak trees, planted at the front of the building, remain today.

1. D.T. Hartley, The Settlers of the Big Swamps.

Pub D.T. Hartley, 1986. P. 68.

2. Ibid. P. 97.

James Price purchased the 258 acres next to John and Martha Elliott at Buttai. The Price and Elliott family then owning half each of Buttai, which covered an area of approximately one square mile. James Price was born in England in 1809. He married his wife Anne when he was 37 years old. It was a second marriage for both.

The 1840's were difficult years for the settlers in the Hunter Valley and in fact the rest of the colony. The Bank of Australia failed in 1843 and financial instability prevailed. Properties were stocked with animals for which there was no market. It was during these depressed times that the boiling down of sheep and cattle for tallow became a viable alternative to stock losses. John Price established the Buttai Creek Boiling Down Works on his land. Other settlers followed Elliotts and Prices and a community developed as small acreages were taken up. The Boiling Down Works engendered employment resulting in population growth. Buttai became a busy place as drovers moved their herds along the tracks to Price's paddock. A store was established in the area. James Price was known as "The Master at Buttai, during the latter part of his life James was known as "Gentleman" which gave some indication of his success and standing in the community. James Price died in 1883 approximately 1 month after the death of his wife, Anne.

The first settlers at Black Hill were Walter and Ellen Taylor and their children.

In the later 1850's, the Taylors left the busy township of Maitland and took up residence in the straggling settlement of Wyabah, (referred to in page 1). From Wyabah, the "Spur" of the Sugar Loaf Ranges rises steeply to the summit, referred to as the "Mountain" by the settlers. This "Mountain" was Black Hill. In 1862, the Taylor family moved on to their land on Black Hill. Gradually, other settlers came to take up the land further along the hill to the west.

3.

3. E. Taylor. Footsteps in the Sands of Time
unpublished

The busy coal mining town of Minmi, four miles south, was in need of food. The produce of the Black Hill farms, butter, eggs, meat, fruit, vegetables, honey, wheat, corn straw for bedding, were all brought by dray around the swamplands. Should the swamps be filled with water from a particularly wet season with the subsequent run off from the mountain, the farm produce was packed on horseback and swum across the expanse of water.

As settlement spread, the bush tracks became arterial roads for the bullock teams carrying the timber, for drays carrying the produce to the towns, and the drovers with stock for the Boiling Down Works at Buttai, and for travellers to the railway.

The best known landmark in Black Hill was the Wine Saloon erected by Patrick Leneghan (referred to on page 2). Another landmark still standing is the building known as "The Big House". This old brick two-storey hotel was erected on land at the margin of the swamps which was once used as a racecourse and was situated between Black Hill Wine Saloon and Minmi.

Over the century this building has withstood many floods, but it has not been used as a hotel for decades.

In the 1880's some citrus trees were brought for trial in this newly opened land. A seedless mandarin name "Oonshi" came from Asia to Australia and Mr. Charles Osborn planted some of these trees on his selection. The orchardists produced a mandarin famous for its early ripening qualities. The area gradually relinquished the unsuccessful wheat growing and sheep breeding, to become a district of orchardists and tomato growers. 4. The present day "Osborn's Orchard" of Black Hill is owned and operated by a descendant of Charles Osborn, John Osborn, whose wife Helen is a descendant from Walter and Ellen Taylor, the first settlers at Black Hill. This orchard is well known for its famous citrus fruits and peaches.

In 1880 the "Public Instruction Act" was introduced which made education compulsory for children between the ages of 6 and 14 years.

The pioneers of Black Hill applied for a provisional school for their children. This original application stated that fifteen boys and eleven girls would attend. The year was 1881.

In the early 1900's there were three schools servicing the Buttai - Black Hill area; Buttai School, Stockrington School and Black Hill School, evidence of the considerable population growth at that time. The Black Hill school, a primary school, is the only remaining school in the district.

By the Black Hill School's centenary celebration year of 1981, fifteen boys and fifteen girls were enrolled at the school.

The development of the Black Hill settlement followed the same pattern as it's sister settlement of Buttai, growing from small beginnings to more populated and busier times and over the years, reverting back to a less populated, quiet rural district.

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Diary of Wilfred Elliott

Various documents and articles loaned by Mrs. Dianne Parnell

REVIEW OF RECORDED INTERVIEW

Mrs. Dianne Parnell is a descendant of the first settlers of Buttai, John and Martha Elliott who arrived from England on the "Hugh Crawford" in 1824. They brought with them their first daughter Margaret, and eleven more children were born in Australia. All twelve children survived to be adults, which was rare for those times.

After arrival, John and Martha lived in Scone "Segenhoe", for some years, moved to Maitland to take up farming, then moved to Wyabah to farm and raise cattle. From there they bought land at Buttai and remained there with their family.

As more families joined the Elliotts at Buttai, development in enterprises included timber getting - there was a lot of cedar at Buttai - Sandstone blocks were cut from "Kangaroo" hill, cattle raising ^Sprospered, extensive orchards were planted and Wilfred Elliott had the largest orchard in the Maitland district.

In 1860, John Price began an enterprise of tallow making, called the "Boiling Down Works". This engendered a population growth as employees were needed for the works and ancillary occupations came to the area. The school records of the times listed a variety of fathers' occupations including butchers, labourers etc. At this time Buttai was at its peak of activity and population.

The social life of the time was community based. Cricket teams played against teams from neighbouring Black Hill, social dances were held at the school, and music was popular, many residents played musical instruments and a choir was formed.

Buttai today is very different. It's best known for The Buttai Barn, a bush dancing restaurant, which is built on the site of the original Buttai School. There is a gravel quarry, owned by Darakon, otherwise the area is now very sparsely populated and no orchards remain. John Renshaw Drive, a very busy main road, cut through Buttai in the 1960's, and electricity connection to Buttai followed. John Renshaw Drive cuts through Dianne Parnell's property, and 20 acres of the land is on the other side of the road. On this part of the property is a steep hill and this is where the family cemetery is located. The original settlers John and Martha Elliott are buried there as well as Elliott descendants right down to the present day.

At this point Dianne and I took a drive around her property and she pointed out sites and remains of the various enterprises and activities she had talked about, as well as recounting anecdotes handed down through the family of interesting happenings. Of particular interest was the family cemet^eary with the headstones tracing the family history from the original settlers to the present day.

Back at the house after the drive around, we reflected on the changes Buttai had gone through, from its beginnings to its peak of activity and population, back now to its present day, peaceful, sparsely populated rural district.

Dianne pointed out that of the original property taken up by the first Elliotts, 150 acres is still owned and occupied by Elliotts, and she expressed her hope that this would always be so.