

Open Foundation Course

Subject: Australian History

Lecturer: Margaret Henry

Topic: Research Project

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Elsie Ayres was brought in the world by her Gram in her parents private home "Honeymoon" cottage. There were four boys and five girls and Elsie was the fourth in family.

Elsie's father made a living as a drover, shearer any other job he could find, often he was away three four months at a time. This did not seem to have any adverse effect on the family. They stayed at home which had three bedrooms, outback kitchen and living room built of stone. In later years they built a larger home with extra beds and verandah. The mother did not go out to work, they stayed at home to care for the children.

Elsie started school at about six; there were about eighty other students. She neither liked nor did particularly at school. Elsie left school at sixteen and stayed at home, with her mother being taught some duties. At nineteen, she became a subsidized teacher for the government, with eleven children in her care.

Elsie met her husband Gerald Ball at nineteen and courted her for three years, he lived on his parents' farm called "Ellersley". Just before they were married Gerald Ball joined the Police Force but missed the farm life and returned home after only six weeks. After they were married they moved to Newcastle where Mr Ball worked for ten months on the trams. He rejoined the Police Force, had two years in Sydney then transferred back to Waratah to become station sergeant.

Elsie tells about she disliked Sydney in 1924, the drovers came to her mother's inn for a meal, about floods and about her grandmother and mother attendance at the Reverend Cooper wife's private school at the Rectory.

Jerry's Plains was the first area discovered in the Hunter Valley by John Howe who was a Chief Constable of Windsor. He had two attempts to reach what is now Jerry's Plains. His first exploration in 1819 had brought him to the edge of the Bulga Range where he was able to look down on a ocean of fog covering the southern part of land owned by the Aborigine tribe that spoke the language of Kogilaroi. The party followed a creek, to be later named Doyle's Creek into the river. The following day he had reached the river which he followed for seven miles but ill-health and lack of food forced him and his party back so he decided to return the way they had come. Returning the second time John Howe with a party of thirteen men, which included Jeremiah Butler, a ticket-of-leave man, "an Englishman, Native of Suffolk who stood five foot, three quarters inches tall, had fair to ruddy complexion, grey and brown hair." His former trade being that of a shoemaker. This man has great importance in this area. On this second exploration, John Howe having his written observations from his earlier trip, took a more easterly route to find a successful crossing of the Hunter River to the river flats above Morpeth.

Jeremiah Butler returned to Windsor where, in 1821 whilst employed as a policeman he received his pardon. He apparently he returned to the area he had helped to discover as it is reported in the "Maitland Mercury" of 1879 that the early settlers had lost a faithful servant of Jeremiah Butler who was in the act of lighting a fire with the aid of gunpowder. The resulting explosion had removed his limb. Contracted necrosis which was to cause his death, the date of his death is not given but it is definite to be between 1822 and 1827. Upon his death he was buried in a paddock

1. Jerry's Plains Public School, Dobson and McEwan, P.6.

across from the old post office site. The post was known as Jerry's Plains (Daunders), when describing in the "Australian" on the fourteenth of February 1827 the name "Jerry's Plains" for the first time. Recognition from government was to come two years later, and a notice was published in the "Australian Almanac" in the year 1829.

The Bulga Road up to the Hunter Valley had attracted a line of new settlers to select their farm sites, around 380,000 acres were claimed. This continuous movement prompted the building of the Great North Road. With 1827 came the "first policeman John Needham" and by 1830 arrived the people decided to build a Mounted Police station by thirteen men. The station and its church is shown as being on the site of the present day township. The towns people petitioned for a post office which was opened in January 1837, the postmaster was Robert T. Caff. The affairs were determined in "Richard Alcorn in the "Victoria" from June 1838. In 1840's the government drew up for a village and was advertised in "Government Gazette" but it took around forty years to move to the site on higher land and to the need for education in Jerry's Plains was apparent in the "Hunter River Gazette" a report was published "a person capable in teaching the rudiments of an English could reckon with certainty on having his efforts a liberal success"²

1. Jerry's Plains Public School, Dobson and McEwan, P.6-7.
2. The Public Library of Newcastle, File Jerry's Plains, P. 7

The first of January 1844, Terry's Plains had a minister Reverend Joseph Cooper. So with the coming church, Reverend Cooper established the first school, the England Denominational School, a headmaster and was appointed by the Bishop of Australia. The first year was paid by the residents. In the Legislative Assembly in 1859 it was stated that in a wooden building, the students' ages ranged from 5 to 15 years. They were taught for five and half hours a day thirty days a year. The holidays were a week at Christmas and Easter, with four weeks at harvest time. Their teachers were few the years but after the public school was erected they dropped off dramatically. The building became so small that Reverend Cooper closed the school in 1882, and the following year with a private school at the P.

The public school was built of sandstone brick and ironbark shingles situated on two acres of land. It was built on the corner of the road and Part of Dingleton. Upon its completion in 1880 the first teacher James Cummings took up residence and started with a number of subjects. He also started the tennis and they dug a vegetable garden. There were a few teachers who made various changes to the residence. They were not impressed with Terry's Plains as a place to live permanently.

Mr George D'Arcy was replaced after three years by Mr Albert Bruce, with Mr Bruce's arrival considered a student, of Elsie Ayres who did not like school all and did not do particularly well. Mr Bruce was an students' individual ability and needs. He also had renovated the school done, the best being the new iron roof of main classroom divided into two, the strip desks replaced. Mr Alfred E. Thompson was replaced Mr in 1914, he asked for a six week holiday because heat in the area. The students' outdoor activity was a fernery, made from material collected from the bush the pot plants were collected by the children from and friends, which no doubt Elsie Ayres had for Elsie Ayres probably had one of the new teachers, D. Sherman or Mr D.S. Smith.

Elsie Ayres left school at the age of sixteen to a subsidized teacher for the government, with eleven in her care. She would travel, ride a horse, to the farms where her school was held and stay for a and ride home for weekends.

At the age of nineteen, she met her husband Ted who lived two miles away on a farm call 'Elle' left the farm to join the Police Force but suffered sickness and came home after only six weeks. After years of courting they married and moved to to work on the trams. He rejoined the Police Force ten months working on trams. They lived in Sydney years, he was transferred back to Waratah to the Station sergeant and lived in the Police residence where they lived happily with their two daughter until he retired. On retiring they moved into only three houses from the Station. Elsie still there to this day.

Jerry's Plains Public School 1881-1981. Dobson + McE

Information from The Public Library of Newcastle

ELSIE BAW
SERREY

Where were you born?

At Jerry's Plains.

Where you born at home?

Yes, my grandmother brought me into the world. At Jerry's Plains in our private home.

Did it have a name?

Well they called it 'Honeymoon cottage' but that was a long time ago.

How many children were there in the family?

Nine, four boys and five girls

What number were you?

Number four

What did your father do for a living?

Drove, sheared, and any other work he could get.

Was that hard on your mother?

No, not particularly, no, no, you just did your own work. There were no washing machines, no fridges, nothing like that, there was everything else.

Did your mother, brothers and sisters have a lot of time without your father?

Yes, quite a bit sometimes Dad would be away for three or four months, driving and shearing.

Did your mother find that hard?

I can't remember.

How big was your house?

Just a small cottage, a three bedrooms, outback kitchen, living room and verandah.

That was the old one, it was built of slab in those days. Then we moved from there on the same land and built a big weather board home with verandahs all round.

More bedrooms?

Yes, four bedrooms.

How did your mother do her housework, how did it compare to everyone else's?

Just the same sort, everybody really did the same things in those days. Of course, it was just a routine, no mothers went to work, they all stayed at home and looked after their families and did their work.

How old were you when you went to school?

Six, I think.

Did you like it?

No.

How many children were there?

* four teachers and eighty children.

Was it a big school?

Quite a nice stone school built years and years before.

Was there a lot of people living at Terry's Plains when you were little? Did it seem big to you?

Not really, just ordinary because there were farms all around and they had different places in the village, there were quite a number of families in the village, but the outlying farms they had each home and their own children.

Did you do well at school?

Not particularly.

At what age did you leave school?

Sixteen.

Where did you get a job when you left school?

I stayed home until I was nineteen, when I was nineteen

I went as a subsidized teacher, by the government.

I was about five miles from home and I used to stay with the people on the farm and come home each weekend. I had eleven pupils that I watched all the time.

How did you get to work?

I used to ride over to the farms and then stay there for the week and ride home.

On a horse.

What sort of transport was there?

Milk tories, daily mail, we had the daily mail.

Mostly horse and buggy?

Dulky and ponies, later on we had cars.

Did Terry's Plains grow very big?

No, it really and truly stayed exactly as it was until they moved to the coal.

Was it less now than before?

No, more bigger homes during the mining.

What sort of services were around?

When I was growing up there was two hotels, a post office, three grocery shops and drugery who would come in from Stington, they used to come out daily and you could buy your things off them.

What did you and the other children do in your leisure time?

Tennis, swimming in the Hunter.

When did you meet your husband?

Nineteen, he had a property but it was called 'Elshy' and it

was a mixed farm, dairy and cattle.
How long did he court you for?

Three years.

How far away did he live from you?

About a mile and three quarters.

After you were married, did you settle in Jerry's Plains?

No, we came to Newcastle and worked on the trams.

Before we were married, my husband joined the N.S.W. police and he stayed there for six weeks and then he resigned and come home to the farm and then we were married, we went to Newcastle to work on the trams and stayed about ten months and he joined the N.S.W. police again and that is where we stayed in Newcastle. We went to Sydney and stayed there for two years and came back and lived mainly in Newcastle.

What was it like living in Sydney from where you lived?

Terrible, terrible, I hated every minute of it, I did not even know where the sun rose when I first went there.

Was there many buildings in Sydney at the time?

It was all buildings in my mind.

Was there very many high buildings I mean?

No.

What was different in Sydney?

Houses and the atmosphere really, there was no fresh air in my way of thinking, it was so dull.

Did they cook the same way as in the country?

Probably the same. They cooked really with gas mostly or electricity and we were use to the fuel stoves.

What year was this?

1924.

And you stayed there for two years and came back to Newcastle, was he posted back to Newcastle?

Yes, he was station sergeant for twenty five or twenty six years, then he retired.

Drovers came with their mob of cattle and they would go to Granny's and have their meal and wine.

My mother went to a private school, the clergyman's wife was a teacher and my mother and her family went to the private school and there was a public school as well, later in years they built a lovely stone school which is there to this day.

Church of England was built by the people not convicts and it is really beautiful because, the windows are really and truly beautiful, they are these stain glass windows, there here in the Cathedral. They were donated by the wealthy people of the area, each window was dedicated to the people. Which buildings were built by the convicts?

"Elsely", the house at Elsely was built by the convicts, another beautiful old property was built by the convicts, a big old stone house but was knocked down by vandals years ago. A lot of the real old buildings were built by the convicts. Is any of them still here today?

Elsely but it blown half down. Uncle Martin's, where Uncle Martin lived was built by the convicts but they are all gone now.

Where did your husband take you, did you go dancing? We went to tennis, swimming and dancing and parties. How far did you go for these dances?

Sometimes ten and twenty miles.

What sort of bands played at the dances?

Piano and violin mostly or the accordion.

Were they local people who played in the band?

They were from Slington, my sister played a lot of dance music.

How did you get to the dances?

With a milk lorry mostly or you went in your own private horse and sulky but mostly the whole party used to go in a milk lorry, sometimes thirty or more.

Must have been a big lorry?

We were cramped in.

What did you do when there was a state emergency on?

Well, when the rains came and when the Hunter broke it banks it flooded into two lagoons, one each side and we know a certain part, where the river would overflow that when people on the river banks moved everything and moved their cattle to higher grounds.

When did people use to stay?

Yes, Everybody, out of the floods reach, they would stay with neighbours.

Everybody helped each other?

Yes, well it was community, everybody helped each other.

And what was the worst flood?

They were really only small floods but the biggest was in 1955

The others was just minor floods. They came over the banks and floods the farms but no real damages.

Some may, but sometimes the river was so low, there was no water

About how many farms in the area? The farms used to go right down to the river

There was what we called 'Carrington Hills' that went right along, beautiful gray, and went for miles. The river run underneath that and the farms were on this side of the hill. It was a beautiful place.

bottom of the lower part of the Hunter had their own farms each one, milking cows and growing things.

Did you have your own cows?

Yes, but we did not have a farm, we just had local, we had our own pony, often we wished we had a bigger paddock. What sort of work or chores did the boys have to do?

My brother when they left school, my eldest brother left school at thirteen. He joined the N.S.W. police, when he was twenty one and raise to Superintendent. He went to night school. My second brother went on a stud farm, loved horses, he stayed for a very long time because he loved horses, and he retired to join the Mounted Police. He stayed there until he retired. The next brother, he could not get work anywhere and came to Newcastle.

Did they have alot of chores to do at home?

My two eldest brothers went to work very early. The eldest brother went to work at thirteen and the next brother went to work at fifteen. The others stayed at home and did odd jobs.

What about your sisters?

The eldest sister did the same as I did, became a subsidized teacher then she left and went to Sydney and she stayed in Sydney for quite a long while then she came back and went back to teaching again and then she married and they went back to Sydney to live.

And your other sisters.

Dicky never worked, Edna came to Newcastle to work, Madge came to Newcastle and worked there, they both married.

What kind of work did they do?
Really and truly shop work, shop assistant.
How old was your father when he retired?
Sixty three, my Dad was when he retired.
Where did they live?
They just lived at home.

The house was transported from the main street of Jerry's Plains to a farm and it still stand today. At Chesshunt about fifteen miles Grandma Ayes, Well Grandfather Ayes was an Englishman, a well educated man who came to Australia and married Grandma Ayes.

Grandma Ayes could not read or write and Grandfather would have to read to her and when he had finished the stories, she would say then what happened. Well she would.

They lived on a farm and my Grandfather had the first car that came to Jerry's Plains, the family had a farm, they rented off what we called "Parnell". He had the first stripper he also use to go around stripping the wheat. Was very well educated but did not educate the family which hurt them very much. They were a most happy family, loved one another if you saw one brother, you saw the whole lot. They were always together, very close family.

They went away to a property and stayed there for awhile and came back to Jerry's Plains when my second brother was ready to be born.

Grandfather Ayes was a Church of England, and Grandma Ayes was a Roman Catholic and they come to Church.

Grandfather use to stay with his eldest son while Grandma Ayes was in church. She came home from church and the daughter-in-law said that he was asleep. She pulled the pillow from under his head and said

"Come on home, and thank the Lord we have got a better pillow on which to rest your head."

She use to sit in doorway, and she had a switch, she use to call you, not me, I was too young and that was usual and then she would flick you with the stick. When she got sick of them, she would set the dog and send them home. She use to wear little bonnets, Mum would decorate them, with a little bunch of violets. Mum said to Grandma Gee "Mama would you like a bonnet too."

"No, bloody way will I wear a bonnet like that" was Grandma

Gee reply.

She was drown, Grandma Ayes was drown in the Hunter. Grandma Ayes and her daughter was crossing the Hunter, it was when sulky had the mudguards on them. As they were, you had to drive into the river and up a steep bank to come on to the farm. The belly band broke and it (sulky) turned over and Aunty Maud did not have the strength to pull Grandma Ayes out. I think Grandma die of a heart attack. When they laid she out, they found she had four hundred sovereigns, she had four hundred sovereign and half sovereign in a stocking one on top of the other. They said there Milly (Grandma Gee) you have as such right to that as any of them.

A lady was having a baby and when the baby was coming she did not want the baby and she played up on them so Mum had to go to help. While she was away a priest came to christen us. One of the brother Keith said "You beggar you are not going to christen me!"

Dad said to the priest "If you do not get yourself down those steps, I will kick your beside down."