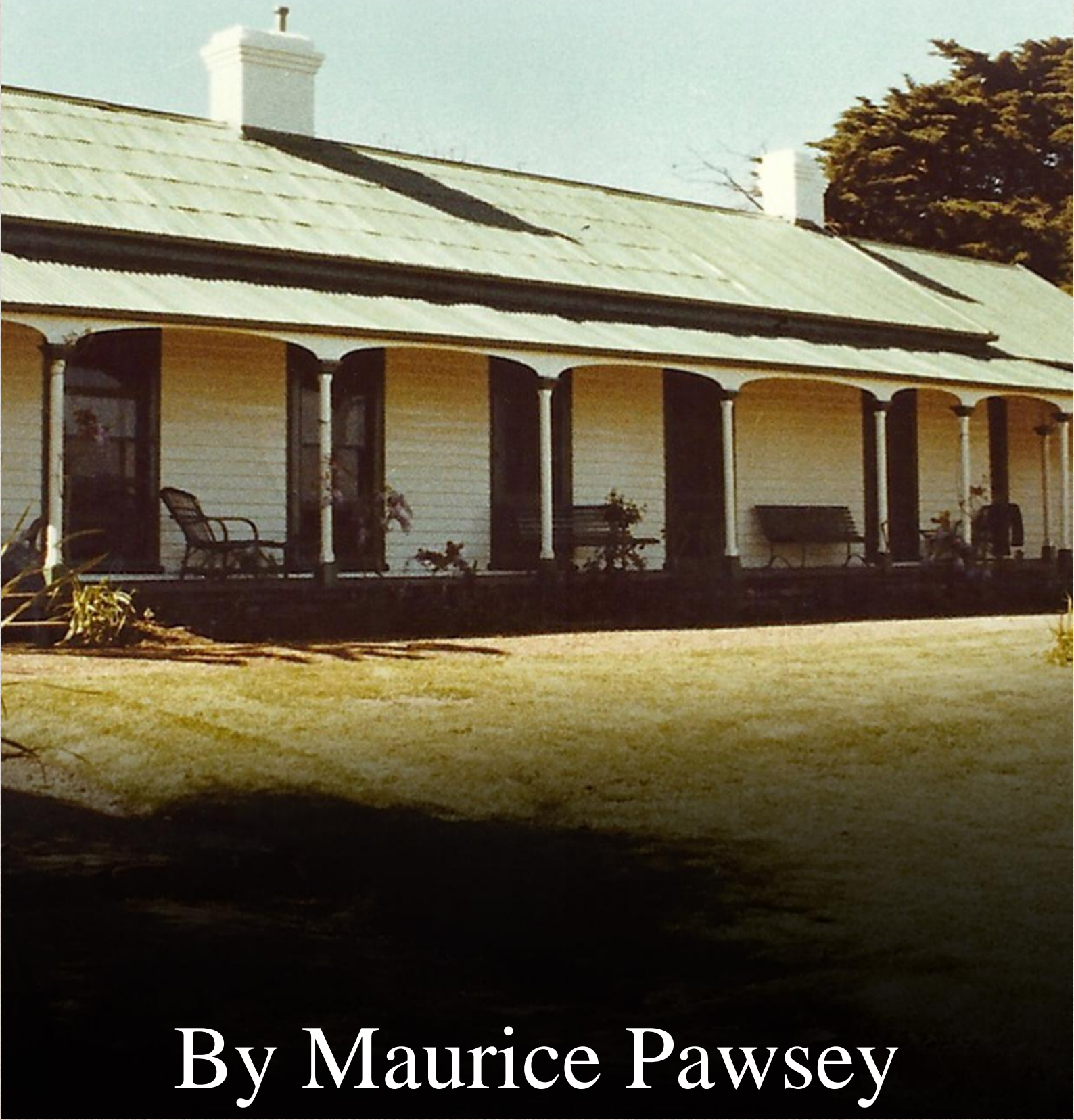


HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE



By Maurice Pawsey



HISTORIC
STRUCTURE
SERIES

GIPPSLAND STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

BY © MAURICE PAWSEY

Photograph Contributors:
Maurie Pawsey

Early Photographer Contributions:
From *Australian Pictures* - Howard Willoughby 1886

Others:
From *Strathfieldsaye - A History & Guide* by Meredith Fletcher 1992
Centre for Gippsland Studies

INTRODUCTION

I became involved with Strathfieldsaye Estate through my position as Head of the Property & Buildings Department in the Administration of the University of Melbourne, as described in Chapter 8.

At that time 1977, Strathfieldsaye Homestead was known as the oldest, continuously occupied Homestead in Gippsland. I do not believe the University's occupation of the property and that of the Australian Landscape Trust has changed that situation.

It is a fascinating property, particularly in that when taken over by the University it reflected the over 100 years of occupation by one pioneering family, with all the furniture, pictures and bric-a-brac of a family.

It is situated on the north-east shore of Lake Wellington, the most westerly of the Gippsland Lakes. Sale is situated on the western side of the Lake and Stratford –to the north, is the nearest town to Strathfieldsaye.

So we have a Homestead, commenced around 1850, replacing early sheds on the site, extended mainly by the Disher family and occupied by successive generations of that family until the last surviving member donated it to the University in 1977.

This Essay gives the history of the property, the University's part of the story and the current situation.

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CHAPTER ONE

SHORT HISTORY

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CHAPTER ONE

The property located on the North east shore of Lake Wellington, Gippsland, was established by William O'Dell Raymond, a grazier from Orange in New South Wales (NSW). After a prolonged drought in Orange in 1842 he read an account of Strzelecki's exploration of Gippsland and an account from explorer and grazier Angus McMillan who was already farming in Gippsland. A man of great enterprise, William collected a team from his father's estate and drove 8000 sheep to Gippsland. It is thought this epic feat took him through the Snowy Mountains and along the Tambo to Gippsland, where he settled on the shore of Lake Wellington. As his father had served under the Duke of Wellington, he named the property 'Strathfieldsaye', after the property in Hampshire, which had been given to the Duke by the English Government after his victories over Napoleon's armies.



Extract of Strathfieldsaye from Australian Pictures, a facsimile originally published in 1886 by Howard Willoughby



HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

CHAPTER ONE

After the original settler Raymond, there was a number of short stay owners, until it was finally purchased by William Henderson Disher in 1869.

The Disher family successfully operated the property, with a number of purchases and property sales, until Harold Clive Disher—with no descendants—donated the property to the University in 1977, with the expectations detailed in Chapter 8.

His will imposed extensive commitments on the University to preserve the property and establish a Teaching and Research Field Station, to be named the "Strathfieldsaye Institute of Teaching and Research in Agriculture and Allied Sciences".

The University carried out these wishes, as far as it was able, limited by the restriction that it should be a self sufficient operation, with no financial support from the University. The limitation throughout was the heavy commitment to maintain a very extensive (and interesting) collection of buildings and garden, covered by State and Australian Heritage protection. The implied requirement throughout was for the University to demonstrate effective and advanced farming and research methods and techniques, to provide a lead to the local farming community, produce sufficient income to support the upkeep of the historic property and meet the requirements of the various heritage registrations.

History shows that the farm and research activities never did attain those levels and it was only because we established 13 years of working bees and while the working bees maintained the heritage requirements, the property remained viable. Once the working bees stopped, apparently the cost of maintaining the property forced the University to divest itself of the obligation, to the Australian Landscape Trust.

The fact that the Australian Landscape Trust has demonstrated better agricultural results, but is not able to staff an operation to Open the house daily, has meant they cannot obtain Heritage grants and this leaves the property with a very uncertain future. To me a sad outlook.

A faded, light-colored background image of a large, multi-story building with a prominent porch supported by columns. A chimney is visible on the roofline to the left. The image is centered and serves as a backdrop for the chapter title.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BUILDINGS

HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

CHAPTER TWO

Strathfieldsaye Homestead, as it now stands, was started in the period 1849/1850, after an earlier building became too small. It is a timber building clad in pit sawn red gum weatherboards, initially of three rooms only (the present day lounge and corridor, Library and Dining room). The earliest roofing is of English corrugated iron, made by Tupper and Crompton, of one yard lengths, as it had to be carried by pack horse from Port Albert. At this time, Western Gippsland was a swamp. During maintenance and repairs, in the University period, it was discovered that the foundations of these original buildings were red gum tree trunks-laid flat on the ground, on which the building rested.

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A number of farm buildings were erected later, including a shearing shed, shearers quarters, hay sheds, meat store, stables etc. Included in the farm buildings, there is also a still functioning blacksmith's shop and as well as a bullock dray [See Chapter Nine –

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CHAPTER TWO

Working Bees] and a number of Buggies and other horse drawn vehicles. Outside the central complex, there are two houses for farm staff.

Mainly in the time of the Disher family- late in the 1890s, the other additions to the Homestead were a kitchen, originally separated from the main house, but the adjoining area became a utility room, then more bedrooms, the main bedroom off the dining room with its own bathroom and 4 more opening onto a wide verandah. Also a two bedroom



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flat with bathroom was added at the western end. The Homestead was substantially completed by 1892. The University added a Research Laboratory during its time. The whole homestead area and farm buildings and large homestead garden were gradually added to the National Trust, the Victorian and Federal Heritage Registers.



CHAPTER THREE

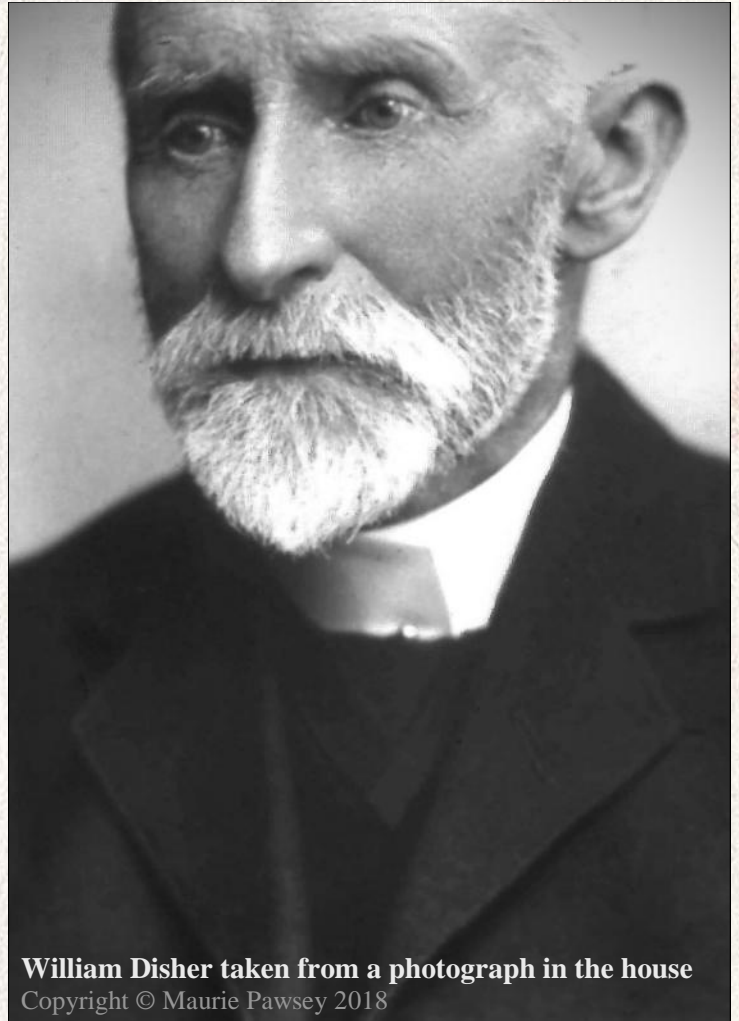
THE DISHERS

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CHAPTER THREE

The property passed through several different hands, after Raymond left in the 1850s, before being purchased by William Henderson Disher and his brother Samuel, in 1869. William Henderson Disher had migrated from Scotland in 1842, spending time in Hobart, before moving to Tarraville, near Port Albert, to establish a branch of the family's Hobart based store.

He married Elizabeth Scott at Erinvale in 1853 and they had four children; John, William, Annie and Henry. When they went to Strathfieldsaye it consisted of 2000 acres of freehold and 20,000 acres of leasehold land. There was considerable movement in acquiring and selling land over the years, leading to the 8000 acres at handover to the University. One of these was the acquisition of a small holding from the Hartwiches, the settlers slab hut is still on the property—See Photo Gallery.



William Disher taken from a photograph in the house
Copyright © Maurie Pawsey 2018



CHAPTER FOUR

BACK TO THE DISHERS

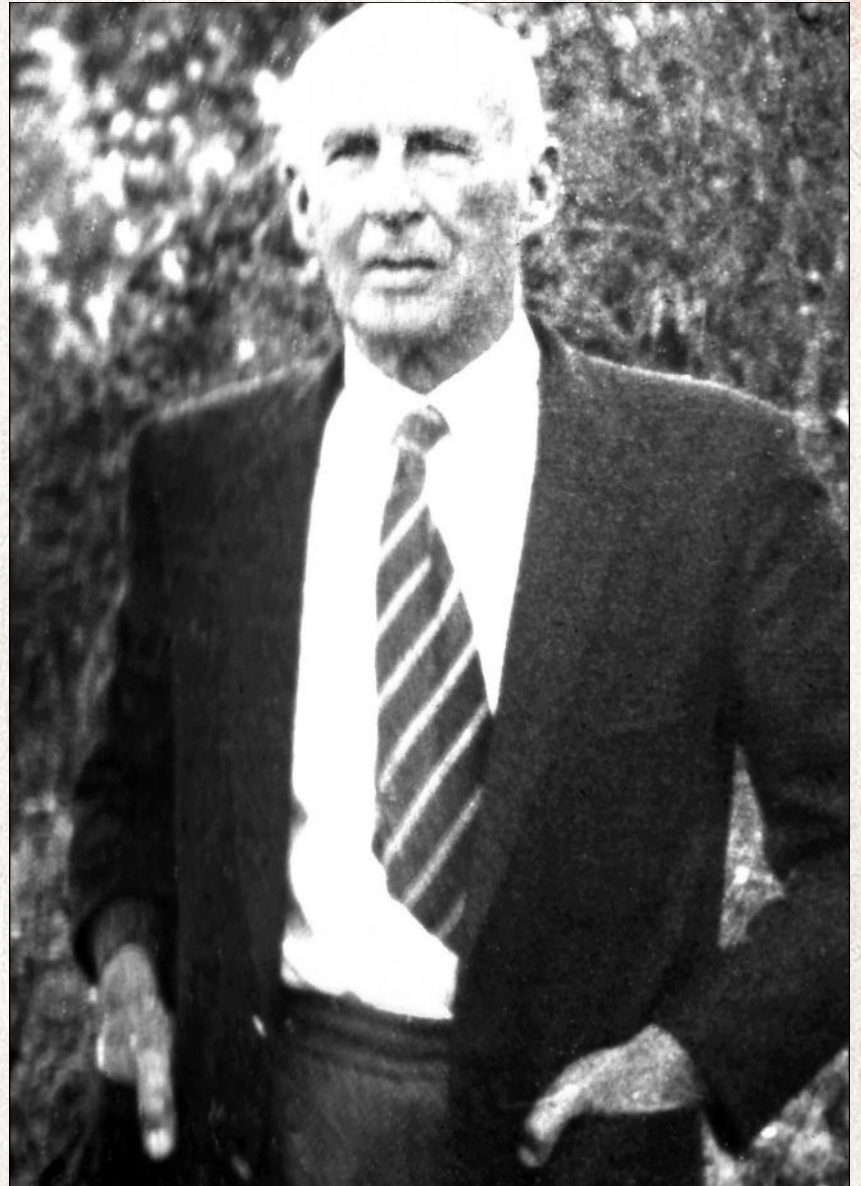
HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

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For the Disher family, John went into partnership with his father until William Henderson died in 1915, at the age of 93. His wife Elizabeth died in 1878 and son William died in 1875. Henry had a small farm at Rosedale adjoining Strathfieldsaye and married Mary Hagenauer, the daughter of the Ramahyuck Aboriginal missionary, in the late 1880`s. Their children were Daisy, who died in 1897, and the centrepiece of our story Harold Clive –born in 1891 [always known as Clive]. Daisy and Clive were the only Disher children of their generation and on Daisy`s death, Clive became the only child-the last Disher of that family.

We need to briefly summarise Clive`s history, Gippsland College in Sale, Scotch College in Melbourne, then Medicine at the University of Melbourne- at Ormond College. He rowed for Ormond College and Melbourne University. In 1916, he graduated and immediately enlisted in the Australian Army.

From 1917 to 1919, he served as a medical officer in France, receiving the Military Cross. He spent his time in England, before being repatriated. In the Peace Regatta for the King`s Cup at Henley-1919, Clive Disher stroked the AIF team, defeating crews from Oxford, Cambridge, France, New Zealand and America. The King`s Cup was brought to Australia and generated what is now Australia`s premier rowing event.



Clive Disher taken from a photograph in the house
Copyright © Maurie Pawsey 2018



CHAPTER FIVE

POST WAR

HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

CHAPTER FIVE

After the war, Clive specialised as an Anaesthetist. In 1926 he married Doris Kitson, a nurse and they lived in Camberwell. Clive continued in the Army Reserve, promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. He made regular visits to Strathfieldsaye, where his uncle John continued to operate the property. John died in 1931 and Clive's mother and father – Mary & Henry moved to Strathfieldsaye. Memorable occasions in the early 1930's, involved the loading of the Strathfieldsaye wool clip onto the “Burrabogie”, a small steamer, in the mouth of the Perry river, for transhipment to Melbourne.

Loading wool on the Perry River, c1934 (Jack Neumann)

Courtesy Meredith Fletcher, Centre for Gippsland Studies
"Strathfieldsaye-A History and a Guide" 1992.



When war broke out, Clive enlisted at his rank of Lieutenant Colonel and was sent to the Middle East and to Greece. He was evacuated from Crete and returned to Australia in 1941 into the New Guinea campaigns, promoted to Brigadier and became Director of Medical Services at the First Australian Army Headquarters, until 1944.



CHAPTER SIX

MOVE TO STRATHFIELDSAYE



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Henry Disher had died in 1944 and Clive was now the owner of Strathfieldsaye, also Doris was ill and the pair retired to Strathfieldsaye, Clive in his mid fifties. He was well known, but now was able to play a role as landowner and permanent resident, becoming very involved in the district and opening Strathfieldsaye for community activities, particularly young farmers. When Doris died in 1946, her sister Edith Kitson came to live and help run the house.

Clive's last few years were spent quietly at Strathfieldsaye, for the last 10 years to 1976, he placed control of the property in the hands of trustees. He was planning to leave the property, as the last of the Disher family, to the University of Melbourne. He was possibly influenced by a close friend, Professor Sir Samuel Wadham-Professor of Agriculture. His Will is a fascinating document, covering many pages, expressing his views on many matters, including the name of the property, if the University accepted the donation- to be the:

“Strathfieldsaye Institute of Teaching and Research in Agriculture and Allied Sciences”. The Research Institute was to be administered “by young men and women of initiative and with inquisitive minds” and that “stick-in- the- mud and hidebound persons“ should be excluded from the executive committee. The vision was for the bequest to be of benefit to students, the university and the farming community.

He died in March 1976.



CHAPTER SEVEN

THE STRATHFIELDSAYE HOMESTEAD



HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

CHAPTER SEVEN

This is a good spot to introduce the Strathfieldsaye Homestead.

In the Hallway there is six rowing oars, won by crews stroked by Clive Disher, some while at University, others after the war. There is also a megaphone used when he was coaching University crews, after the first World War. There was a seventh, the Kings Cup Oar, which is now with the Victorian Rowing Association.

The fascinating thing about the homestead, is the contents. Apart from the majority of their clothes which were removed by the trustees, leaving only Clive`s uniform and Doris`s fur coat, the house contained all of the items, pictures, a very interesting library of books, crockery, sewing machines, all of the items which you would expect to find of what a family would need, over 100 years of living. I was proud to be able to say, that when I retired that the contents were intact, after 13 years of occupation by the University.

The background of the page is a faded, light-colored image of a building with a prominent clock tower and a walkway with arches, likely a part of The University of Melbourne campus.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

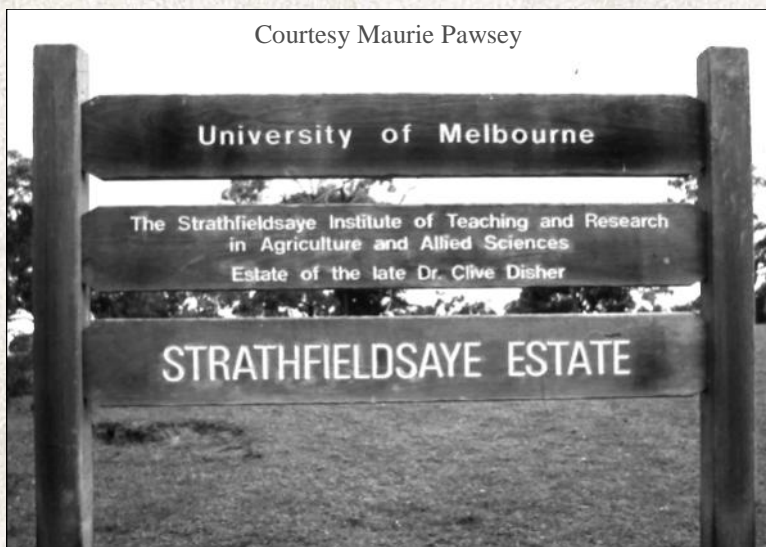
CHAPTER EIGHT

As head of Property & Buildings, in the University Administration, I became involved in early 1977, when I was requested to take a small party to the property and advise the Vice-Chancellor on the viability of the bequest. The group included the Dean of Veterinary Science, the Dean of Agriculture and Professor Carrick Chambers –Botany and myself. After a long day of driving there and all over the 8000 acres of the property, we met in the Library. Well gentlemen, what is the verdict ?. Professor Ken Jubb, as usual-blunt and to the point-“Bulldoze the house and garden and we can make it viable”. The property of 8000 acres, ran along the shore of Lake Wellington for some 4/5 KMS and was roughly - half salt effected low lying area covered with ti-tree and tussocks and half -at a higher level -grass covered sand dunes -with scattered red gum trees.

The general verdict, agreed with Professor Jubb, was that it would never be economically viable, because of the poor quality of the soil and the cost of meeting Heritage requirements to maintain the garden and buildings. That was broadly our advice to the Vice-Chancellor.

Pressure from the Melbourne establishment, ‘refuse dear old Clive’s bequest and it might be the last’ was the deciding factor.

So in 1977, the University accepted the Bequest and the Strathfieldsaye Institute of Teaching and Research in Agriculture and Allied Sciences came into being.



With the Doctor’s Will requirements:

- A Board of Management
- A Research Committee
- A Farm Committee
- A Homestead Committee.

I-Maurice Pawsey-Controller [Buildings] was Chair of the Homestead Committee and a member of the other two Committees and the Board of Management. The commitment was extensive, about

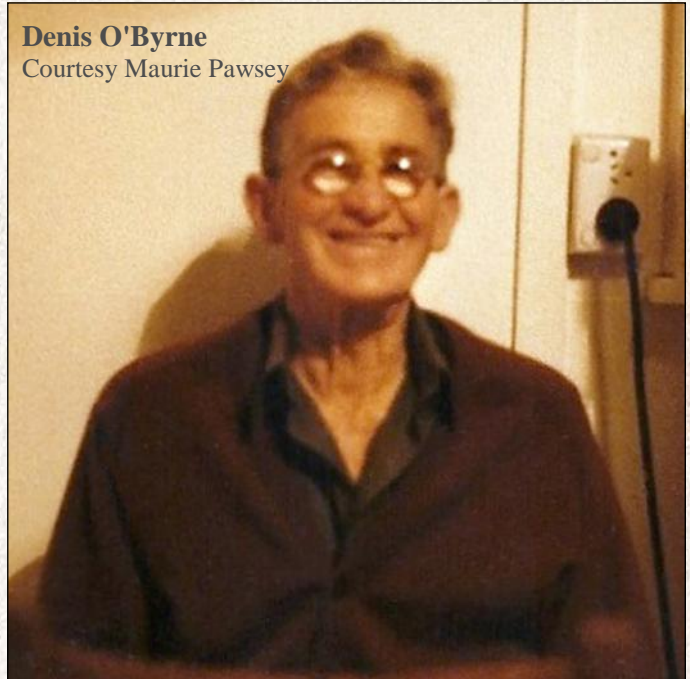
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12 meetings a year and a co-ordination role, as the only person on all four groups.

Staff: The existing staff -only one was kept, after discussion with the trustees -Denis O'Byrne -an aged gardener, who then lived -very uncomfortably -in the Shearers Quarters. We moved him into the small cottage at the rear of the Homestead. He came on my department's payroll, but charged to Strathfieldsaye.

Farm Manager & Homestead Manager: We advertised and recruited both, they lasted only a year or two and along come Denis & Glenis Crane. Glenis lasted the distance, in my terms, because I can only speak for the period 1977 to 1990. Denis separated from Glenis and resigned 1988 or so.



Denis O'Byrne
Courtesy Maurie Pawsey



**Glenis with
Lady Woodward**
Courtesy Maurie Pawsey

The HOMESTEAD

I was presented with a dilemma, I was in charge of University maintenance funds, but should not use those funds to maintain external properties, like Strathfieldsaye. BUT the Heritage requirements of the various bodies controlling those aspects required us to maintain and keep up to date. Here was the reason we hesitated on accepting the Bequest.



HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

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Therefore, in theory, the Strathfieldsaye Institute had to generate REVENUE from farm operations to:

- Support the Farm operation and Staff
- Support a Research operation
- Support and maintain the Homestead, Farm buildings & Garden.

We knew from losses incurred by the Trustees in recent years, this was a tall order.



CHAPTER NINE

WORKING BEES

HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

CHAPTER NINE

With a background in community activities, including Rotary, the thought of working bees came to mind. So, an experiment, we advertised throughout Property and Buildings -some 300 staff, for the opportunity to visit Strathfieldsaye for a weekend, but there was a catch, the basis was:

- you travelled there yourself-obviously by car
- you arrived Friday night and ate on the way
- we provided beds-you provided bedding
- no washing for the housekeeper
- we provided three meals Saturday, two on Sunday
- Saturday night, drinks would be provided, inc alcohol
- you worked all day Saturday and Sunday morning

On the agreed weekend, 45 staff members arrived by arrangement, stretching the bedding accommodation to the limit. But it was an outstanding success, sheds were cleared of rubbish, equipment sorted, a heritage listed bullock dray-under a tree—covered in leaves—was moved into a shed, also jinkers and other horse drawn equipages moved under shelter, lawns were mown, hedges, bushes pruned, trees pruned etc. The then farm manager came over about 10 am, expecting I think to wake us up, was so impressed he



Moving Dray.
From Meredith Fletcher -
Strathfieldsaye-A
History & Guide
Courtesy Maurie Pawsey

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CHAPTER NINE

stayed to work with us.

This set the pattern for 13 years of Working Bees, a regular monthly one - February to November, plus additional weekends, Easter and Christmas and the Botany Department special -Christmas in July -mulled wine etc -to which my family and I were invited. So 14 working bees a year, average attendance 16 people over 13 years, comes to around 3000 weekend people, about 12 hours a weekend each, easy to suggest in the ball park of \$400,000 in value.

Anecdotes from the Working Bees;

-Like all areas of human endeavour, there were peaks and troughs, successes and failures, conflicts of interest between farm staff and working bee attendees. It got to the point that when I was not there, these conflicts arose. It became easier to be there, fortunately my wife and the two youngest children, Mark & Cathy loved being there, so unless we were away, we attended.



Doncaster Rotary Club
Courtesy Maurie Pawsey

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An example was my deputy, who was an architect who always meant well, but a man of fast movement, fast thoughts, a fast driver, decided one day to take the farm utility and show some of the workers around the property. Drove off with the tray loaded with people, most standing up, at his usual pace. The Farm manager came over to get the utility and saw it being driven off -as he put it “with all wheels off the ground”.



Courtesy Maurie Pawsey

-The long drive down on a Friday night was difficult for some. On one occasion when a couple had not arrived, I made the 3 km drive out to the gate, to find these first timers lost, debating whether they were in the right place.



Courtesy Maurie Pawsey

-I persuaded my Rotary Club-Doncaster to hold a working bee at Strathfieldsaye. We tackled the Shearing Shed, a large structure, once painted, but many years ago. Clean down and a base of red lead- 200 litres. We had 25 people there that weekend, members & wives and children and they had to come back later to complete the job.

-Painting the roof of the homestead was not a popular task, but we did it several times in the 13 years.

-Open Days were required by the National Trust, which under the Will had ownership of the contents. Hold Open Days or they removed all the contents, so we held three a year. Dr Disher used to open the Garden regularly, but never the House, so when we held the first Open day in 1978, the Sale and



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Stratford residents were there to see -1200 of them. We had to repair a drop in the floor, between two rooms afterwards.

So, in essence, we removed -largely -the cost of building maintenance and rehabilitation from the Estate Budget. Certainly there was the cost of materials, but that was an area where we could help. Therefore until I retired in 1990 and the Working Bees stopped, cost of maintaining the Homestead and surrounds of Strathfieldsaye was not a significant factor.



CHAPTER TEN

MEREDITH FLETCHER

HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

CHAPTER TEN

PRESENTATION OF MEREDITH FLETCHER'S HISTORY & GUIDE-Centre for Gippsland Studies.

This brochure was presented at a Garden Party at Strathfieldsaye in 1992 at a ceremony presided over by the University's Chancellor Sir Edward Woodward and Lady Woodward.



All photographs courtesy Maurie Pawsey



CHAPTER ELEVEN

TRANSFER TO THE AUSTRALIAN LANDSCAPE TRUST



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CHAPTER ELEVEN

After 1990 the costs of operating Strathfieldsaye commenced to mount and in the early part of the new century the University must have decided a limit had been reached and obtained Supreme Court approval to rid itself of the Trust.

The Australian Landscape Trust accepted the property, we do not know on what basis. The group according to their web page has significant partners and a large centre in the South Australian Riverland-the McCormack Centre.

From a visit, by myself and my wife in 2014, to explain the University's role over my time 1977 to 1990, it was disconcerting to see the deterioration in the Buildings and once prolific garden. The historic contents were largely stored in an external container, while major repairs had been undertaken inside the Homestead and replaced with rather heterogeneous furniture, the imported English roofing iron seriously subject to rust, the garden largely disappeared.

Contact with the local manager, explained this deterioration to some degree. They have tried to obtain Heritage grants, but a major condition of these grants, is that the property has to be open on a regular basis, to the public. They do not have this capacity, apparently, therefore no access to grants.

The property still appears on the National Trust of Victoria's registered list.

MAURICE PAWSEY OAM

Former Deputy Vice-Principal [Property & Buildings]
University of Melbourne

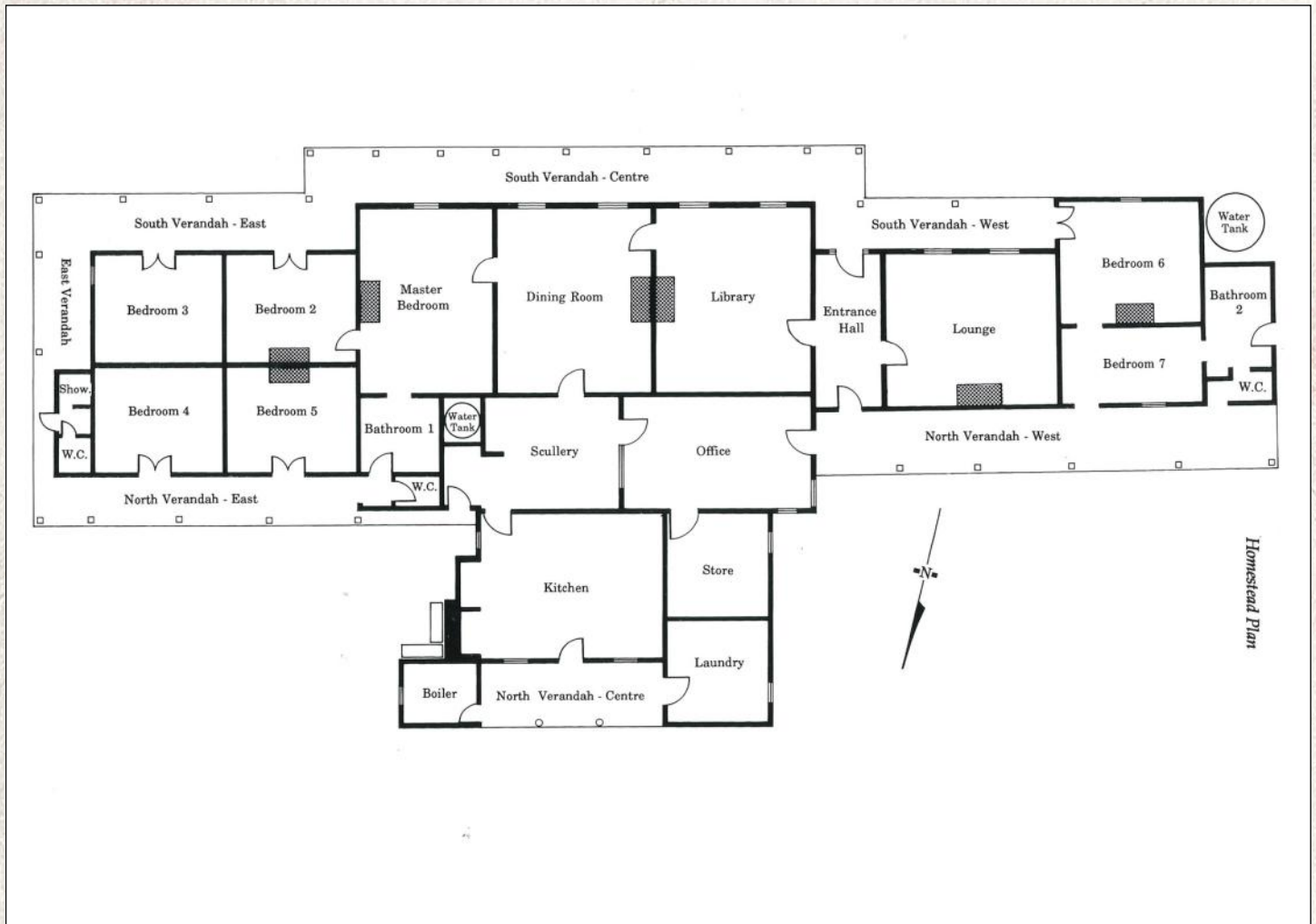
A faded, light-colored background image of a large, single-story house with a prominent front porch supported by several columns. The house has a gabled roof and a chimney. In front of the house is a well-manicured lawn and some shrubbery.

GALLERY

PHOTO GALLERY

HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

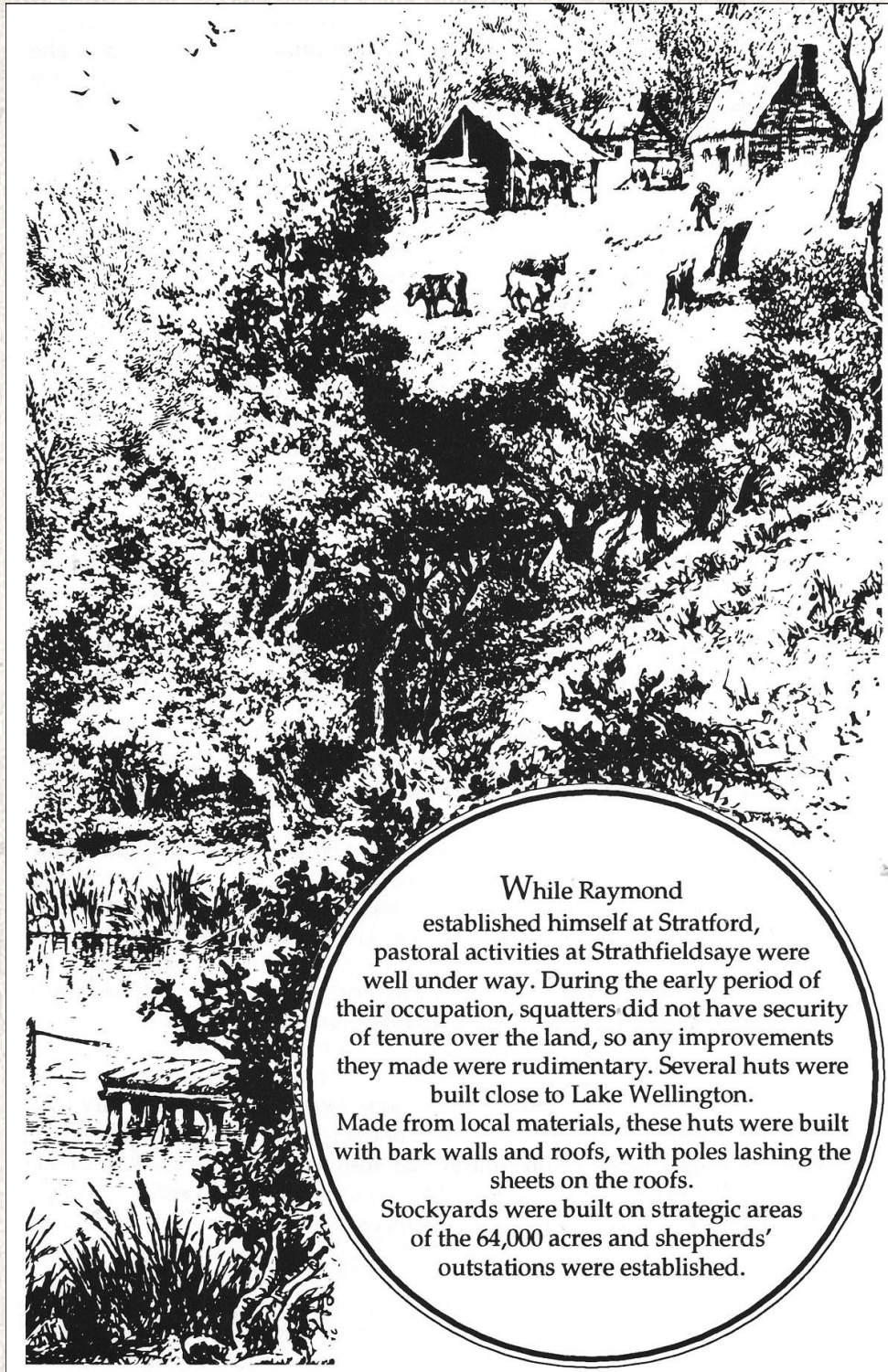
GALLERY



Strathfieldsaye Homestead plan
Courtesy Maurie Pawsey 2018

HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

GALLERY



While Raymond established himself at Stratford, pastoral activities at Strathfieldsaye were well under way. During the early period of their occupation, squatters did not have security of tenure over the land, so any improvements they made were rudimentary. Several huts were built close to Lake Wellington. Made from local materials, these huts were built with bark walls and roofs, with poles lashing the sheets on the roofs. Stockyards were built on strategic areas of the 64,000 acres and shepherds' outstations were established.

Extract of Strathfieldsaye from Australian Pictures, a facsimile originally published in 1886 by Howard Willoughby

Courtesy Maurie Pawsey 2018

HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

GALLERY



Aerial photo from Meredith Fletcher book *Strathfieldsaye-A History and a Guide*, 1992.
Courtesy Meredith Fletcher 2018

HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

GALLERY



Clive Disher and Kingsley Norris
Courtesy Maurie Pawsey 2018

HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

GALLERY



Extract From Meredith Fletcher *A History & Guide-Gippsland Studies 1992*
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GALLERY



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GALLERY



Extract From Meredith Fletcher *A History & Guide-Gippsland Studies 1992*
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HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

GALLERY



Rotary working bee on the shearing shed in 1982
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HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

GALLERY



Maurie on a tractor clearing fence lines
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HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

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Clearing undergrowth from fences and near the shed
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HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

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Christmas 1984

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HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

GALLERY



Replacing a gate post
Copyright © Maurie Pawsey 2018

HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

GALLERY



Working bee group during the 1984 Christmas
Copyright © Maurie Pawsey 2018

HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

GALLERY



The working bee group having dinner in the kitchen
Copyright © Maurie Pawsey 2018

HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

GALLERY



Rebuilding Chimney-Hartwiches Hut
Copyright © Maurie Pawsey 2018

HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

GALLERY



Preparing the roof for repainting
Copyright © Maurie Pawsey 2018

HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

GALLERY



Working bee in Homestead's garden
Copyright © Maurie Pawsey 2018

HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

GALLERY



Helping with the hay
Copyright © Maurie Pawsey 2018

HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

GALLERY



Inspection after a Board Meeting
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HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

GALLERY



A young farmer's sheering competition
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HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

GALLERY



Botany Department working bee at lunch in 1988
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HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

GALLERY



Part of the Strathfieldsaye kangaroo mob
Copyright © Maurie Pawsey 2018

HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

GALLERY



Repainting the meat house during Christmas 1984
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HISTORY OF THE STRATHFIELDSAYE ESTATE

GALLERY



Hartwiche's Hut

Copyright © Maurie Pawsey 2018



Strathfieldsaye