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ACT HERITAGE UNIT

# *Remembering* **TIDBINBILLA**



**Tidbinbilla Oral History Project conducted by  
Matthew Higgins**

**On behalf of the Tidbinbilla Pioneers Association**

**This project was carried out with the assistance of funds made available by  
the ACT Government under the 1994/95 ACT Heritage Grants Program.**

**September 1995**

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# Say "Tidbinbilla"

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## New Test for Sobriety

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Before Messrs. E. H. Kelly and T. J. Murray, J.S.I., at Queanbeyan Police Court yesterday, George Augus pleaded guilty to driving a motor vehicle on July 5th while under the influence of intoxicating liquor, also to driving without a license.

Constable Imrie said that shortly after midnight on Sunday morning defendant drove a motor car in an erratic manner from Monaro Street and pulled up in Crawford Street. Defendant's breath smelt strongly of liquor and he staggered when he got out of the car. At defendant's request a doctor was called and defendant was asked to say "Tidbinbilla" but could not. Defendant said he had previously held a license which had expired. There was very little traffic about at that time.

Defendant made a statement that he had held a license since 1926 and this was the first time he had got into trouble. He was unemployed and getting the dole.

For the first offence a fine of £2, in default four days' hard labour, was imposed, and for the second offence a fine of £1, in default two days' hard labour. A month was allowed to pay in each instance.

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Front cover: A snow-covered Tidbinbilla Range rises behind part of Congwarra, about 1973; Hedda Morrison photo. (Bill and Monica Flint Collection)

## INTRODUCTION

The Tidbinbilla Oral History Project was conducted during 1995 with funding from the ACT Heritage Grants Program. The need for such a project was realised during 1994 when, during discussions between the author and Tidbinbilla Pioneers Association Inc (TPA) Secretary Claire Lewis, it became apparent that while several books and reports had been written on the Tidbinbilla area there had been no concerted attempt to record the oral history of Tidbinbilla. The TPA subsequently decided to apply for funding which would enable a number of people associated with the district to be recorded.

Central to the aims of the project was the need to try to record 'what life was like' for the people of Tidbinbilla since the turn of the century. Thus the human element within Tidbinbilla's European cultural heritage was a key aspect of the interviews. The history of particular sites was also an important factor, though it needs to be kept in mind that the oral record is not always the most accurate in this area (eg precise dates of land acquisitions, of building construction etc) and documentary evidence for some of this type of information exists elsewhere. The project as a whole was designed to build up a picture of life at Tidbinbilla during the period of living memory which would also provide an all important context within which cultural sites could be better understood.

A general list of questions was compiled (based on the themes outlined in the grant application) and then for each interview specific questions relating to the individual interviewee were added. The general themes included family history, education, home life, transport and communication, women's role, men's role, domestic and pastoral and agricultural work, rabbitting, the eucalyptus distilling industry, timber milling, history of particular European habitation sites, recreation and social life, sense of community, memorable individuals, religion, wildlife and landscape changes, climate, knowledge of Aboriginal history and sites, the district's relationship with Canberra-Queanbeyan, local placenames, major events (eg Depression, the wars, bushfires, floods), and sense of place.

In selecting the interviewees, lists of names were discussed by the author and Claire Lewis, Eddie and Keith Green, and Harrie Quince (all members of the TPA). It was important to try to ensure that the various families who lived (and in one case still lives) in the Tidbinbilla district were represented, and that the area was properly represented geographically as well. In defining just what is Tidbinbilla, the project took in a wider area than the present Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve (TNR). Extending out beyond the TNR boundaries, the Tidbinbilla area was viewed as going north beyond Congwarra, east to Bullen and south-east almost to the Paddys River bridge, as per the map at page 6A. (Other areas of the adjoining ACT and NSW region were included in interviews as relevant.)

The interviewees are shown in the following list which gives the place and date of interview and the number of 60-minute cassettes used:

- |   |                  |                                    |
|---|------------------|------------------------------------|
| • Beryl Fisher, Canberra                          | 10/5 and 21/6/95 | 3x60                               |
| • Helen Flint, Canberra                           | 11/5/95          | 3x60                               |
| • Keith Green, Bowning                            | 17/5/95          | 3x60                               |
| • Phyllis Morton, Queanbeyan                      | 18/5/95          | 2x60                               |
| • Bill and Monica Flint, Congwarra                | 19/5/95          | 3x60                               |
| • Eddie Green, Canowindra                         | 24/5/95          | 3x60                               |
| • Laurie Dallender, Murrumburrah                  | 31/5 and 14/6/95 | declined to be interviewed on tape |
| • Jean Reid, Frogmore                             | 2/6/95           | 3x60                               |
| • Thelma Cabban, Thuddungra                       | 14/6/95          | 2x60                               |
| • Sheila Lawton and Doug Blewitt, Nil Desperandum | 15/6/95          | 2x60                               |
| • Doreen Blundell and Valerie Cootes, Queanbeyan  | 20/6/95          | 2x60                               |
| • Dave Kerr, Canberra                             | 21/6/95          | 1x60                               |
| • Gladys Larkin, Canberra                         | 30/6/95          | 2x60                               |
| • Jo Waterhouse, Canberra                         | 11/7/95          | 1x60                               |

In addition to the above, the following people were also contacted (or at least attempted contact was made) for interview:

- Ruby Harris (Miss Harris's age and condition militated against an interview; some weeks after our preliminary meeting she passed away)
- Cecil Woods (Mr Woods declined to be included in the project)
- Lance Green (Severe illness prevented Mr Green from participating in the project at the stage where an interview could have been scheduled)
- Lindsay Blewitt (Distance proved the major barrier here)
- Edie England (Mrs England was unable to attend the interview with her sisters Doreen and Val)
- Haley Blewitt (An interview was arranged but had to be postponed because of circumstances preventing Mr Blewitt from doing the interview for some months; it then was no longer possible to do the interview)

Prior to the interview phase, background research was conducted using a range of written sources. These included Monica Flint, *To Green the Memory*, Congwarra 1983 and *Flint Family Reunion*, Congwarra 1985; David Bulbeck and Philip Boot, *Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve Cultural Resource Survey and Conservation Plan*, Canberra 1991; Vincent Fisher, *Gibraltar : an old bush school*, Congwarra 1986; Harrie Quince, *From Tipperary to the Limestone Plains*, Canberra 1991; and Freeman Collett & Partners and Matthew Higgins, *Nil Desperandum Precinct Conservation Plan*, Canberra 1994. During the interviews there was a conscious effort to try to avoid simply duplicating the information held in these and other sources, and to endeavour to complement and greatly extend them (and, dare it be said, to correct them if necessary!).

Prior to interviews, preliminary meetings were held with most of the interviewees. These were an opportunity for the author and the informant to get to know one another and for both parties to get a better idea of what that specific interview would entail. It was an important part of the process of tailoring the questions for each interviewee.

The recordings were generally made in the interviewees' homes, although some on-site interviewing was done (Sheila Lawton and Doug Blewitt were interviewed in their old Tidbinbilla home Nil Desperandum). Equipment used was a Sony D6C cassette recorder with an AKG D130 microphone. Tapes were TDK SA60. A total of 30 60-minute tapes were used and the length of each interview is evident from the summaries. The project copyright form (in which interviewees acknowledged that copyright on the tapes is held by the ACT Government and that various public uses of the material could be made) was signed at the time of the taped interview.

Photographs were also borrowed from interviewees for copying under the project. These images (photocopies of most of which are found in this report) number 61 and copyright is held by the donors. The TPA holds the copy negatives and a set of prints.

Summaries of the interviews make up the bulk of the rest of this report. They begin with a brief biographical account of the interviewee and then proceed with a precis of what is on the tape. They are essentially a *guide* to the tapes, and have been written to include as much information as possible within the project's resources; they are not really a replacement for the tapes nor some sort of 'mini history' of Tidbinbilla (though they do approach this). The summaries were checked with interviewees before inclusion in the report, and where interviewees have amended something said on the tape this is shown by the use of square brackets in the summary (square brackets have also been used by the author when adding other remarks — eg making cross references or pointing out inconsistencies — to summaries). Because a summary tends to telescope an interview, it may make the interview seem disordered or confused, with different subjects of discussion abruptly running into one another in the interview. This confusion is more apparent than real, and does not reflect the structured nature of the interviews. On the other hand, interviews often do range back and forth across subject areas, and across different time periods, and this needs to be accepted as part of the process of interviewing, of remembering and of talking. Each summary has been written so as to reflect as closely as possible the actual flow of the interview, although in some instances a little distillation was necessary where the flow became particularly disjointed.

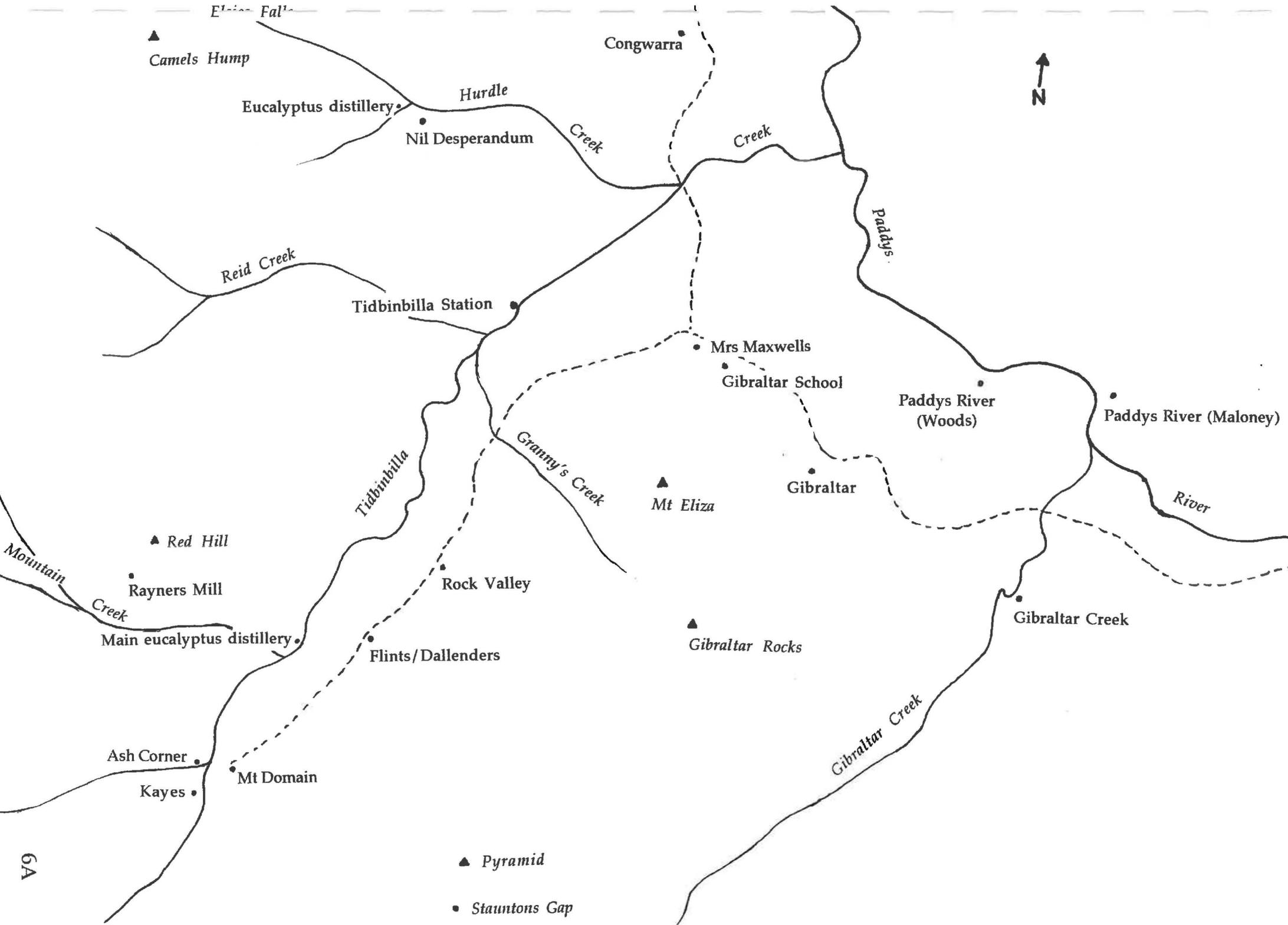
Following the summaries is an index to names, places and subjects. This should prove useful to users of the collection seeking information on specific people, buildings, properties, activities etc.

Finally, users of this material should carefully consider the nature of oral history. The oral record is a most significant and valuable form of historical evidence. It provides information often not available in other forms of evidence such as documents and photographs. It gives individuals involved with a particular place and time the chance to tell their story and to have that story preserved for future generations. It helps in a very real way to people the past and so enable us to keep a human perspective on the past. Without the preserving of the oral record a huge amount of our knowledge about the past would pass to the grave and be lost forever. Yet it does have its weaknesses, and these need to be kept in mind. The fallibility of memory, the subjective nature of some oral evidence, the constraints of the interviewing process itself are matters which affect the way in which oral material can be used. No guarantee can be given as to the veracity of all the material taped under this project, and it will be seen that there are some conflicts between some interviewees' material. Remember that interviewees are as justified in voicing opinions and beliefs about their past lives as are the rest of us. Where it is possible to do so, it is always a good idea for researchers who might wish to use this collection to try to weigh up all the forms of evidence available (oral, documentary, pictorial, physical) before reaching conclusions.

Copyright in the tapes is held by the ACT Government. Inquiries regarding access to and use of the tape collection should be directed to the ACT Heritage Unit.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Hearty thanks are extended especially to all of the people, listed above, who agreed to be interviewed about their Tidbinbilla lives. Without your co-operation the project would never have become more than simply an idea. I am grateful also to a number of people who assisted in many very helpful ways. These are Claire and Bob Lewis, Keith and Eddie Green, Gwen Green, Harrie Quince, Fran Sorrelle, Vince Fisher, Steve Welch, Dave Dwyer, Adam Henderson, Dorothy Minson, Bert Bennett and Val Jeffery.



## INTERVIEW SUMMARIES

*Dear Reader,*

*Please read the introduction to this report before making use of these summaries or the tapes.*

## **Beryl Fisher**

*Beryl Fisher (nee Woods) was born at Paddys River in 1910, the fifth child of Edward Woods jnr and Elizabeth (Bessie) nee Anderson. She grew up at Paddys River and in 1936 married Pat Fisher, who worked for the Forestry and Timber Bureau and later Parks and Gardens. They lived at Hall for a short time before moving to Yarralumla where Beryl still resides. Beryl's son Vince sat in on the interview and assisted his mother at certain points.*

### **Tape 1, side A**

Beryl tells that her father was in the district before his marriage and built the Paddys River house after marrying Bessie; houses needed to be near rivers in case of dry times. The property was 80 acres at the time. Beryl, sister Julia and brothers Harold and Charlie were all born there; older sisters Elma and Doris were born at Hawthorne Cottage in Canberra. Bessie had worked on Cuppacumbalong and Lambrigg, minding the De Salis children; Edward sheared and fenced locally. Vince explains that they would have known each other at school, and that Edward's father was a tenant farmer at Yarralumla and Bessie's a tenant farmer on Duntroon.

The Paddys River house is described. It was slab with a big stone fireplace, iron roof and small windows; Edward and his brothers would have cut the slabs. A separate kitchen and adjoining bedroom was built later, c.1905, by Harry Holland, later a New Zealand politician. Bedrooms and beds were shared. The family boarded some of the Gibraltar school teachers (in the room adjoining the kitchen), beginning with Miss Duddle. The main part of the house was knocked down and replaced by the current house in 1928; the kitchen block remains [and has just been listed on the Register of the National Estate].

Beryl describes in some detail the process of papering the walls with wallpaper and homemade paste. Bessie first cooked in a camp oven, then in a wood stove; firewood was brought on a dray. Lighting was with kero lanterns. Washing was done by 'just Mum and the girls' (the boys were with Dad in the paddocks) once or twice a week; at first there was no copper and washing was boiled in kero tins (when water was short the job was done on the riverbank).

Breakfast was porridge and bread (Bessie baked twice a week); flour was bought in 150 pound bags and stored in a mice-proof box. Beryl recites the jobs that the girls had to do before school while their mother went to milk the cows. Milk was scalded to get the cream which was then made into butter using butterpats, daily. Bessie used the buttermilk for making scones. There was very little free time. On the way home from school the kids would get the cows — 'hunt them off the swamp' — and separate the calves for the night.

The boarding teachers are described. After Miss Duddle came Miss Woodbridge, about 50, who 'had a lot of German in her' and thought others should too! She ate away from the family, in the dining room. If Doris or Elma forgot to give her a teaspoon to eat her boiled egg with at breakfast they risked the cane in class. Next teacher Victor Kelly stayed at Greens' Rock Valley; Edward didn't want him boarding when Edward was away shearing. Vera Bye, about 20, was 'a lovely person'. Miss Smith was scared of the workmen clearing nearby and hid behind her umbrella. Other teachers who stayed elsewhere are mentioned. The board helped the family income.

## 1B

Starting at Gibraltar aged four, Beryl just recalls the old slab school then describes the layout of the subsequent weatherboard building. Slates and chalk were used in first class, then pencil and exercise books; there were six classes in the small school. She especially liked poetry and recites part of 'The Daffodils'. Miss Sackett had pupils recite prayers morning and evening; Beryl recites the morning one:

Father we thank thee for the night  
And for the pleasant morning light  
For rest and food and loving care  
And all that makes the world so fair.

Help us to do the things we should  
And be to others kind and good  
In all we do in work or play  
To be more loving every day

There was a lot of sport, games described including Denmark, Hen and Chickens, cricket, football and rounders. Pupils would go over the stile to the adjacent tennis court with Miss Sackett.

The walk to school, often barefoot, was one and three quarter miles. Bessie made the school clothes for Beryl and her siblings.

Phil Hardy's bullock team would pass the school, attracting the kids as Hardy pulled up. The leaders were Pointer and Hunter. Hardy played Santa Claus one year at the school. Another big event was the opening of Telopea Park School; Gibraltar and Tharwa School kids were bused in to Canberra for the ceremony. Inspector Mr Dart without warning arrived one day and gave Beryl and several others (eg Beryl Rustin, Beatrice Woods) their Qualifying Examination, which they passed. Kids feared him owing to his deep voice.

Homework was done after tea by the lamp; if it was windy smoke blew down the chimney or put the lamp out. Candles too were used for lighting. When there were visitors Beryl and Julia would often put out their bedroom candle and go and listen to the adults' conversation, using

the extinguished candle as an excuse for needing to come into the adults' room.

Beryl describes the interior of the house, including the furniture. Card games played at night are mentioned. Bessie in her spare time read books brought home from school by the older girls. Once a month she would take Miss Bye to church at Tharwa. Beryl slept in the same room as Miss Bye.

Edward was often away shearing eg in the Riverina for five months. At home he killed and salted meat for the family, but the salt meat was often leathery so fresh meat was a relief. By the time of his death in 1926 (when Harold and Charlie took over) the property was the original 80 acres plus the reserve (320) and part of Bullen (1000); there were 1000 sheep. Beryl describes helping her father with fencing when about twelve.

## 2A

Aged about 12 Beryl went to Mrs Nina Farrer's Lambrigg for (working) holidays. Much time was spent picking apricots which Mrs Farrer sold. She didn't let Beryl into some of the rooms, and after Mrs Farrer's niece Miss Vera played on the piano with Beryl Mrs Farrer wasn't pleased — Beryl was told not to play the piano 'because my fingers might dirty the keys'.

One day Bessie took Beryl to Blythburn to visit Elizabeth Julia McKeahnice; Beryl recalls Elizabeth's good cakes and scones and how Elizabeth milked and patted her cows.

Beryl often went rabbit trapping, to keep them under control, earn money and to provide food. She trapped a paddock on Rock Valley in 1926 after sister Elma married Tom Green of Rock Valley in 1925. Thirty traps were used. At home some of the rabbits were boiled up in kero tins for the chickens and dogs. Edward used to put wire netting 'cages' in burrows to catch rabbits.

Beryl recalls trips to Queanbeyan by horse and sulky, which took several hours. One trip detailed is when she and mother went in to collect father from the early morning train when he was returning from a shearing trip. They went in the day before and stayed at Davies Hotel. Beryl opened the numerous gates on the road. The horse, Roany, would stop when roadworkers were met because Edward always used to stop and talk with them, though Bessie didn't want to stop this time! So she whipped the horse and they flew into town; near the post office they raced over a bump and Beryl lost the umbrella.

Beryl had her own horse, Stella. When on the mail run to Booroomba (described later) she rode another, Creamy. On the Queanbeyan trips they crossed the Murrumbidgee at Point Hut Crossing, which then was a ford (including an island) a little downstream from the present concrete

crossing. It was dangerous when the river was high; the drowning of Ted Green is recalled. In the 1920s the first concrete crossing was put in. Beryl mentions the first car owners in the district, including Bill Staunton, Greens, Rustins.

Of local social life, Beryl says of the tennis courts 'that's when the social life started, really'. Dances were popular, being held at Blewitts' Gibraltar, at the school, and at home when Miss Bye left. Musicians included Martin Woods and Jack Maloney (both on accordion, Jack also on violin), and Bill Staunton on violin. Dances were mostly waltzes and scottisches and square dances; some tunes are recalled. Tharwa Hall was another venue, and dances were held for the churches or charities.

## 2B

Dances and tennis were prime ways to meet other local people. When young people were seeing one another it was always in a group, so no need for a chaperone. Charlie and Harold often drove other locals to the dances.

Fishing was a pastime, sometimes in the Murrumbidgee and at Cotter Reserve but mostly in Paddys River and Gibraltar Creek. Beryl just had a stick and line, though Bessie had a proper reel; bait was used and the fish were always trout, not native fish. Beryl feels cormorants etc have lowered the fish population today.

Once Beryl rode in the Tuggeranong races (on Pat Fisher's horse Loretta); the Rowe girls from Booroomba won because they fed their horses on oats. After the races a ball would be held at Tuggeranong Homestead. Tennis was also played at Tharwa, Queanbeyan and Weetangera.

Pat Fisher once went for a flight with Andy Cunningham, and lost his hat and pipe, vowing never to go up again. Charlie and Harold met Unity Cunningham and liked her; they rented her property near the Red Rocks Gorge.

Discussing religion, Beryl says that mass was held at Christmas and Easter sometimes at Tom and Mary Woods' place at Gibraltar Creek, or at Stauntons' Mt Domain, at Annie and Sid Flints and had earlier been held at Hatcliffs'. It was also held at Tharwa Hall. Father Haydon, who rode a motorbike with sidecar and heard the childrens' catechism, would visit Presbyterian Bessie — Beryl and siblings went for rides in the sidecar. Protestant families apart from Bessie were Greens, Bert and Flo Reid, the Reads at Naas, and Mrs Rustin. Sectarianism generally did not create problems.

Asked about sense of community, Beryl says it was strong in early days because people needed one another in times of sickness especially. Mrs Susan Maloney of Calvary acted as midwife at the births of Charlie, Harold, Beryl and Julia. When Beryl was born there was a flood in Paddys

River, so Mrs Maloney crossed on the strands of a wire fence. It was Lent, and Mrs Maloney being a strong Catholic enforced restrictions in the household, including the prohibition on meat. After 10 days when she left Edward put three steaks in the pan saying 'I'm never going through that again!' When Julia was born, father was away, so mother asked three-year-old Beryl to ask Ruby MacIntyre to hurry (she lived with brother John where Jack Maloney later moved in, later called Miowera). Ruby asked Beryl to stay outside during the birth. 'I must have been well behaved, because I did stay outside.'

Susan Maloney probably left Calvary after husband Michael died in 1915. Beryl and her mother went up there to get apricots which were carried back in kero tins and made good jam. Cherries were picked too at other times for jam. This was in the 1920s and the abandoned house was still intact.

The Maloneys' son Jack lived in a little weatherboard hut near Rustins, then at Gibraltar [called by Beryl Birrigai on the tape, the site is now Birrigai], then he moved to where MacIntyres had been, a pise kitchen with dirt floor, another pise building and separate slab building. He built a new place there after marrying Kathleen Corkhill; the property was called Paddys River (like Beryl's family property). Jack was a big, sociable man. He would help the Woods' at times, and had sheep, cattle and a stallion which he had service peoples' mares.

### 3A

Edward got the Tharwa-Mt Domain mail run in about 1920, though it was the Woods children that actually ran the mail. The run included Booroomba, and Beryl describes riding with the big, leather mail bag through the Booroomba bull paddock. Bulls often charged; it was terrifying. Booroomba man Harry Tyrie told Bessie it was dangerous for the girls. Julia would sing due to fear and this sometimes attracted the steers, making matters worse. Beryl would then go on to school while Julia accompanied Charlie on to Rock Valley and Mt Domain in the sulky. Lucy Maxwell took on the run after Charlie, though didn't go to Booroomba or Lambrigg.

Mrs Maxwell lived in the Rustins' old house. Jack Rustin and wife Aggie had two daughters and a son; the family lived there till moving to Tharwa sometime after 1926. Mrs Maxwell is described as a 'very strong woman' who sold rabbits, apples and eggs.

More stories about Charles Henry McKeahnie's wild Booroomba cattle follow; they were brought down from the mountains in winter and weren't used to people. Their paddock bordered the Woods' Paddys River and Beryl tells of close escapes.

On another occasion Beryl, aged about ten, had to fetch in the milking cow from over Smiths Hill late one winter afternoon. With no boots and only

a thin dress and jacket she set off and found the cow but got caught in a snowstorm. Beryl got into a burnt out tree and pulled the cow in against her as the snow fell (the cow's warmth saved her). It was dark, with the moon sometimes shining. As the snow stopped Beryl led the cow home. Mum was cooeing and with Harold was watching for them with a lantern. Bessie carried Beryl inside and carefully bathed her frozen feet. The family's favourite time of the year was summer.

Some bushfires are described. Bessie kept the girls inside during fires but Dad and the boys went out to try to fight them. A bad hailstorm is recalled when the swamp was covered in egg-sized stones.

Reflecting on life in the Tidbinbilla district, Beryl says she and her family enjoyed life and made the most of it, and the kids had their friends and relatives to spend time with. 'It was a different life...I love the mountains...I don't think I could ever go away from the mountains.' She loves to go back out there for trips today, but the people have gone and that older life will never return.

(Continuing the interview on 21 June) When Edward was dying of tuberculosis, boarding teacher Miss Fitzroy was frightened by his screams. She moved to Gibraltar. Miss Bye got upset by the frogs around the house (the ground was wetter then), their croaking kept her awake and she cried. One night she got upset by the curlews (which have gone now).

### 3B

Beryl says the curlews' call was a 'long, mournful whistle'; Mum asked Beryl to chase them away. Miss Bye was nice but nervous; she was in her early 20s and was from Wagga. Beryl cannot recall details of when Miss Woodbridge somehow contrived for Doris to return from high school in Sydney.

Abraham Joseph (Lebanese) and Peter Melon (Greek) were two hawkers who toured the district every 6 or 12 months, selling clothes, haberdashery, books, etc. They had vans drawn by draught-horses and would stay overnight in the vans nearby, Abraham quite close to the house. Dad once bought Beryl a pair of boots and laced them too tightly for her. After these two men disappeared there were no further hawkers.

Swagmen came by at the time of construction of Cotter Dam, and Bessie fed them and told them how to get to the dam site. Later another came, and Miss Bye and the kids steered clear of him; swaggies frightened the children because they were big and strangers.

Further details on Michael and Susan Maloney are given. Before Calvary they lived on the Paddys River where a large dead pine is today; Michael lost this block due to a transaction with McKeahnie over sheep, and they had to move to Calvary. Susan was small, Irish, 'very, very religious',

capable and was straight to the point. No-one was living at Calvary when Beryl married in the 1930s.

Details (as above) on Jack Maloney's Paddys River place are given. Woods' sheared at Jack Maloney's sometimes, and at Booroomba one year. Harold and Charlie then built their own shed and this was their accommodation while they built their new house in 1928.

The reserve which was leased by Edward was not cleared. Edward wanted to clear it but Bessie and the family voted against it; Bessie wanted trees for a windbreak and 'it makes a place look more homely with trees'. Details of the garden trees and shrubs grown by Bessie are given.

In 1926 Beryl went to Kurri Kurri to her Uncle Will's, then went to Sydney for work. There was little money at home and her trapping at Tidbinbilla had given her the fare. In Sydney she was a maid for the Lowe family (owners of the clothing retail chain) in Double Bay. Then she worked for the Baillieu family at Cassillis and went to Melbourne (by boat) with them for a holiday at Mt Macedon. Details are given of when she was in Sydney while sister Elma Green was there for a hydatids operation, and how her ill mother died in Sydney in 1934.

While accompanying Charlie on the mail run as a young girl Beryl went to Stauntons' Mt Domain; she recalls the big fire always going in the kitchen, how they'd always be given something to eat, John Staunton's comfortable chair, and how Mrs Staunton was 'very official' in getting the mail bag ready. Charlie signed for the mail and they went back down the valley.

*After the tape finished Beryl preferred to continue off tape. There were 8 gates to open on the way to Stauntons which would be reached by 8am. Beryl or Julia accompanied Charlie (then in his late teens and early twenties) to open the gates, and one would go on to Stauntons while the other went to Booroomba as mentioned earlier. After dropping say Beryl at school Charlie would go on to Lambrigg (during school holidays Beryl would go there with him and always get lunch with Mrs Farrer), then on to other households and in to post mistress Mrs Sheedy at Tharwa. Payment for the mail run was 8 pounds per month, which went to Beryl's parents, not to the kids who did the work. Charlie did the run at least till 1928 when Mrs Maxwell took over.*

*Beryl recalled Rayner's sawmill. Mrs Rayner lived there too and she helped Beryl with some knitting. When Charlie and Harold built the new house at Paddys River in 1928, some of it came from a flood-damaged Queanbeyan house and other timber came from Rayner's mill.*

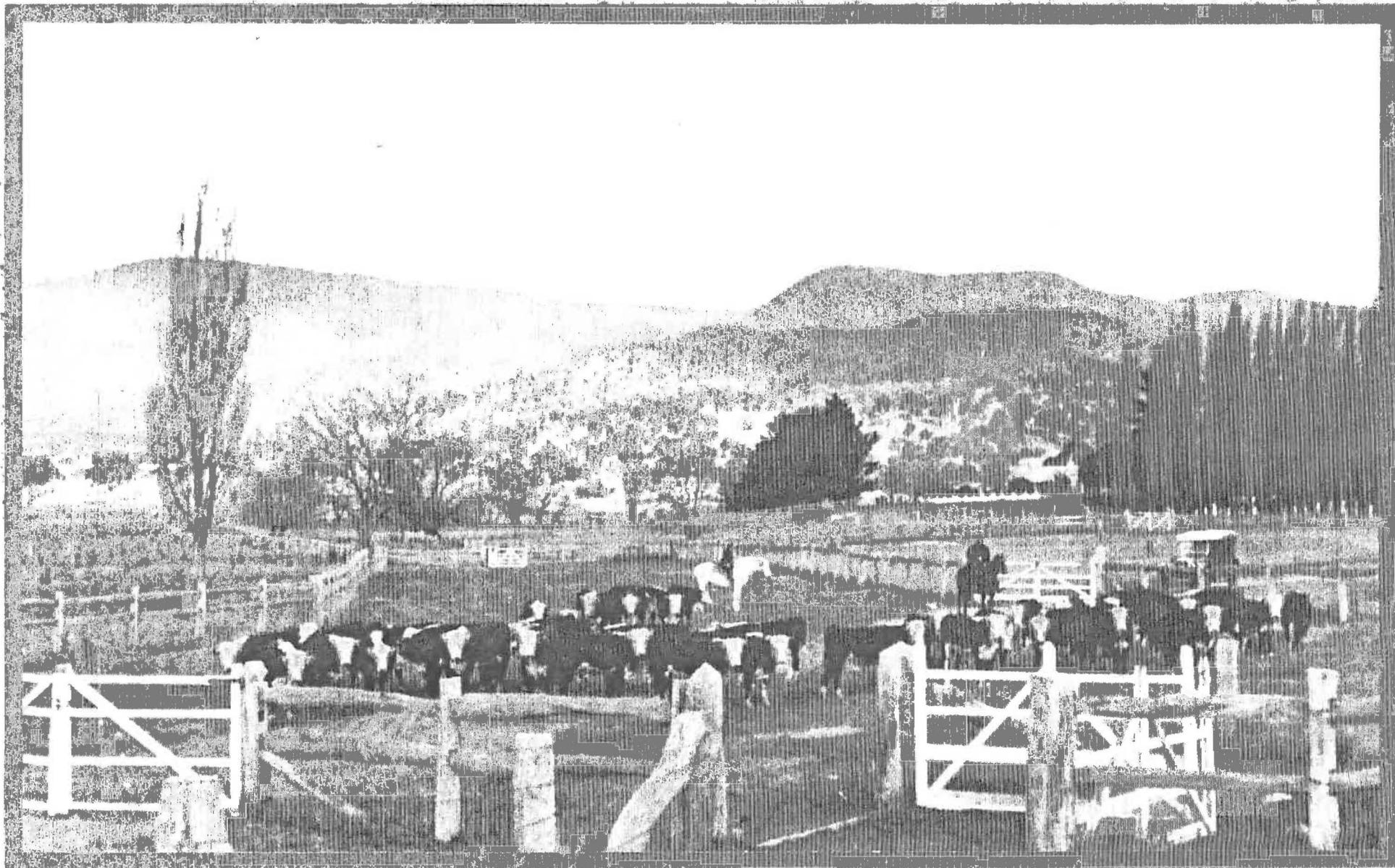
*Another subject was discussed which is not included in this report.*



Beryl Fisher's mother Bessie Woods at Paddys River about 1928-30. The woolshed had been erected a short time before by Beryl's brothers Harold and Charlie and stands today, with alterations. Note the ringbarking in the background. (Beryl Fisher Collection, copy kindly supplied by Vince Fisher)



Beryl Fisher stands in front of the 1905 kitchen at her former home Paddys River. Teachers from Gibraltar School who boarded with Beryl's family stayed in the room adjoining the kitchen. The photo was taken during a site visit during the project. (Author photo)



Cattle at Booroomba, about 1927. (Beryl Fisher Collection)

## Helen Flint

*Helen was born Helen Rigney in Adelaide in 1916. In the 1930s she worked as a child's nurse on properties in northern South Australia and far western New South Wales. She came to Sydney and from there came to Lanyon in 1935 where she worked as a maid. She met Kevin Flint of Congwarra (brother to interviewees Bill Flint and Phyllis Morton) and they married in 1939. They lived for a year at Congwarra, then at Pierces Creek where Kevin worked in Forestry during the 1940s. They again lived at Congwarra during 1950-52 until the property passed to Bill. Moving to Urila, Kevin died there in 1959. Helen lived at Sutton, then Ainslie, Barton and now lives at Scullin. Owing to the great interest inherent in Helen's early outback experiences, these begin the interview which then moves on to the Tidbinbilla district.*

### Tape 1, Side A

Aged 15, Helen left Adelaide to get work as a child's nurse on rural properties (her family lived in a hotel in Adelaide which was not to her liking). She went to Koomooloo, near Burra: it was so flat 'you could see the dust of the mailman coming 20 miles away'. Life on the station is described, as is a picnic train trip to Adelaide. Helen enjoyed all the new experiences, like exploring the mines and playing polo. A pair of dogs were used to hunt and kill kangaroos. On horseback, Helen once chased a kangaroo and luckily escaped injury when the horse propped at a fence. There were 32 000 sheep, and 20 blade shearers.

After two years at Burra Helen went to Beltana near the Flinders Ranges. On the train trip there she went through Parachilna which was being taken over by creeping sand. At Beltana (where she was for six months) her room was under a concrete water tank. Owing to the drought there was no butter or fresh milk for those six months. When the South Australian Governor and his wife visited all they could serve them was jam sandwiches. At the dances (7 in 6 months), Afghans would attend. Helen rode camels and donkeys and recalls the camel and mule trains coming in for supplies. There were mule races at Copley.

After working for a time in an Adelaide surgery (Helen moved constantly because she 'wanted to see more and more') she went to Caulpulin Station at Wilcannia. She travelled up with the cook who was mentally unbalanced, and ended up leaving because of her; numerous instances of the cook's strange behaviour are recounted.

### 1B

In Sydney Helen met another cook, Eve, who wanted to go to the bush. They got a job at Lanyon in 1935, Helen as a housemaid. It was a 'very good, very easy time' at Lanyon. Owner T.A.Field visited every three months. Helen walked to Tharwa for the dances, where Una West played

the piano and there were other musicians; the hall had 'a fantastic floor'. She rode in the Cuppacumbalong races as well, and she recounts an amusing race.

Lanyon had a charisma about it. VIPs visited, including the commodore of the P&O Line and representatives from the Empire Games (Helen recalls difficulties with an Indian man caused by caste).

At one dance in Queanbeyan Helen's friend Tom Hopkins was unable to drive her back to Lanyon so he asked Kevin Flint to give her a lift back. They were to go to a dance at Tralee, but it was postponed when one of the Morrisons there was accidentally shot when getting through a fence with a rifle. Helen and Kevin made trips to Congwarra, and they married in 1939.

Talking of Kevin's family, Helen says how his father Philip (better known as Phib) had been a ganger on the Cotter Dam project [other information suggests that while Phib was a ranger at the Cotter he probably didn't actually work on the dam] and then lived at Rose [Hill]. When the Wrights (Alice Wright, nee Green, was a sister to Phib's wife Lizzie) moved from Congwarra, Flints moved in. Brief mention is made of Gibraltar schoolteachers Miss Myers and Norman Cornwell.

In 1939 Helen lived at Congwarra, and Kevin and Laurie Dallender went to Pierces Creek through the week for Forestry work, Kevin returning home at weekends. Kevin's work on the Stromlo pines is described. He had been born in 1914, was a quiet man, had a hearing problem and was very clever: 'a natural born mechanic'.

At Congwarra there was a pet kangaroo, Joe, who you had to be careful with because he'd try to fight you (Phib had got him from Archie Brown of Bulga Creek who had taught him to fight). He would chase Bill and Harold Flint on their bikes, and would try to get Kevin out from under a car he was working on, in order to have a fight. John Bluett [of Koorabri], then living at Oakey Creek, would get bailed up in his car by Joe.

When living at Pierces Creek in the 1940s, Helen and Kevin went to Congwarra at weekends to help around the place.

Helen now tells several reminiscences about Phib, whom she got to know very well. Once when shearing was about to start and Phib had gone to town to get stores, it threatened rain so Helen and others got the sheep in to keep them dry, and she was proud of their efforts. When Phib returned he was unaccountably angry with her for it and let the sheep out. They got wet, the shearing was delayed, and the shearers departed for town.

After her son Brian was born, Helen wanted to take him to Queanbeyan Hospital (where she had worked for a time) to show him to the staff. Phib came too and got on the rum. During the drive home Phib's driving got

worse and worse. Helen talked him into going to Woods' and phoning Kevin to come and get them from there, which Kevin did. Phib wasn't pleased with Helen then either.

Despite these incidents, Helen and Phib got on well together and she had a lot of affection for him. 'I never let him bluff me', she says.

Phib gave her a horse, Shadow, which bucked terribly under anyone but Phib himself. Phib knew his animals: 'he had a marvellous feeling for cattle and horses'. Once they were checking the sheep, got off their horses, and the horses went back home. Phib was enraged by the horses' disobedience and gave his a bit of a beating when they got back, though Helen prevented him hitting hers. By the next day it was all forgotten.

Helen recalls an unrelated incident when there was a drought and a cow died in the yards and she couldn't get it out. After a week she saw it moving — there were little pigs inside the carcass, eating it. 'I'll never forget that.'

Phib always had a bent-stemmed pipe, and often had it in his mouth upside down — so as to prevent the rain from putting it out. He was regarded by one and all as a 'character'.

Helen mentions how he did deals by a handshake rather than by putting them on paper, and how his tough constitution brought him through severe illness.

## 2A

On one of his trips to the snow leases Phib brought back a wild pig strapped to the saddle; it eventually had to be killed because it killed a couple of dogs. He bred the fattest pigs in the district, and his salted down pork would last for 12 months.

Helen remembers Lizzie as a wonderful woman, good at anything around the house, kind and generous. Helen coaxed her to go away for a holiday once.

Once when Helen returned from Gibraltar (having picked up some ration tickets), Phib arrived furious because of something a man MacIntyre who worked for him had done. The man's hat was on the verandah so Phib poured kero on it and burned it.

On another occasion Phib and George Rowley had been on the rum and returning home tried to cross flooded Tidbinbilla Creek. Phib slipped off the log but saved the rum bottle. At Congwarra the rest of the family moved into another room for some peace when these two arrived home, and Helen gave Phib his tea but argued with him to change into some dry clothes. After heated discussion, Phib relented and came back in collar and tie. He meekly obeyed Helen when she told him to go to bed later.

Phib's helping of other families is mentioned , after which Helen says he was a 'street angel and a house devil'.

When living at Congwarra at the beginning of the 50s, Helen campaigned to get the school bus to come beyond the Cotter Reserve to Congwarra. She succeeded, and bribed the workmen on the road to bring the drive right to Congwarra, offering dressed fowls as an inducement. Her sons were then able to get to Telopea Park School.

Helen describes hers and Kevin's feelings when Congwarra was sold in 1952, how Kevin worked for a time at Queanbeyan, and then at Urila.

Then follows a detailed description of how she accompanied Phib and Kevin (in about 1940) when they packed into the Cotter River the equipment and food for the men building the small trial weir near today's Bendora Dam. Going over Fishing Gap, they crossed the Cotter 9 times to get to the site. 'The vegetation was absolutely superb. I didn't realise there was anything like that out behind those mountains.' (Later, Kevin had the job of reading the stream gauge near the weir and Helen sometimes went with him.) On one trip in the Cotter, Helen looked down to see a brown snake between the horses legs; Kevin shot it. Phib knew the good fishing holes in the river , and on one wet night Kevin and Joe Goodall caught 76 trout from one hole. Back at Congwarra the women cleaned the fish and Kevin salted them down: 'we ate trout for six months afterwards'.

Helen says that sometimes when Kevin rode over to read the gauge he went via Snowy Corner [other information suggests Kevin went via Fishing Gap]. The 'clock' in the gauge ran for a week so the gauge had to be checked weekly. Edna Dallender (nee Flint, a cousin to Kevin and Bill), later did this job. 'She was game...out there in the mountains, alone, anything could happen.' Kevin saw Aboriginal carvings during his trips over the Tidbinbilla Range to the gauge, and once brought back a stone axe. Aboriginal sites on Mt Tennent are briefly referred to.

Helen used to help Elma Green when Elma was ill, and she goes on to tell of great dances at Greens' woolshed at Rock Valley. One time the hot supper ran out, so Helen brought a roast from home which the Queanbeyan policeman cut very thinly to make go round all the people. The dances finished in the early hours, and were enjoyable, relaxed occasions.

## 2B

Talking of Gibraltar, Helen says how hard Doreen Blewitt worked as a teenager to run the phone exchange (when her mother Ethel was away working), to cook and sew. Helen, Olga Flint, Edna Dallender would play tennis with her. A Green family reunion in the Nature Reserve is briefly referred to, when an emu ate a fruit cake specially made by Doreen. The huge fireplace at Gibraltar is mentioned later.

Eric and Elsie Blewitt lived at Nil Desperandum and Helen walked up to see them: 'its a lovely spot'. Kevin plastered the walls for them. Elsie had a good garden, including asparagus. The local community was deeply shocked when Eric was killed by his horse.

Returning to local dances, Kevin played the accordian all night, tunes including Bridle on the Wall, Danny Boy, Two Little Girls in Blue. When they were still engaged he would play at Naas dances and Helen would sing, songs including Bridle on the Wall, Its a Sin to tell a Lie, Mother McCree. She lost her singing voice when she contracted scarlet fever while living at Pierces Creek.

She feels there was less sense of community in her time than perhaps in earlier times, though the TPA has helped to recapture some it.

There follows a detailed description of how in the 1940s when, while Kevin and Doug Maxwell were working on the Stockyard Creek Arboretum in the Brindabellas, she stayed at Maxwells' house at Bulls Head. While riding to the mail box at Piccadilly Circus, her horse fell and rolled on Helen, breaking her pelvis. She tried to walk but collapsed, and crawled a quarter of a mile to the road junction. The ineffectual mailman was of little help, but a roadworker got a car and drove her to Uriarra, where the doctor put her in hospital. Recovery was slow, but three months later Helen was back in the saddle mustering sheep with Hubert Noone at Congwarra.

Kevin's work with Forestry is briefly described (eg hoeing firebreaks, servicing trucks, fighting fires).

The 1939 bushfire was terrible. It came over from the Brindabellas, and men sent to Tidbinbilla from Canberra to fight it got stopped fighting a fire at Castle Hill. Phib lost stock in the blaze, which was worst up the valley at Annie Flint's. Annie and daughter Edna fought the blaze with wet bags and axes.

A Mr [George] Jefferis, waiter at the Hotel Canberra, used to come out and camp on the Tidbinbilla Range in winter in the snow for his holidays. He was a loner. When leaving he would call in to Congwarra and Lizzie would give him a good meal. He was interested in nature and wrote a book about his trips. [The three-volume typescript, 'Around Australia's Capital', 1931, was not published but is held in typescript form at the Canberra and District Historical Society library; John Whelen contributed to it too.]

Problems caused by floods in Tidbinbilla Creek are mentioned. Helen and Kevin once stayed with Mrs Maxwell when they couldn't get through. Vehicles sometimes got stuck in the creek.

### 3A

Once when Phib was caught in the creek Kevin took down two draughthorses in the middle of the night to rescue the vehicle. When in flood it was a strong creek: 'you could get washed away'. Kevin and Helen went up the creek fishing; Kevin actually fished, Helen loved the surroundings.

Recalling the eucalyptus distillers, especially big Steve [Lajcin], Helen says how the three Czechs took it in turns to go to town, and how once when Steve lit the 'copper' [the boiler for the still?] a wombat shot out from underneath. Helen talks of the distilling process and how the oil appeared so slowly.

Reflecting on her Tidbinbilla days, Helen says that the area 'means quite a lot' to her, and she comments on its 'compactness' and it being real bush. 'It will always be in my heart as a very lovely place. I loved it, I loved everything about it.'

Florence Reid at Tidbinbilla Station is remembered as a very nice old lady who baked beautiful Christmas cakes. Her husband Bert Reid and Phib went to the mountain snow leases together. Phib talked about how he knew when the first snow was about to fall and it was time to return home. The bullock team is discussed.

The interview finishes with comments on the difficulties faced by early women settlers in the area, especially with river crossings, and Helen tells of a big flood in the 'bidgee in her time. She says a relative of Phib's was drowned in the river once [this was the son of his brother Bertie]. There is a brief reference to the Hardy family, who were related to the Flints.



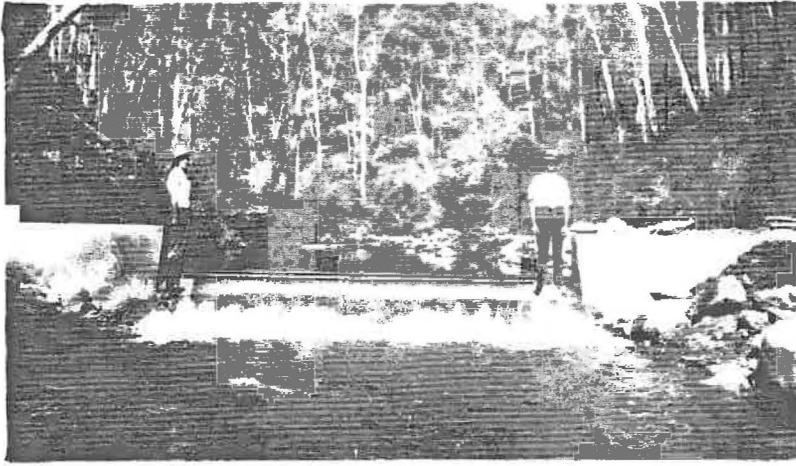
Phib Flint and 'Joe' at Congwarra. The car is the 1936 Ford V8 (owned by Kevin Flint) which was used to drive to Staunton's Mt Domain during the bad 1939 bushfire. (Bill and Monica Flint Collection)



Phib Flint in Queanbeyan. (Bill and Monica Flint Collection)



Phib, and Kevin and Helen's son Brian, feeding turkeys at Congwarra about 1950. (Bill and Monica Flint Collection)



The weir built on the Cotter River at the upper end of what is now Bendora Dam. The structure was constructed with materials packed in by Phib, Kevin and Helen Flint in 1939. (Helen Flint Collection)



Bushwalker George Jefferis on the top of a wintry Tidbinbilla Range. (Helen Flint Collection)

## Keith Green

*Keith was born in 1928, the first son of Tom Green and Elma nee Woods (sister to interviewee Beryl Fisher). He grew up at Rock Valley and by the time the property was resumed for the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve in the 1960s Keith was driving taxis in Queanbeyan. He operated a tourist bus in Canberra's bush hinterland and later moved to Araluen. After a brief time in Queensland Keith moved to Bowning where he resides today. Keith is a brother to interviewee Eddie Green. (Keith was also interviewed for the Tharwa Primary School oral history project in 1993 and relevant material is on those tapes, held by the school and the National Library of Australia)*

### Tape 1, Side A

Keith's grandfather Englishman George Green took up land at Tidbinbilla in 1884. He and John Staunton inspected the valley while working on the Queanbeyan-Cooma rail line; George Hatcliff also had a look at the land shortly after. They probably selected because the land was available at the right time. The two Georges lived at first without title on land at Apple Tree Flat (below the Fishing Gap Firetrail) in a bark hut; at one time the fireplace was still visible, though it is no longer able to be found [see also Eddie Green summary].

They then moved to a selection at Ash Corner where they built a slab hut which probably had a bark roof; Green and Hatcliff became proficient at slab-splitting. Mary Ann McCaffrey emigrated from England and she and George Green married; the meagre food supplies of the time are mentioned. Life was hard for Mary Ann because she had just arrived from England and was alone for much of the time as the Georges were away working on Booroomba.

Greens moved to Rock Valley in c.1895 as the land there was better and George was a determined agriculturist. He always had a good garden and some of the crop paddocks are still visible. Many of his trees survive, especially the pines along the drive; orchards and wells are mentioned.

The two Georges did various work on Booroomba. This income was vital to small selectors; the relationship with McKeahnies at Booroomba was a good one. Green and Hatcliff's pise building skills are discussed, and the buildings erected by them listed. George Green also built with timber and iron.

Keith has only one early memory of his grandfather, rowing on him for pulling plants out of the garden! Local opinion of George Green was high. After George's death Rock Valley went to son Tom Green, partly as older brother Willie was thought to be going to Barellan.

Recalling school days at Gibraltar School, Keith remembers teacher Norman Cornwell as being 'quite liberal with the cane'; every Friday Keith got caned for spelling errors, and his health was affected (later at Tharwa School his spelling improved). Cornwell would even lift him up by the hair. Some kids were well treated. Keith and Eddie walked the two miles to school; Cornwell boarded at Reids' Tidbinbilla Station and he would sometimes give the boys a lift part of the way home, as he did with the Blewitt kids from Nil Desperandum. Keith describes the interior of the school; you'd see Mt Eliza out the window and could tell by the sun when it was about time to go home (the teacher was the only one with a watch). Father Haydon took the Catholic kids for scripture under the trees or on the verandah. Pupils at the school generally got on well — 'we were practically all related...it was virtually like all one big family'.

## 1B

The bigger girls at school (eg Blewitts, Woods, Flints) would help the young ones. Once the inspector came with paw paws, an unusual fruit for country children. When RMC cadets marched past school it attracted a lot of attention; they would have a break in Ghost Gully (a name used by local adults and children alike).

RMC cadets used to camp on Rock Valley near Tidbinbilla Creek, for several days or a week, then march back to Canberra. Sometimes they camped on Tidbinbilla Station.

Discussing life at Rock Valley, Keith says how the lounge fireplace was used only when visitors arrived but that the kitchen stove and fire went constantly (the hot water fountain was suspended above). Water supply is described.

Elma began suffering from hydatids in the early 1930s; she had 13 major operations in Sydney. Consequently other people came to help at home, eg her sisters, the Blewitts and the Flints; Nell Holland was there the longest; Thelma Cabban was there a lot too.

A piano was bought in the early 1940s, though Elma and Tom didn't play (Tom played an accordion). Harold and Vivian Woods would come after tennis on Sundays for an evening around the piano (Vivian played); Mavis Woods (formerly Mavis Smith, Gibraltar teacher) also came.

Keith discusses meals eaten and how dinner (ie lunch) was the main meal. A lot of meat was corned, and hams were cured (the processes are described). After leaving school Keith had a poultry farm at Rock Valley and sold eggs and dressed turkeys in Queanbeyan.

In times of illness, prior to the Gibraltar exchange the Tom Woods's had a phone and it was used in emergencies. Then with the exchange came the local party line. Each home had its own signal, and people would listen in to others' calls: 'we were as guilty as everyone else in the valley'. As

people were related this was one reason for listening in. Keith describes in some detail the use of the phone when bushwalker Alan Bagnall had a bad fall at Tidbinbilla in the 1950s (some locals had little sympathy at first for 'bushwalkers'); the difficulty of getting exchanges (in this case Tharwa) to answer after hours is mentioned. There was an early radio at Rock Valley but it wasn't used much for fear of flattening the batteries too soon. Wireless ownership spread during the Second World War. A big outside aerial was a feature on houses owing to Bullen Range being in the way of the Canberra signal.

## 2A

Elma Green played a major role in campaigning for mains electricity for Tidbinbilla, and after a lengthy battle it arrived, though ironically single phase power only was connected to Rock Valley. Instant light and an electric jug were welcome changes.

Keith recalls most people having cars, but remembers Annie Flint's horse and sulky, the Tom Woods's having no car for years, etc. Mrs Maxwell did the mail run by horse and sulky on Wednesdays and Saturdays from Tharwa to Mt Domain. The mail also brought groceries from Jefferys' store in Tharwa which were paid for annually when the wool cheque arrived.

The road to Rock Valley was not sealed in Keith's time; the Tidbinbilla Tracking Station speeded up sealing of local roads. Paddys River was bridged in the 1930s, and Gibraltar Creek often held you up. To find out if Point Hut crossing on the Murrumbidgee was passable you'd ring Tharwa to check the river's height. The road via the Cotter was little used. Trips to Queanbeyan were slow due to gates and rough roads. Tom and Elma left the boys with neighbours during monthly (later weekly) Queanbeyan trips. Tidbinbilla people always went to Queanbeyan and not Canberra because the former was a *rural* town with drenches, salt licks etc.

Women who worked outside on properties (clearing etc) included Annie and Edna Flint as Sid died young; neighbours would help.

Tidbinbilla properties were mainly sheep with some cattle (though Tidbinbilla Station was more cattle). Stock in earlier days were driven to Queanbeyan sales on foot, and Keith describes bringing stock out to Rock Valley, over several days, staying at stock reserves. Dipping and shearing were communal; Bill Blewitt, Annie Flint and Mt Domain (and sometimes Eric Blewitt) would dip at Green's old dip on Grannys Creek till the 1950s when the new dip was built. Everyone would help one another. Similarly the Greens' shearing shed was used, with shearing being later then, finishing just before Christmas. The shed had been built of slabs by George Green, and then extended with timber from Rayner's Mill (which as well as increasing shedding capacity made the shed more suitable for dances). Snow leases held by other families are referred to briefly.

Oats and corn were grown in the valley, and everyone grew spuds. Pumpkins and melons were also cultivated, the melons for jam.

## 2B

These crops were mostly for home consumption, though Bill Blewitt sold some. Lucy Maxwell sold vegetables, eggs and dressed fowls in Queanbeyan. George Green sold a lot of fruit. Keith describes Rock Valley's old dairy which had thatched roof and slab walls. Keith's poultry sheds were slab-walled (Keith also says how his parents saw that going into poultry would keep him out of the army, should he have reached military age before the war ended).

Tom Green's death may have been caused by the effects of spray that he and Pat Fisher used on a potato crop one year; Pat too was affected; the paddock was near Noone's site on Tidbinbilla Creek. Little was known about the danger of sprays at the time, and Tom believed that if you smoked it kept everything away (he smoked with a cigarette holder).

Keith believes that Rayner's Sawmill began around the early 1930s, and there were other mills before that (eg Jack Winter's near Block 60 — there was still evidence of this one when Forestry started planting pines there). Rayners operated for a few years, and Tom Green carted some of their sawn timber to Queanbeyan. The mill was steam-powered, and you could still see piles of sawdust when the TNR was established. Bullocks (12-14 of them) hauled logs to the mill and one of the wagons remained near Rock Valley for years. Keith explains how as a child you had no chance of calling an adult by his first name, and so he doesn't recall the bullocky's name [see Laurie Dallender and Sheila and Doug Blewitt summaries]. Perhaps eight workers lived on site, plus two or three wives, including Rayner's; the huts were rough affairs built from sawn boards, and there were probably 'shutters' in place of windows. Rayner later milled timber at Wantagong in the Spring Range area.

The Czech eucalyptus distillers had two huts at their main camp, one a kitchen, the other sleeping quarters; building materials were rough weatherboards and bark. The sleeping quarters had a mud and stone fireplace on the short end wall and the door was next to it; the two buildings were at right angles. Keith and Lindsay Blewitt for a time cut leaves for the Czechs. The Czechs came to Rock Valley weekly to socialise and pick up meat from Tom; they bought vegetables from Annie Flint and grew some themselves, and bought spuds from Cranswick's in Queanbeyan.

People kept kangaroos from vegetable plots by shooting them; there weren't many roos, mainly up on the mountain sides.

Owing to Elma's illness, Keith had to do a lot of housekeeping for her and she was 'fanatical' about it being done properly. There was less time to help Dad outside.

### 3A

So there was not much recreation time. Tennis on the Tidbinbilla courts next to the school on Sunday afternoons was a big event, involving many local families. Dances at the Rock Valley woolshed are described. Over time it became necessary to charge admission. There might be 3 or 4 per year and big crowds would come from Tidbinbilla, Tharwa, Naas, Queanbeyan and Canberra. Initially people brought supper but then Greens catered. Alcohol was BYO. There were one or two fist fights, as usual for country dances, but police (eg Bob Hilton) attended.

Boxing Day at Rock Valley became a big event too, with a gymkhana, picnic, beauty contests for women *and* men (one year it snowed!), and motorbike events. Buses came from town, and the RSL (which got some of the proceeds) assisted.

Keith and others also sold blackberries (by the kerosene tin) and other local produce, and people would come to pick blackberries. Rock Valley was open to picnickers (who paid a fee per car) for years.

Rock Valley was the social focus of the valley, and Elma despite her health problems cooked for many events. Tennis played a big role in keeping the community together, though in later years it declined. The fact that so many people were related helped the sense of community.

Catholic and Anglican 'seemed to get on alright, because they were all related anyway'. Anglican services were held monthly at Tharwa, and mass was held at Mt Domain [in earlier years].

Regarding wildlife, Keith never saw curlews at Rock Valley but heard them at Paddys River. Lyrebirds were somewhat special and no one shot them. Keith just remembers rock wallabies and believes many were killed by rabbit poison (as were other animals). There were shooting parties in the early 1900s. In Keith's time only one dingo entered the valley; everyone was on the alert; eventually it was shot in a dingo drive on Block 60. Tom Green had seen koalas in his youth.

About every 4 or 5 years snow would extend right down to the valley floor, one of the biggest falls being in 1948. Another heavy fall was when there was a local clearing sale and the Greens had to stay in Tharwa because the road home to Tidbinbilla was closed. On another occasion when Keith was going to school at Tharwa there was snow on Castle Hill.

Discussing Aboriginal sites, Keith once knew of a stone arrangement in Alf's Block above Wallaby Rocks near Gibraltar Rocks but it is no longer visible. There may have been another site near Ash Corner but it too has possibly been disturbed.

A range of European sites, and their appearance in Keith's time, is discussed. What may have been George and Sarah Webb's original site was in the 1940s a ten foot high stone chimney; however Keith and his father pulled it down when planting potatoes during wartime. Quince and cherry trees have since suckered at the site. Keith felt that there was more of a foundation remaining than is present today (Keith at various times through the interview says that a number of sites in the TNR were destroyed when the reserve was begun).

### 3B

This site discussion continues. At Rock Valley there was the original, first home, with thatched roof and slab walls, but which was falling down and was demolished in Keith's time. When the TNR was started the blacksmiths shop, with bellows and forge, were still extant. Of John Sheedy's site, there were only foundations. At Granny Bell's there was a remnant chimney and timbers (Granny Bell was a midwife last century). At Noones' (near the present Depot), there were chimneys and fruit trees (the trees remain). Stauntons' Mt Domain pise home faced east; it had a verandah and an iron roof; during Rossiters' time (they rented it from Stauntons) there was a good garden on the slope running down to the road and a vegetable garden to the east, and there was a Swiss-breed milking cow. Lucy Maxwell's house was 'bits and pieces of everything', having been added onto by various owners. Tom Green helped build the new kitchen in the early 1930s. There was more of the walls remaining of the Church Rock Valley School. Sid and Annie Flint's home was 'fairly substantial', made of pise and with an iron roof. A 'fair bit of the walls' was standing at Kaye's Hut site. On Nina Farrer's block at Ash Corner grapes were grown but had to be abandoned due to disease (earlier in the interview Keith says the chimney foundation here belongs to Farrer's hut and not to the earlier Green and Hatcliff hut).

Around the valley are various campsites: eg Bill and Ethel Blewitt's rabbiting camp on Tidbinbilla Creek near the present BBQ area, a Depression-era camp near Grannys Bridge (the bridge is now a culvert just east of the Visitors Centre) which housed men ringbarking for Tom and George Green.

Regarding place names, Elsie's Falls is named after Elsie Blewitt; Greens Peak (not now officially on maps, it stands out beyond the end of the valley, rising up out of the Cotter) was named after George and brother William Green after they rode there to recapture lost cattle; Turkey Hill is named for the spot where Mary Ann Green found some lost turkeys (it was then heavily timbered); Stauntons Gap is named after the Stauntons of Mt Domain, and Keith tells how Anastasia walked through here to Gibraltar Creek to milk the cows, Gibraltar Creek valley then being clearer than Mt Domain (Keith also says that Anastasia was big and strong: she 'could quite easily throw the men about').

Of World War Two, Keith says about the only local-born man who served was Jack Reid; others being farmers (eg Harold and Charlie Woods) were in reserved occupations, some (eg Les Morton) did munitions-related work.

Regarding Keith's sense of place, he says 'I love the valley, I'd still dearly love to be living there. I feel I could offer a lot to people coming in there...It's always home, you're always happy to go there and be there...I still consider it ours and we're able to share it'. Keith finds the wilder part of the valley attractive, particularly with snow on it. Ringbarking is mentioned, and Keith feels the appearance of the valley is more attractive now since regrowth. He regrets the loss of sites during the early years of the TNR (eg the woolshed which he says was unique).

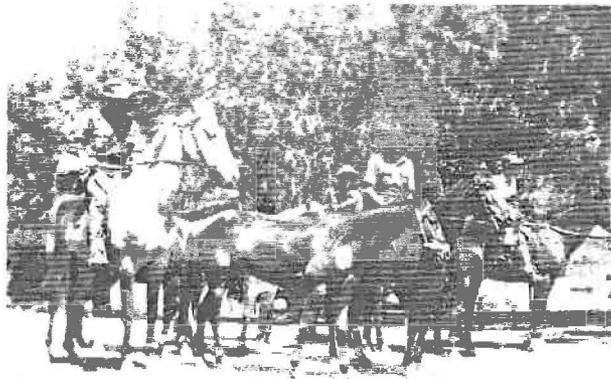
Finally, discussing certain locals, Keith recalls Florence Reid as kind and gentle, and Bert Reid as rugged because he was always going off into the mountains. Jack Maloney was a 'very straightforward bloke' who took Keith to task once for going into Queanbeyan for a trip rather than staying home and working.



Keith at Rock Valley in the 1950s, about to ride to Jumbuck Flats. (Keith Green Collection)



Keith, sitting on the stockyard rails at Rock Valley, dressed as a cowboy for a fancy dress party in Queanbeyan in the 1950s. (Keith Green Collection)



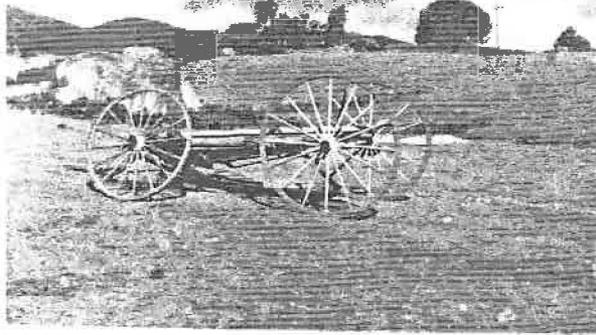
Horsemen photographed after a Boxing Day gymkhana at Rock Valley about 1952. (Keith Green Collection)



Rock Valley after the 1948 snowstorm. (Keith Green Collection)



Hut built by Keith Green and Lindsay Blewitt in the mid 1940s; they lived in it for nearly a year and Doug Blewitt lived with them for a time. The cart was from Gibraltar. (Keith Green Collection)



George and Mary Ann Green's buckboard, 1957. (Keith Green Collection)



Branding cattle at Rock Valley in 1953; l-r: George Arnold, Tom Green and Laurie Dallender. (Keith Green Collection)

## Phyllis Morton

*Phyllis was born in 1916, the first daughter of Philip (Phib) Flint and Mary Elizabeth (Lizzie, nee Green, daughter of George Green). At the age of 12 Phyllis moved with her family from Rose Hill to Congwarra where she lived until leaving home at age 18. She had several jobs locally before going to Sydney where she married Les Morton in 1938 (Les was a son from Lucy Maxwell's first marriage to Herbert Morton who was killed in the Yerranderie silver mine in the southern Blue Mountains just before Les's birth; Les and Phyllis knew one another at Gibraltar School). A few years later they lived at Pierces Creek and after the war Les became a ranger in 1948 and they lived at the old Tuggeranong School residence for 28 years. After Les's retirement they ran a property near Young and then moved to Queanbeyan where Les died in 1985. Phyllis lives in Queanbeyan today.*

### **Tape 1, Side A**

The Flints' Rose Hill home was located on the eastern side of Paddys River opposite Riverlea. Phyllis and older brother Kevin used to race one another on their horses on the way to school, and she remembers an incident where Kevin came home during a flood and Phib helped him through a floodgate. Ada Sackett taught at Gibraltar School and one weekend when visiting Rose Hill she broke her wrist. Phyllis liked being taught by Dorothy Fitzroy; she recalls when Ted Maxwell came and abused Miss Fitzroy for not being at school before the children arrived. Carl Morisset was another teacher; years later he was badly injured in a motorbike accident near Tuggeranong. Mr Wood was 'a funny old fellow — we didn't like him very much'. Margaret Smith taught Phyllis, her sister and the Woods girls their catechism at weekends at Lucy Maxwell's where she boarded.

Phyllis enjoyed geography, says that discipline at school was pretty tight, and mentions calisthenics before school. Various sports are named (the Tidbinbilla tennis courts may have been built next to the school deliberately so that the pupils could use them). At school there was a flower garden in the shape of Australia.

At Rose Hill there was no water tank so a drum on wheels was drawn by the mare to Paddys River for water; otherwise the Flint children would carry kero tins of water up from the river (one child each side of a tin, with a stick through the handle). During one Paddys River flood a pig that had been sold came home and swam the river. The house was slab, lined inside with paper and hessian, and the fireplace was stone and mud. There were three rooms and a verandah (Phib always slept on the verandah).

The family moved to Congwarra in 1928 after Ernie and Alice Wright moved to Dalby (Alice and Lizzie were sisters); Congwarra had more land than Rose Hill.

Lizzie had milked six cows at Rose Hill and at Congwarra Phyllis and Kevin milked more (before school). The milk was separated and butter was made by hand by beating it for an hour (you took turns to save your arm). Among the clothes made by Lizzie were the girls' silk confirmation dresses. Washing was done in an uncovered outside copper; given the labour of washing, you wore clothes longer between washes than is the habit today.

At Rose Hill Lizzie had cooked only in a camp oven over the open fire; this continued at Congwarra until a fuel stove was purchased. The main meal was at night and was commonly boiled salted meat with vegetables which had been grown by Lizzie. Breakfast might be rolled oats and sometimes fried vegetables. 'We had to be really self-supporting because we never got to town very often'. As Phyllis grew older and worked more outside her younger sisters assisted Mum inside.

#### **1B**

Aged 13, Phyllis began helping Dad with mustering, branding etc. She loved riding and finished breaking-in several horses (one, Prince, broke her finger which only came straight through the exercise of milking the cows; another, Norman, was broken in to ride, pull a cart and draw posts, after which Phib ploughed with him, and he was lent to hawker Abraham Joseph whose van he pulled for a year). Because trips to town were infrequent, Lizzie and other women valued the hawkers. Phyllis's work with horses was rare for a woman in the district.

There is a lengthy description of once when during a drought Phib, Phyllis and Kevin took 30 herefords over the Tidbinbilla Range and down into Burkes Creek looking for grass. It was hot, dry work and very steep. Phyllis blames her present-day skin cancers on sunburn from days like that.

Phib went to the snow leases for a fortnight at a time. He also helped control dingoes and brumbies around the Yaouk and Cotter areas. Some brumbies were brought home. Phib's bullock team is briefly mentioned.

As for Lizzie's spare time, 'she didn't have any. I don't know how she coped with [doing] so much'. Time sitting would be spent sewing or darning.

One Sunday when Phyllis was training a pony for picnic races, she with Edna Flint, Pat Fisher and Neville Reid had a training gallop and she fainted, pulling the horse into a tree along the road. Phyllis was knocked unconscious; the doctor was called at 2pm and arrived at 8pm. The head

wound and broken collarbone healed, but her disjointed neck was a problem for years. Various home remedies for ailments are described.

Phyllis had little contact with the outside world; trips to Queanbeyan were 'so rare that I don't remember'. Phib usually went to town on his own. He had a Ford ute and later a Chev tourer. Once when Kathleen had a ruptured appendix Tom Green drove her to the doctor in Phib's car. Local roads were very corrugated and gates were many (Phyllis says 13 between Congwarra and Tharwa). She recalls the Paddys River crossing before the bridge, and tells how once in the sidecar of Kevin's bike she got drenched on the way to church! At Point Hut Crossing there was the early concrete ford, and Phyllis describes getting dizzy on the crossing during one trip (to Sutton) and Phib helping her to stay on her horse.

The arrival of the phone (which was wall-mounted) improved Lizzie's life as it enabled her to keep in contact with her relatives. Lighting was by kero lamps. Shopping was always done in Queanbeyan; about the only time the family went to Canberra was for the opening of Parliament House in 1927; Phyllis describes her memories of that day (including aeroplane joy rides; Charlie Woods went up and lost his goggles).

## 2A

Phyllis left home at 18 because life there was very hard and her health was being undermined. Her times with the Browns and Hardys are mentioned briefly, as is the family connection with the Hardys (and Bert Reid's partnership with Phil Hardy). She worked for Jack Maloney, looking after Jack and wife Kathleen's (nee Corkhill) daughter Ann and doing housework.

After marrying Les, Phyllis and Les lived briefly at Rock Valley while waiting for their house at Pierces Creek to be completed. The 1939 bushfire is briefly described: 'those bushfires are pretty frightening'. Les and Kevin Flint did munitions work in Sydney before transferring to Mt Stromlo where they were involved in war optics work for the rest of the war. Les rode a motorbike to Stromlo from Pierces Creek and it was often so cold that when he got to work 'he could stand his coat up alongside the wall — it was frozen'.

Returning to discussion of her earlier life, Phyllis talks of her mustering work and how she was not paid. Phib grew small areas of crop, such as oats for the cows and turnips for cattle; crops were not sold, all income was from sheep and cattle.

On Congwarra Phyllis had trapped rabbits to keep their numbers down and to earn some pocket money. Skins were sold to Jim O'Malley and some carcasses were eaten while the rest were fed to the dogs. Sometimes rabbit numbers were high; once during a drought on Rose Hill they were in heaps against a wooden fence. One thing Phyllis spent some of this

rabbiting money on was a gold bangle purchased from Hammonds jewellers in Queanbeyan. Trapping was a wintertime task.

The eucalyptus distillers are mentioned briefly, as is Rayner's sawmill. Phyllis thinks Rayner's name may have been Stan.

Concerning recreation, Phyllis didn't see a film until after she had left home and gone to Sydney. She had her 21st at Tharwa Hall; the big night was organised by her Aunt Elsie (Blewitt). Tharwa Hall dances were an important social event; Phib would sometimes take Phyllis and leave her there in the care of Essie Tong from Naas who acted as chaperone; Lizzie never went. Dances were also held in the Congwarra, Tidbinbilla and Rock Valley woolsheds. Les played accordion, banjo-mandolin and sometimes violin; Bevis West was also on accordion while his wife Una played piano. The dances are described. A good dance would finish at dawn: it was 'a real night out, then we had to go home and milk the cows'.

Phyllis didn't often visit Bert and Florrie Reid, though they were nice people. Reids had Oakey Creek and it was while Neville Reid was riding past on his way there one day that Phyllis had her finger broken by the horse (as above).

## **2B**

Florrie Reid was a nice, quiet person. Lizzie rarely visited her or others, not being able to ride or drive. Lizzie had early in life taken over responsibilities for the rest of the Green children after her mother's death, and her life of labour continued after marriage. She did enjoy gardening and sewing. The treadle sewing machine is still in the family. Phib and Bert are described and compared.

Sid Flint and wife Annie (nee Noone) are discussed; they sheared and dipped at Rock Valley.

After Keith and Eddie Green left Rock Valley in the 1960s Phyllis and Les leased some land off them. Phyllis recalls difficulties of using the dip there. At Congwarra there had been no dip and Flints had dipped at Reids; Flints had over 2000 sheep. Though he didn't like electric shearing equipment Phib had used blade shears, as had Phyllis for crutching.

Sid Flint took more after his mother, being less stout than brother Phib. After Sid's early death Annie's brother Hubert Noone came back from London Bridge to help her run the property. Sid and Annie's daughter Edna worked hard on the place. The presence of dead timber after ringbarking is discussed.

Wildlife was not special and was taken for granted. In her experience native animals were not shot, and Phyllis never had a rifle. Wildlife that she often saw included eagles, kingfishers on the river flats, and lots of plovers. She never saw koalas or platypus. Kangaroos were few in

number. Phyllis feels the climate was colder then and describes frost heave.

Phyllis has no knowledge of Aboriginal sites, nor did she hear in her youth stories of the Aborigines.

Catholic services were held in the Tharwa Hall monthly. Despite the problems of sectarianism in society generally, religious problems were not apparent at Tidbinbilla. This leads to Phib's relationship with [free mason] Bert Reid, and how they would have rum while droving stock: 'nearly all those country drovers did have [a bottle of rum]'. Phib drank when in Queanbeyan and would bring a bottle home, but once that was finished that was it until the next trip to town.

Phyllis does not feel that there was a strong sense of community in the district.

At Congwarra there was no radio prior to Phyllis leaving, but there was a gramophone which was enjoyed by all.

Discussing local place names, Phyllis says that Flints Crossing is where the family crossed Paddys River to get to Rose Hill; Fishing Gap was used as the route by fishing parties making for the Cotter River; Camels Hump is a new name; in the very early days Tidbinbilla was pronounced 'Timanbilly'.

The Tidbinbilla area is today important to Phyllis and she likes to walk in the TNR and enjoy the fresh air 'not contaminated like it is in here'. She is sad that numbers of sites were destroyed when the TNR got going, and mentions buildings at Rock Valley; she is pleased that the rest of the homestead is being preserved.

PERMIT TO ENROL IN A SUPER-PRIMARY CLASS.

(Name) Phyllis Flint

a pupil of the Gibraltar Public School is now sufficiently advanced in her studies to be enrolled in the Seventh Class of a Junior Technical, Commercial, Domestic Science, Rural, District, or other Super-Primary School where seats are not competitive.

Date Feb. 2nd 1931. Miss M. Smith Teacher.

NOTE.—This Permit does not exempt the holder from further attendance at school as required by the Public Instruction (Amendment) Act, 1916.

Certificate issued to Phyllis at Gibraltar School in 1931. (Interesting to note that the teacher has misspelt Phyllis's name.) (Phyllis Morton Collection)



Phyllis Flint and Olga Flint, from Jefferis and Whelen's 1931 manuscript 'Around Australia's Capital'.



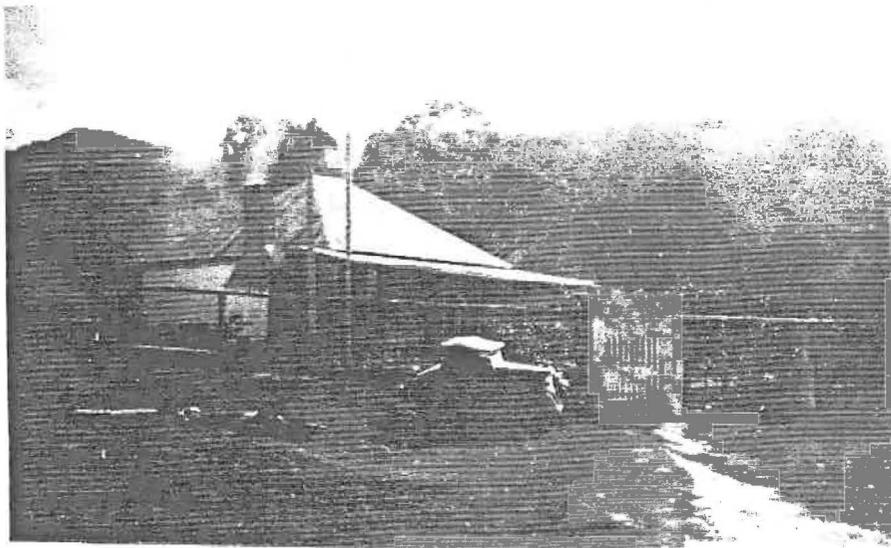
Local girls at the tennis courts next to Gibraltar School in the early 1930s; l-r (front) Kathleen Flint and Eileen Woods, (rear) two of teacher Miss Margaret Smith's nieces, Gladys Woods, Vera Woods, Muriel Woods, Phyllis Flint. (Phyllis Morton Collection)



Gibraltar pupils about to leave school in the late 1920s; standing l-r Eileen Woods, Pat Maxwell, Ted Wright, Vera Woods, mounted l-r possibly Edna Flint, Les Morton, May Wright, Kevin Flint, Kathleen Flint, possibly Phyllis Flint. Note that the children are holding flowers or plant cuttings, and also the stone-bordered flower bed in the foreground in the shape of Australia. (Phyllis Morton Collection)



Phyllis at Congwarra at about age 17. (Phyllis Morton Collection)



Congwarra with Eric Brown's car in front. The photo was taken before the house was extended in 1937 and after the radio aerial pole was erected about 1934. (Phyllis Morton Collection)



Phyllis's mother Lizzie Flint. (Phyllis Morton Collection)



Phib with niece Ella Robertson and girl. (Bill and Monica Flint Collection)



Les and Phyllis Morton at Tuggeranong in the 1970s. (Phyllis Morton Collection)

## Bill and Monica Flint

*Bill Flint was born in 1926, the fifth child of Philip (Phib) Flint and Mary Elizabeth (Lizzie) nee Green. His first two years were at Rose Hill and then he grew up on Congwarra. After leaving school he worked for a time on Phil Champion's property Cooleman (present day Chapman) before beginning with Forestry in 1946, with whom he worked until 1951. In 1952 he married Monica Reay. Monica, born in Sydney, was teacher at Tharwa Primary School from 1947 to 1949. Congwarra was purchased from Phib Flint in 1952 and Bill and Monica have lived there ever since. They have four adult children. The interview was mainly with Bill; Monica participated at certain points. (Monica was interviewed for the Tharwa Primary School oral history project in 1993; tapes of that interview are held by the school and the National Library of Australia.)*

### Tape 1, Side A

The interview begins with aspects of the Flint family history, how Thomas Flint was transported in 1835, worked for T.A.Murray of Yarralumla, married Mary Doherty, one of their sons being William who married Mary Ellen Hardy in 1880 and moved to Rose Hill near Tidbinbilla in the 1880s (these were Bill's grandparents). Their son Phib's work as a ranger at the Cotter is described. Their house was close to Paddys River, while Phib and Lizzie's was higher up the hill. The latter Rose Hill home was slab with a dirt floor and bark (stringybark) roof. Some evidence of the houses is still there today. Although Phib and Lizzie moved to Congwarra in 1928 they owned Rose Hill until 1937.

Phib and Lizzie would have known one another since childhood; Monica says how Phib and brother Sid so often went to the Green's Rock Valley property to buy honey from Mary Ann Green that they were obviously going to visit the Green girls Alice and Lizzie.

The connection with the Hardys is discussed; Catholic William met Protestant Mary Ellen when working at Uriarra; they eloped and a Catholic priest refused to marry them, however he did bless the union after they were married by a Wesleyan minister.

Small landholders commonly worked for larger graziers; both were dependant on each other. Bill tells in detail how Phib worked on C. H.(Henry) McKeahnie's Booroomba early this century and relates how the bank of NSW tried to foreclose but McKeahnie survived and had the pleasure of showing his disdain for the bank by spitting on the bank counter when he finally paid off the debt.

Rose Hill's position east of Paddys River reflects the impediments created by unbridged rivers at the time; the eastern location meant that the river could be avoided on the trip into Queanbeyan.

The move to Congwarra followed the departure from there of Alice (nee Green) and Ernie Wright at which time the lease returned to the government, following which Phib applied for it. Land leases at the time had no 'goodwill' value and so could be acquired for nothing, only the normal rent had to be paid to the government. Bert Reid similarly acquired Oakey Creek after Annie Flint let it go following Sid Flint's death. This situation gave less wealthy people a chance to acquire land. Resumption of properties often saw the big former owners vacate and smaller people move in. Strangely, resumption seemed to follow no real pattern. Some details on the resumption of Rose Hill and Block 140 on the Murrumbidgee are provided.

Bill now talks of Gibraltar School memories 1933-40, mentioning teachers Miss Myers and Norman Cornwell. He liked both; young Cornwell had some problems with Jack Reid and Lach Maxwell who were pupils as old as himself. The school building is described, and pupils sat four to a seat which was a backless form. Older boys were responsible for gathering firewood for the fire. Most kids rode to school and races were frequent.

#### **1B**

[The interview continues after a dead calf is dealt with.] Saddles were left by the school fence or on the porch. Ghost Gully, nearby, may have been named because one of the teachers got a fright there once. The pines around the school were then up to 20 feet high. Pupils had a small garden each which was passed on from older pupils when they left (Bill inherited that of Gladys Woods, now Larkin, also interviewed). Particular memories are the steam engine from Rayner's Sawmill departing past the school and how the teacher would allow the class to go outside to see aeroplanes flying over. RMC cadets camped at various locations around Tidbinbilla and today still use the area.

One of their earlier camp sites was Jacks Rocks on Paddys River. There is also a Jacks Hill or Jacks Lookout; Jack was an early settler (whose hut remains are visible) who stood on the hill to try and see a man who was secretly seeing his wife. Dead Mans Corner is a bend of the river below the hill.

Bill discusses how his and Monica's children caught the school bus into Canberra schools. Ironically there was no bus to Tharwa School — the bus couldn't go further south from Congwarra because of unbridged Tidbinbilla Creek.

At Congwarra (unlike Rose Hill) there has always been tank water. Electricity arrived in 1956 and is 'one of the best things that's happened to country people'. Lizzie never had power though and washed in an open-air copper; washing day was determined by the weather. Most of her and Phib's kids (except Kathleen and Olga) preferred to be outside rather than in with Mum.

The Paddys River-Tidbinbilla Road was sealed only because of the tracking station and associated increased traffic. Firstly the road into the station was sealed, then the road from here to the Cotter was sealed. The road to Tharwa was sealed later. There were accidents on the dirt roads before the sealing work, and sheep getting onto the roads led to fencing. Paddys River was bridged in the 1930s; Phib and Jack Maloney were rivals for the honour of being the first across the new bridge — Jack won. The old ford was above the bridge. Tidbinbilla, Tanners Flat and Gibraltar creeks were bridged some time after Bill and Monica married. Bill tells how a wash-out in Tanners Flat Creek and flood at Murrays Corner caused some anxiety when Monica was about to go to hospital for their daughter Claire's birth. After Birrigai opened the bridges were upgraded to two lanes, an unnecessary step in Bill's view. The Flints travelled via the Cotter Bridge when going to town.

## 2A

By the time Bill was a teenager there were few horses still on the roads, although horses were used on Congwarra for hay carting. Lucy Maxwell was the last to run the mail with horse and sulky in the 1930s; after her came a Mr Cosier, and then Harry Storen who used a green Chevrolet ute.

In times of illness ('people didn't seem to get sick') Queanbeyan was the nearest doctor (although Canberra had doctors everyone locally went to Queanbeyan). Once when Bill cut his foot Bert Reid's daughter Esme Reid (a nurse) rode down from Tidbinbilla Station and stitched it.

A phone was installed in the 1930s; while the Gibraltar exchange operated there were seven callers on the local party line and after Blewitts left Gibraltar, Tidbinbilla callers joined the Tharwa exchange with 13 subscribers. 'A lot of people didn't listen in but a lot did.' You could hear other receivers being lifted or you'd hear the power weaken. Congwarra's signal was one long ring and two shorts [Monica later advised that their number was 4S and that the signal was the morse code signal for S, which *may* have been as stated on the tape].

Flints and Reids had the first radios in Tidbinbilla in the 1930s. Batteries would be taken to Queanbeyan for recharging by the mailman who in those days carried just about everything you asked.

Bill rarely went to Queanbeyan in his youth as Dad went on his own. After Bill and Monica married they went in monthly which was usually on the day for visiting the child health clinic as the family grew. They'd call on neighbours to see if they could pick up anything for them in town. Today people go weekly and everyone goes, owing to better transport and the greater need to purchase things now (eg products formerly produced on the farm).

Bill describes his work with Forestry 1946-51 at Pierces Creek. Brothers Kevin and Harold also worked there as had Eric and Doug Blewitt. The work of pruning, thinning, road work, firebreak chipping (with comments on former strictness about erosion in the Cotter catchment), growing pine seedlings at Cotter Dam and Murrays Corner nurseries, and firetower duty (including the Black Springs tower built in the top of a tree) is described. Other Pierces Creek residents are named and the presence of European immigrants is discussed.

Regarding pastoral work, lamb marking and sheep dipping were communal tasks (up to 12 workers would be needed at a dip). You helped one another. Eric Blewitt shod and broke in horses locally, Bill Blewitt sheared for the community, Tom Green was a carpenter and put in local phone lines (because people had to erect their own poles).

## 2B

You maintained your own section of phone line. After electricity arrived there was a problem of the wind swaying the power line against the phone line at Harold Woods' place. This blew fuses and despite an attempt by Harold to fix the problem it continued and was only finally remedied after the Tharwa exchange was blown up by a power surge.

Phib Flint and Bert Reid each had snow leases and would box their sheep and take them up together. The leases were Leura and Peppercorn and the trips would be a 'bit of a party' (Bert brought the rum). Louis Margules and Doug Blewitt went too a number of times. At night the boys slept between the adults for warmth; there was no tent, just a tarp on top of the blankets. A trip from Leura to Long Plain to pack salt brought in by Pat Maxwell's truck is described; Phib had to chase a bolting packhorse. Sheep were taken up via Naas and Orroral through the Cotter to the leases, while cattle were taken via Kangaroo Flat and on through the Cotter. After the 1939 fire eucalypt saplings grew thickly on Woods' country leading to Kangaroo Flat, so thickly that you couldn't see your horse's ears. The snow leases were very important economically. There was a lot of preparation before the trips including shoeing the horses. One trip Bert lost his pipe so he and Phib shared the one pipe (they were 'the best of friends' but would argue after a few rums — Catholic versus freemason). Once when thistle roots poisoned for rabbits were spread out, snow covered the baits next morning.

Though frosts make Congwarra unsuitable for wheat, oats were grown for the draughthorses; it's now impossible to grow it because of cockatoo numbers. A horse-powered reaper and binder cut the crop which was stoked and then made into chaff with a chaff cutter powered by a horseworks (this horseworks was loaned around the valley and is at Congwarra today having been 'rescued' by Mick McMahan when the TNR began [it is partly visible in a photo of Bill Blewitt cutting chaff which accompanies the Doreen Blundell summary later in this report]).

Draughthorses were finished with after Bill and Monica bought a tractor in the early 1950s.

Rabbitting was a major job for many years. Hubert Noone at Rose Hill had to be working on rabbits constantly. Rabbit-proof netting fences were vital. Boulders too were netted off to keep rabbits from finding harbour there. Skins were sold and Bill sold the carcasses to a Kingston butcher.

Today the kangaroo numbers are much higher than before: in Bill's youth 'it was a rare thing to see more than ten or a dozen kangaroos' in a group. Their numbers have increased due to better pasture, water, TNR, and restrictions on shooting. Bill says in his youth they were not shot indiscriminately (people were 'happy to see them', and Flints still are to a degree) but rangers' dogs kept their numbers down.

### 3A

Timber from Rayner's mill was used in the Congwarra extensions in 1937. This was white gum, as ash does not grow near the mill, only over the range toward Kangaroo Flat.

Bill briefly describes aspects of the eucalyptus distillery run by the Czechs. Regarding disposal of the steamed leaves: 'the smoke was always rising from the burning of the leaves that they'd taken out of the distillery'. The Czechs were good friends with the Greens at Rock Valley.

The 1939 koala enclosure was built with a good fence but it was not maintained during the war and the koalas escaped. As there were no longer any local koalas the enclosure created interest among local folk.

The discussion turns to individuals of the region. Bill's mother had a hard life raising six children and running the domestic side of Congwarra; the salting and curing of meat, baking of bread and growing of fruit and vegetables are mentioned. Flints had a kero fridge for a short time before electricity; before that there was a drip safe, and soft drink would be lowered into the well to keep it cool. Lizzie had little leisure time and didn't play tennis with other people of the area.

Bill describes his father as a strange mix, hard in some ways, kind and generous in others. While Phib and some others drank quite a bit, because it was restricted to town visits and the bottle brought home, Bill feels his father drank less than many people today. 'Fairly tough in some ways', Phib ensured that his children never went hungry.

Phib supplied horses to parties going into the Cotter. This included government officials going into the catchment. On one occasion eleven horses had to be shod the day before a trip. Phib packed in the cement for the weir on the Cotter [see also Helen Flint summary]. Phib Flint knew the local ranges better than anyone, including Bert Reid on one occasion.

Continuing on the theme of bush knowledge, Bill recalls how in the Brindabellas during the 1952 bushfire Doug Maxwell led the bulldozers through the bush unerringly. Bill laments the loss of this sort of knowledge today.

Sid and Annie Flint's place is briefly described; pise, it was built by George Green and George Hatchiff. Annie, says Monica, was 'tiny and tough'. Bill tells how Annie's brother Hubert came back to help Annie after Sid's death, then took up Rose Hill (renamed by him Riverlea). Hubert had told how John Owens last century successfully grew wheat near where the tracking station stands today (the plough marks survive). Hubert also told of hand-harvesting and threshing at his family's block in the Tidbinbilla Valley, and how sometimes when he returned home with income his father John Noone would beat him for the money. Hubert paid for his younger brothers' Goulburn education.

Of Calvary Bill notes how the corner posts of the paddocks are still evident, indicating the absence of bushfires there over a long period.

Of John Maloney, Bill says how he knew of a big carpet snake on Bullen Range.

Discussing wildlife, Bill says there used to be lots of sugar gliders and that Mum kept some in an aviary where they could come and go; but they apparently turned 'cannibal' and disappeared. Possums too have declined in numbers — years ago you could see twenty in an apple box tree.

### 3B

Continuing the wildlife discussion and comparing numbers then and now, earlier there were a only few curlews (not many), today there are fewer plovers (particularly the 'ground plover'), the last goanna was seen on Bullen twenty five years ago, there are still lots of bower birds and choughs, there are now fewer magpies and 'green grass parrots' (presumably red rumps), there are more galahs and fewer gang gangs.

Canberra's background noise has altered the acoustics of Tidbinbilla. Earlier you could recognise who was driving past by the sound of their car, but now there's so much more traffic. Similarly, once it was possible to hear the train going up Tuggeranong Hill and Colless's timber trucks going up from the Cotter on their way to Canberra.

Bill mentions stone axes having been found on Paddys River, but apart from this does not know of other Aboriginal sites.

Local placenames are discussed: the origin of Paddys River is not known, Flints Crossing is named after Bill's grandparents, Lees Swamp is below the tracking station, Phib called Tanners Flat 'Tan-arse' Flat, Larrys Creek is named after Larry Cunningham (no relation to *the* Cunninghams), Mt

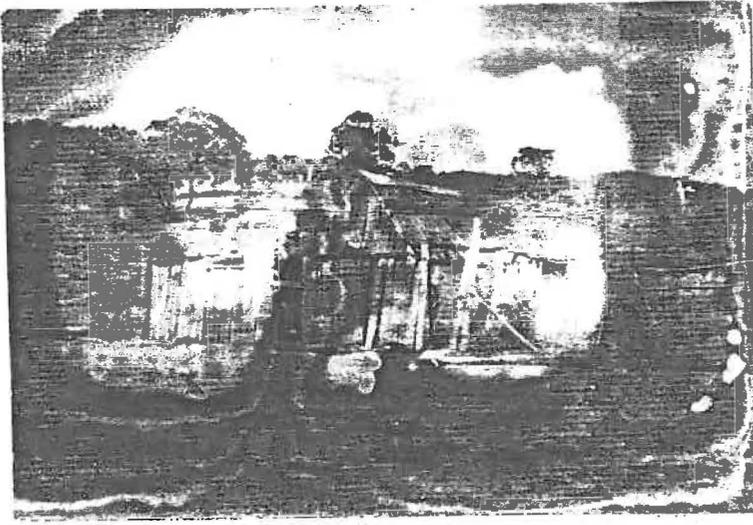
Hardy is named after a Hardy who accidentally shot himself and staggered home through the Murrumbidgee, etc.

There is brief reference to H.F.Gillman of Nil Desperandum, how he was difficult, how he left gates open, and how he got on with the Greens and took snapdragons from his garden to Mary Ann Green.

Local social life saw woolshed dances after the war but with the school closure things declined (eg use of the tennis court). The Greens organised activities [see Keith and Eddie summaries]. Lucy Maxwell and adopted son Pat would come and play cards, mainly 500; her sales of produce in the district are described as are her moves after leaving Tidbinbilla. Dave Povey bought Tidbinbilla Station and his manager was Vic Sayer who with wife Beryl had parties and tennis matches at the homestead. From Povey the property passed to Leo Shanahan and Ron Hill succeeded Vic after Vic got a job with the early TNR.

The district was fairly closeknit (so many people were related anyway) but the sense of community has been changed by the earlier people moving out and many 'Pitt Street farmers', as Bill calls them, having moved in.

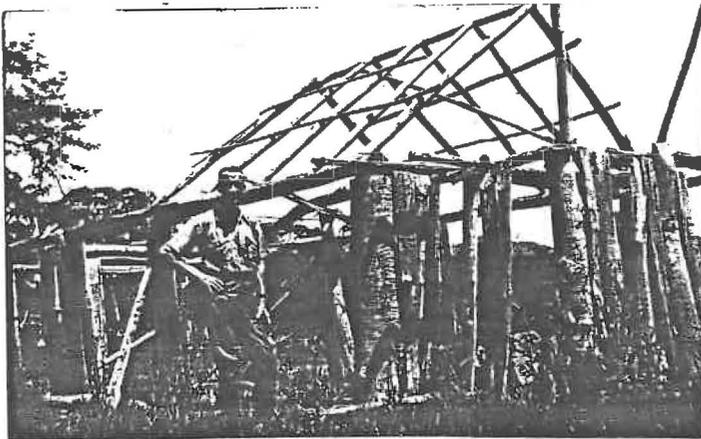
Both Bill and Monica wish to remain at Congwarra for as long as they can together. For Bill the essence of life at Congwarra is the communion with all the animals which he describes in some detail; the natural and manufactured facilities (eg ample water, closeness to town etc) are also a part of it. He finishes by saying all that's needed is to get rid of the local government!



The old Flint home at Rose Hill, from Jefferis and Whelen's 1931 manuscript 'Around Australia's Capital'. Unfortunately the original print has been damaged.



Congwarra in about 1931, from Jefferis and Whelen's manuscript 'Around Australia's Capital'.



The remains of Phil Hardy's home between the Cotter and Murrays Corner, around 1931, from Jefferis and Whelen's 'Around Australia's Capital'.



Betty (or Betsie) and sister Lizzie Green at Booroomba about 1908-10. Betty married Wallace Black and Lizzie married Phib Flint. When the sisters' mother Mary Ann Green had her first child, Willie, it was a difficult birth so Mrs McKeahnie advised her to come to Booroomba for the next birth and consequently Lizzie was born at that homestead. The clothing, picket fence and plantings are all worth noting. (Flint Family Collection)



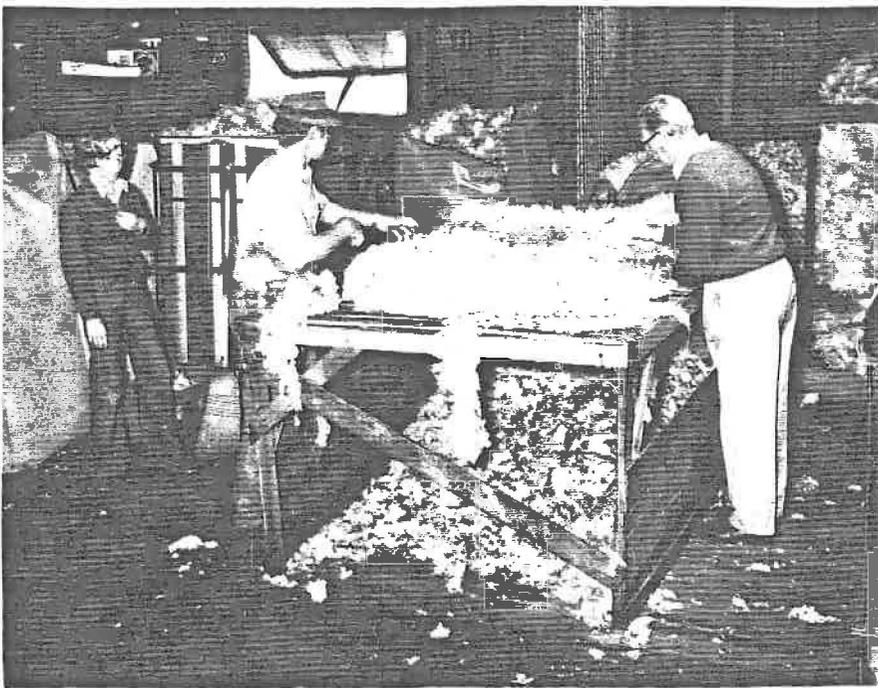
Phib and Lizzie, possibly in Queanbeyan in the 1920s. (Bill and Monica Flint Collection)



Thomas Flint (brother to Phib and Sid) and Lillie Ingram on their wedding day. (Bill and Monica Flint Collection)



Phib (right rear) and sister-in-law Lillie Flint (centre rear) and members of her family, sometime prior to 1951. (Bill and Monica Flint Collection)



Shearing at Congwarra about 1973; Bill and Monica's son Robert at left, Bill's brother Harold in centre, and Ted McAlister classing at right. (Bill and Monica Flint Collection)

## Passing of Mr. Phillip Flint

The death occurred at the Queanbeyan District Hospital this morning of a former Tharwa district grazier, Mr. Phillip Harold (Phib.) Flint.

Born in Queanbeyan 71 years ago, he became well known in the Tharwa and Tidbinbilla area where he conducted a grazing property. Several years ago Mr. Flint retired and came to live in Queanbeyan.

He had been in indifferent health for some time and had been an inmate of the Hospital on several occasions.

He is survived by his wife, Mary Elizabeth and children Kevin, Phyllis (Mrs. Morton), Kathleen (Mrs. Brown), Olga (Mrs. Richards), William and Harold.

The interment will take place in the Catholic portion of the Canberra Cemetery tomorrow after prayers in St. Raphael's, Queanbeyan at 2.30 pm.

## Eddie Green

*Eddie, brother to interviewee Keith Green, was born in 1933 and was the second son of Tom Green and Elma nee Woods. He grew up on Rock Valley and after his parents' death inherited the homestead and some of the adjoining land. He went overseas in 1960, leasing the place to Phyllis Morton (also interviewed) and husband Les. In 1966 he sold Rock Valley and it was resumed shortly after. Eddie lived in Canberra through until recently when he moved to Canowindra.*

### Tape 1, Side A

Eddie feels it would have been the mountains that first attracted his grandfather George Green to Tidbinbilla. The valley was then uncleared; the Sheedys had left by then and only having run cattle would not have done much clearing. Green and George Hatcliff did not live at Apple Tree Flat but built a bark and slab hut at Ash Corner [see Keith Green summary]. At Ash Corner life was basic and wildlife (eg lyrebirds, possums) formed part of the diet. No sheep were grazed here; the first seven were at Rock Valley and had to be protected from dingoes; Green's 12-year-old son Willie shot one at night.

The move to Rock Valley in 1895 was due to the better block available, together with George's wife Mary Ann Green's hatred of rough and lonely Ash Corner.

George Green, and Hatcliff to a lesser extent, were away a lot working, particularly on Booroomba; they walked there, via Stauntons and Sugarloaf gaps. Small settlers and big graziers were mutually dependent, both for labour/income, and during times of illness. It took some years before Rock Valley was productive enough to make the Greens independent of people like McKeahnie at Booroomba.

Briefly referring to Green and Hatcliff's pise building skills, Eddie mentions the thickness of the walls, and their basic finish. He lists the pise buildings erected by them, and says they may have had a hand in Calvary. They didn't build Sid and Annie Flint's, nor Stauntons' Mt Domain (the first Mt Domain house collapsed).

Though he was born after George Green's death, Eddie has a 'marvellous' image of his grandfather, and he tells how Frank Snow of Cuppacumbalong had a very high regard for him.

George Green was a successful gardener. Trees surviving that were planted by him at and near Rock Valley include a walnut, white heart cherry, willows, poplars, pines (including near the Visitor Centre), a Tasmanian gum, and a fir tree 300 m north-east of the homestead planted at the pit where the pise was excavated for the house.

Discussing memories of Gibraltar School, Eddie says he disliked teacher Norman Cornwell. Eddie and Keith walked to school (via a not-so-short cut) and were sometimes given a lift part way home by Cornwell. The school closed without warning in 1942 as only six kids were left. Eddie then went to Hall school (his aunt Beryl Fisher, also interviewed, was living there) where he recalls pumping out the wartime air-raid trenches. Later he attended Tharwa School to which he and Keith rode on pushbikes.

At Gibraltar you'd line up and march in to the building of a morning. There were adequate windows on one side but the porch side was a bit gloomy. Sport on Friday afternoons included rounders, hide and seek etc. There were no excursions due partly at least to wartime fuel restrictions. As he was so young Eddie got a hard time at school, though at Hall things were better. As is mentioned further on, because Eddie couldn't get to Tharwa early enough to get the bus into Canberra high schools, his formal education finished there at age 12. The small country schools did correspondence up to intermediate level and so most Tidbinbilla kids had finished at this level.

Because of his mother Elma's illness, Eddie when young stayed at Woods' place at Paddys River and viewed Beryl Fisher (nee Woods) and her husband Pat as his parents. Eddie lists the relatives who came to help Elma around the house with jobs like the washing etc. Included are many of the Blewitts (from both Blewitt families), Phyllis Morton, Helen Flint [both also interviewed]. They were paid about 5s per week. Margaret Jamieson also helped and helpers also came in response to advertisements. Eddie didn't really have a proper family life and had to help a lot around the house (including cooking) unlike most boys of the time.

## **1B**

At Rock Valley there was a cool safe and then by 1936 a kero fridge. Tom made the brine for salting meat and used a lot of salt and saltpetre. Beef was salted while mutton was eaten fresh, and Tom killed a sheep on Fridays for the next week. The Czech eucalyptus distillers bought fresh meat from Tom. Poultry was eaten less often, being considered a luxury; turkeys were eaten at Christmas and were also sold. Tom cured bacon and hung it in the storeroom and cut rashers off as needed; the storeroom was corrugated iron, hot in summer — the fat would be dripping off the bacon!

During times of illness you'd ring up for medical aid but often the phone wasn't working so you'd use Tom and Mary Woods' at Gibraltar Creek because they were on a direct line to Queanbeyan. An ambulance would take an hour to come from Queanbeyan. Sometimes it was better to use the car. Elma in her last illness was being taken in by car when the ambulance met them near the Tharwa cemetery, however she was already dead.

The Tharwa-Tidbinbilla Road was sealed in the 1980s. Cotter to the tracking station was sealed in the 1960s. Roadman Jack Rustin used to camp up Tidbinbilla Creek from Tidbinbilla Station, sometimes with his wife; remains of the fireplace may survive. Sometimes he camped near Grannys Bridge (just east of the Visitor Centre). Other roadmen included Vic Jeffery and Clarrie Peters. Lack of pipes in creek/gully crossings meant rough roads. Tidbinbilla Creek was bridged around 1970. When Gibraltar Creek flooded Greens would stay at Tom and Mary Woods' or the boys would climb along the floodgate to get home.

Eddie recalls Eric and Elsie Blewitt going to town in horse and sulky before they had a car; they took their kids which not all families did. Tom and Elma went to Queanbeyan every Saturday or so, but Eddie and Keith were left with neighbours; while young, Eddie only got to town about 3 times a year. Eddie got his licence just before turning 17 which gave him some independence. As a teenager he hated Rock Valley because he was so lonely as most of the other kids had left.

Thanks to Elma's campaign, electricity arrived in 1956. It came first to Congwarra, then progressed south, not reaching Booroomba till about 1960. For some time people feared electricity so didn't fully exploit it. The biggest improvements at Rock Valley were electric lights and an electric jug. Eddie listened a lot to the battery radio; the batteries were rotated every 3 weeks.

Recalling women who worked outdoors, Eddie talks of Annie and Edna Flint [Edna later married Laurie Dallender]. They 'virtually ran that place themselves for years'. Edna mustered, drenched, crutched and killed. They both ringbarked, Annie in a ragged dress and Edna in trousers. Ethel Blewitt rabbitted and worked harder than anyone; the money made from skins was not insignificant. There was not much leisure time for women.

Dances were fortnightly at one time. The tennis courts were built in the early 1930s [1920s] on land donated by Jack Maloney (there had been courts inside the school grounds before that [school documents suggest otherwise]). Tidbinbilla would play against Tharwa, Williamsdale, Naas, and there were cups. Eddie's first real match in 1948 was washed out and the courts then closed permanently.

## 2A

[The first 14 seconds were accidentally overdubbed with material from the beginning of tape 3; no significant material was lost.] Before continuing with the tennis, Eddie tells how at Gibraltar School he one day had forgotten his lunch, no-one would share, but then Bill Flint shared his — the sandwiches were toast and dripping.

Most locals played at the courts, except for Edna Flint, Vivian Woods, and then Elma never played again after a mouse once ran up her leg while on

the court! Tennis was a big social day, with afternoon tea; there was a timber shelter shed to the north-east end of the courts. After tennis of a Sunday, Greens often went to Woods' Paddys River or Blewitts' Gibraltar for tea. Visits were made also to Hubert and Dossie Noone at Riverlea (Elma was related to them too). After Blewitts left Gibraltar, Eddie feels the sense of community diminished.

Arthur and Jo Martin moved into Gibraltar and it was a 'paradise' after Mt Domain which was falling down; later Italian occupants replaced the Mt Domain house with a new place. After Martins left Gibraltar, Alec Costin bought it, and subsequently it became Birrigai. Either Blewitts or Will Green had extended the building [see Thelma Cabban and Doreen Blundell, Val Cootes summaries].

Woolshed dances are then described. They might start at 8pm and attract 70-80 people, adults and kids. There'd be a fire outside for boiling the billy. Music initially was provided free of charge. The dances were fund-raising events for things like the tennis club, or the local 'queen' competition; Tharwa's Dulcie White was one queen entrant. Dances would finish in the early hours. Musicians included Pat Maxwell on accordion, Bill and Haley Blewitt similarly [this perhaps should be Bill and Lindsay], Una West and Mavis Woods on piano. Some Canberra people came. Dances were advertised in the *Queanbeyan Age*.

Swimming was unpopular as parents warned kids about the risk of drowning. Fishing was popular in Tidbinbilla Creek before the blackberries choked it, in Paddys River and Gibraltar Creek; cormorants were then less numerous and so fish numbers higher. George Green with his initial 3 blackberry plants (2 of which died) is responsible for the weed today in the area.

Greens' shearing shed and dip were used communally as there were few sheds and dips on other properties. Greens and the other landholders using Rock Valley's 2-stand shed would have their sheep shorn in one big phase lasting about a month. Laurie Dallender classed and Edna mustered. Bill Blewitt sheared, and Tom Green did some too. Shearing was in spring, never in winter as it is today.

The Rock Valley dip was used by Blewitts (both families), Martins and Dallenders. George Green's stone dip on Grannys Creek was superceded by a new one at the woolshed in 1948-49 because it was more convenient. The early dip had been built on the creek for water and to enable it to be drained back into the creek.

Most dips were drained into creeks and no-one seemed to worry about pollution. Once while working on Maloneys Creek, Eddie and others had a drink only to find a dead fox upstream. Harold Woods then said 'don't worry, water always cleans itself in 30 yards'.

Tidbinbilla was mainly a sheep area, but there were some cattle. The many swamps meant fluke, so drenching was monthly. Edna Dallender inoculated sheep around the valley for the various owners, and Eddie says how this communal way of working was important — you had to get on well with neighbours. Sometimes food might be a form of barter for help rendered, but there were no cash payments.

Tom had the contract to clear the track over Fishing Gap to the Cotter stream gauge every few years, and Eddie helped him. The work was with mattock and axe. George Arnold helped Tom do the section leading down into the Cotter from the gap. Tom also carried out local census collection.

## 2B

Tidbinbilla was not on a main stock route to the mountains, though the nearby Gibraltar Creek valley was used as a route.

Numbers of people in the valley grew small plots of grain crops for home consumption (ie horse feed). Potatoes were sold for profit and Eddie describes in detail how he grew spuds on various small acreages along the Tidbinbilla Creek, and also near the Visitors Centre. He sold them mainly to the Tharwa Store. Though he used a tractor (which was purchased in the late 1940s), earlier he had helped his father plant potatoes and Tom used horse and plough before the tractor's purchase. Tom's death may well have been associated with his spraying of 3 acres of potatoes without a mask. Pumpkins were another crop.

Rabbitting was another job on Rock Valley. Eddie trapped and helped his father put out poisoned thistle root baits. The arrival of myxomatosis both reduced rabbit numbers and saw the grass become lush for the first time in decades. Skins were sold to Thos. W. Green in Queanbeyan. Other rabbiters were Bill and Ethel Blewitt, Haley Blewitt, Elsie Blewitt, Pat Maxwell.

Eddie describes in detail the eucalyptus distillery run by Steve Lajcin, Martin Teckle and Jan Jandura (two others moved to Burruga). They had fled Czechoslovakia after Hitler's annexation of it and arrived at Tidbinbilla late 1939 or 1940. Their main camp was where the kangaroo enclosure carpark is today. Apart from the still and a chaff shed, they had a kitchen with stone and mud and iron chimney which smoked a lot, and weatherboard walls (timber from the old mill) which were roughly made. The living quarters hut was also of timber from Rayner's mill but was better sealed and very cosy. Furniture was built from bush timber. Greens regularly played 500 with them, and there would be a few drinks. Eddie describes how Martin and Steve returned home after the war but how Jan stayed and his wife and son came out and they moved to Sydney about 1947. Yugoslavs worked the eucalyptus later. The Czechs also worked for a time on Hurdle Creek and their rough hut was on the distillery side of the creek. Eddie describes the year-round work of cutting and distilling the leaves. The still was fired on Fridays and 'you'd smell the eucalyptus

vapour right down the valley'. Three weeks work would fill a 44 gallon drum, and Bill Cranswick would come out from Queanbeyan to pick up 3 or 4 drums each time. Eddie says Steve, Martin and Jan made a lot of money out of it, with no overheads and paying no royalties. Eddie found Jan the most friendly. All three were very hygienic, bathing 2 or 3 times a week (locals bathed once if that), and were fastidious with washing up dishes.

### 3A

They'd pour boiling water over dishes rather than wipe them. Eddie never cut euc because it was too hard and the hours too long. The Czechs had most to do with Greens, Dallenders, and Blewitts at Nil Desperandum on Hurdle Creek.

Recalling individuals of the area, Eddie says Aunt Lizzie Flint was quiet and timid; Phib was a bit frightening to Eddie as a younger person because of his temper and drink, as was Bert Reid to some extent (though the fear might not have existed had Eddie been older). Annie Flint was small and 'frail for the work she did'. She sometimes put on airs to outsiders, which may have been inherited from her father John Noone; there had been fallings out between Noones and George and Mary Ann Green, and John had accidentally burnt Greens' log fences which didn't help. Florrie Reid was a gentle, caring person who paid more attention to children than did many. Eddie had a lot to do with Jack Reid and ploughed and hay-carted with him; Jack and Jean's departure from Tidbinbilla influenced Eddie to go away for a while too in the early 1960s. Tom Green was well regarded but showed some impatience with Eddie; Eddie was closer to his mother. Arthur and Jo Martin and family had to pass Rock Valley on their way to Mt Domain and were frequent visitors; they had modest means and Elma often had them in for meals. (Eddie explains the line of occupation of Mt Domain: Stauntons, then Rossiters, Merve Tong, Martins, Corbetts, then an Italian family (name forgotten) during whose time Bert Driver (who still owned the property) had the concrete piggery built (the Italians built it). Of the Gibraltar Blewitts, Eddie says Bill was timid and easy going, and Ethel was a 'hard worker with a bad temper'. Eddie had less to do with the Woods at Gibraltar Creek, though he took Eileen and Dulcie to dances at Tharwa. He liked their mother, Mary, and would call in during the bike trip home from Tharwa School.

Discussing local wildlife: koalas had been shot out (for rugs) in Eddie's grandparents' time; wallaby species (including rock wallabies) had been thinned by foxes and some shooting; Greens didn't shoot kangaroos but their numbers were not high; dingoes were few and Eddie recalls how Tom could howl them up and how he shot one in Block 60; Eric Blewitt also shot one at Nil; platypus were common in the creek and weren't affected by the euc still run off; snakes were killed on site by all; native cats were sometimes caught in rabbit traps and were considered as vermin because of their raids on chooks.

Of ringbarking, Eddie says how he burnt a lot of rung timber (and sometimes rabbits would run out of the piles on fire). The area called 90 Acres at the entrance to TNR was in the 1960s full of dead timber which Eddie pulled together and burnt. Areas that have regenerated include Red Hill which Noonan had once cleared on the eastern side. Eddie prefers today's scene of regrowth to the sight of dead timber in his youth.

### 3B

Of Aboriginal sites and history, Eddie says how his Aunt Betty in the 1890s was slapped by local Aborigine Jimmy Jimmy for picking a red flower from a gum. Eddie was told of grave sites by Uncle Will but is sworn to secrecy; some graves existed in Block 60, now pine forest. There was an art site on Woolpack Rocks below Rock Valley house, but some of the rock has collapsed obliterating the art [a site visit by the author failed to see any surviving sign of the art].

Tidbinbilla people always went to Queanbeyan; trips to Canberra were only for registering the car etc. As Canberra was a government town, there was some resentment of it. Once the Cotter-Tidbinbilla Road was improved the Greens would sometimes call into Canberra to see relatives.

At Rock Valley the old slab kitchen and brick oven (under the present fig tree) were gone by Eddie's birth; the slab dairy with shingle roof was demolished c.1950; the granary was south of the house and Tom and boarding schoolteacher Vic Kelly used to sleep in the loft because there was no room in the house. The woolshed was pulled down by TNR in the 1960s; the pise hayshed of 1911 was damaged by horses licking salt from the walls and TNR eventually pulled it down. Eddie describes the expansion of the house 1895-1911.

Other sites are discussed: Granny Bell's was a crude 2-room hut; Grannys Bridge was built by the Department of Interior and rattled every time someone went over, so you'd hear whoever was coming well in advance. After describing 4-room Mt Domain, Eddie recalls Mrs Staunton as an elderly lady living in Canberra in Eddie's youth; he went with her and others in a sulky across the flooded creek at the Naas races once. Church Rock Valley School was mainly slab. Nina Farrer's block may have been used in high rainfall wheat experiments but Eddie is unsure.

Staunton's Gap was named because Stauntons' cows were through the gap in the Gibraltar Creek valley and Anastasia used to walk through daily and milk them. Camels Hump was sometimes called Blewitts Peak, after the Blewitts of Nil.

Eddie has strong feelings for Tidbinbilla, saying it is still home and that he is lucky to be able to visit unlike other farmers whose properties are now under Canberra suburbia. Devastated by the 1960s resumptions, he now enjoys the nature reserve, and it is better known now than when he lived there. He explains how the Tidbinbilla Pioneers Association was formed

following the Green and Hatcliff centenary celebrations in the 1980s, and discusses the Friends of Tidbinbilla.



A get-together at Rock Valley in the 1950s. Arthur Martin is in the centre wearing the tie, and behind him Jo Martin (now Waterhouse) holds two beer bottles. To the right of them stands Elma Green, and at left rear is Tom Green. Jo's brother Jack Jones from Adaminaby is at right with the striped tie. At front left sits eucalyptus distiller Steve Lajcin and the three children to the right are Gay, Bimby and Annette Martin. (Jo Waterhouse Collection)



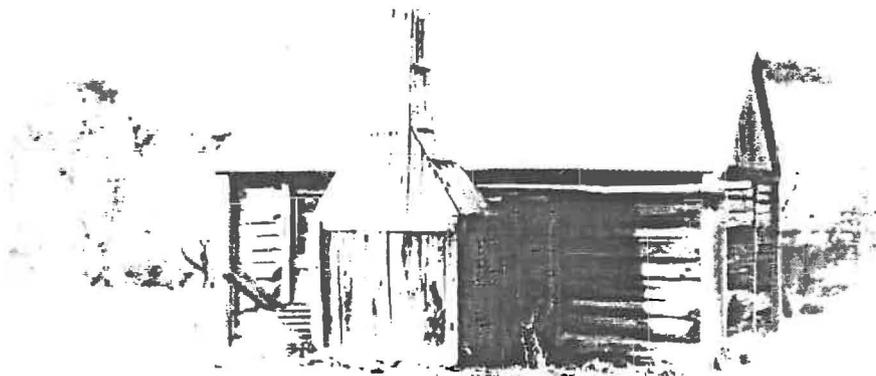
Scene outside the Rock Valley woolshed in the 1940s; Sid Cramp left, Tom Green 2nd left, Bill Fox on right. (Thelma Cabban Collection)



The drive to Rock Valley in the 1940s. (Keith Green Collection)



Snow on Turkey Hill, 1948. (Keith Green Collection)



A slab hut in the Rock Valley area, from Jefferis and Whelen's 1931 manuscript 'Around Australia's Capital'.

## Laurie Dallender

*Laurie preferred not to be interviewed on tape. The following summary is based on notes taken at the time of our meetings. It follows the course of the discussion and so returns to certain subjects at times, rather than being purely chronological.*

Laurie was born in England in about 1907; his mother was a nurse and his father, who died while Laurie was a baby, worked on the land. After visiting the Wembley Exhibition and learning about opportunities in Australia he sailed on the SS *Border* in 1924 (eight men to a cabin) and arrived in Sydney. There was 2 pounds in a bank account to aid him on arrival. Tom Green had arranged for Laurie to work for him on a 3-year contract at Rock Valley. Laurie came down on the train and was met at Tuggeranong Siding by Tom's brother-in-law Ernie Wright. They got 12 punctures driving back to Tidbinbilla.

Laurie began working for Greens but stayed for only one year of the contract. He then started rabbitting on other properties (eg above Stauntons and elsewhere). For a number of years he combined winter rabbitting with summer bushwork. He is proud never to have gone on the dole.

The first work at Greens consisted of picking up fleeces and other shed work as shearing had begun. Jack Maloney was shearing his sheep there too; the shearers were Jack and Tom. Another job was pulling briars on Congwarra and Jacks Hill with the aid of Punch the draughthorse. Ernie Wright and wife Alice nee Green had earlier gone to Glen Innes but drought forced them back to Rock Valley. When Tom married Elma nee Woods, Ernie and Alice moved to Congwarra (there was some ill feeling between Tom and Ernie). Subsequently Ernie and Alice moved from Congwarra to Dalby and prospered.

Trapping rabbits on Stauntons' Mt Domain, Laurie got to know Bill Staunton and sister Anastasia. Anastasia was big and used to do a 'crossed sword dance' (actually using pieces of timber); when she did it at Blewitts' Gibraltar it made the house shake. She used to walk to Gibraltar Creek to milk the cows. She'd walk the Mt Domain boundary fortnightly to keep dingoes out, placing paper on the fence to frighten them, the human smell of the paper apparently keeping them away.

There were always dingoes. One was howling once on Stauntons Gap and another was on Tidbinbilla Mountain, which made Laurie feel uneasy while setting rabbit traps. Tom Taylor came over once from Currango and set up a wired gun-trap on a track to kill a dingo. Sid Flint had a similar trap and warned Laurie not to ride into it. Once a female dingo caught its leg in a fence and hung there till it died; the male partner came down and fought with Greens' dogs and went on to Flints. Dingoes didn't kill sheep regularly but 'slaughtered sheep left, right and centre at Noones' old place'.

Jack Reid once howled up a dingo from the creek and Tom Green went and howled and shot it with a double-barrel shotgun. People would give 5 pounds as a bounty on a dingo to get rid of them.

Laurie worked for Jack Maloney for 3 pounds per week, scrubbing, fencing and draining, for 6 months. Jack, a big man, had worked on the roads before owning Paddys River. Jack was a hard man but a fair man. He had a Buick (one of the first cars in the district) which Laurie drove for him to get to dances. Jack's mother, brother and two sisters lived at Castle Hill at Sydney by that time and Laurie once drove him down there; the trip over the Razorback near Camden was dangerous. Jack cooked for Laurie, doing good meals in a camp oven.

Following this Laurie worked for Sid Flint for 2 pound per week (in 1939 Laurie married Sid and Annie's daughter Edna). Laurie was rabbitting at Brindabella when Sid died. Sid had been 'in pain all the time with his kidneys'. He had been going to Sydney for an operation but was talked out of it by a Queanbeyan friend who said the op would not succeed. 'You could see he was in agony'. Work on Flints was hard, 'everything was bloody hard work with him'.

Laurie did stockwork and other work for Bert Reid. Bert at one time had 700 head in the off-limits Cotter catchment; Laurie and he rode along the Brindabellas looking at them. Bert said 'What do you think of my cattle ranch', to which Laurie replied 'It looks alright'. Another time, Laurie and a Rolfe mustered 1600 young sheep at Little Peppercorn for Bert and brought them back to Tidbinbilla Station. Laurie also worked in Bert's shearing shed, but after one 10-week stint was paid little.

Laurie trapped in the Brindabella valley late in the 1920s. At first he lived in a tent then moved into William Reid's old hotel, known as Boltons Hut. Laurie often cooked rabbit stew and had the mailman bring bread from Queanbeyan once a week. According to Laurie, William's gold-mining operations were made difficult by water seeping up from the river, requiring further work, but he finished up broke.

Laurie remembers Mt Domain as pise with a chimney having an iron top and a pise base; the roof was iron and there was a kitchen, dining/living room and two bedrooms one of which had been shared by the children. Laurie offered Bill Staunton 5 pound to trap rabbits, but Bill's mother had already let her brother Tom Isaacs trap the property at that particular time.

Laurie poisoned rabbits using not only thistle root baits but also used a mixture of jam and strichnine which was placed on freshly dug ground — the problem was that stock liked it too!

Sid and Annie Flint's house was pise with iron roof and a kitchen was built off it. A strong wind blew the kitchen askew and Sid left it like that till his death. After Sid's death Annie was going to sell to Tom Green for

3000 pounds. Laurie was by now at Tidbinbilla Station and Annie asked him to help her run the place; Laurie didn't want to go because he was going out with Reids' daughter Esme (at a dance at Queanbeyan Hospital Les Morton punched Laurie because of jealousy over Esme; a bone in Laurie's face was broken and some legal action followed). Anyway, Annie decided not to sell and her brother Hubert came back from London Bridge to help her. Hubert hadn't had much education but his brothers Ted, Jim and Jack had all gone to St Patricks School in Goulburn (Ted was a teacher and like Jim who sold Sydney real estate till the Depression had been in the army; Jack was an architect). The Noone brothers had bought London Bridge after the First World War.

Laurie worked for Hubert for 1 pound per week in summer and trapped at Greens, Stauntons and Flints in winter 'all the rabbits I could get' (it was then the Depression). Skins and carcasses were sold to Bill Oldfield in Queanbeyan, while better skins were sold to Jim O'Malley who gave 4s a pound.

Laurie went to Warren working in shearing sheds in the 1930s and also killed sheep for the shearers' mess. This led to shed jobs elsewhere around western NSW (eg Willandra) and locally at Cuppacumbalong, Bredbo and Tidbinbilla.

Talking of Tidbinbilla Station, Laurie recalled how Bert Reid and most of his family lived in an older section of the homestead [the pise section?], while on the side was a little room in which Laurie, Neville Reid and someone else slept. Twenty yards away Pat Kelly lived in a little hut and worked on Tidbinbilla for years. He'd get on a stump and spruik like an orator. After many years he returned to Ireland but couldn't live there so he came back and, as punishment for having left (according to Laurie) was made to fell trees and cut them up into firewood. Eventually he went to Queanbeyan where the spruiking continued.

Laurie worked on the roads. Late in the 1920s Bill Staunton was driving him along and he was in need of work. Roadman Jack Rustin was there blowing a stump and was asked by Bill if a job could be found for Laurie. 'He can start at Gibraltar Creek on Monday', came the reply. Other workers in the gang were Pat Fisher, Bill Miners, Locky Clarkson (brother to Mrs Rustin, he was the leading hand and used to play football for Tharwa; he was 'small and stupid'), and 'Biggan' Johnson. They'd spar at boxing matches in their time off, and Pat and Bill used to get pretty serious. Pat, Bill and Johnson would ride to Tharwa dances. There were two or three road jobs round Paddys River, then they worked at Connellys Corner near Lambrigg, then they worked on the Point Hut Crossing. There was some concrete already at the crossing but they extended the work, including little pillars along the edge of the crossing. Later gangs did further work here. A deep hole below the crossing put many people off using it. There had been three drownings here before Laurie's time.

Laurie worked for Minson Glass in Sydney at times in the 1930s which was run by his relatives. He also worked locally for Dan White of Spring Station at Tharwa, and Dan also worked for Hubert Noone at Riverlea. Laurie recalls a humorous story regarding Dan. Apparently Dan was working in a shearing shed somewhere in NSW and the time may have been in the Depression. A fellow worker looked at Dan's FCT numberplate and asked what FCT stood for. Dan, quick as a flash, made a reply which can't be written here, but the last two words were '- Crook Times'!

After marrying Edna, Laurie worked for Forestry at Pierces Creek for three years and was a leading hand at the Paddys River nursery. He was being paid 6 pound per week. Then he was called up for war service (in the air force). He didn't want to go and leave Edna and Annie on the property, but had to. He trained at Tocumwal, then went to Richmond, then Ascot Vale. He was to go to Darwin but was given three months leave, and came back home. He then was sent to Darwin, and after coming back to Sydney was waiting to go to Borneo but the war ended.

For several years (presumably after he married Edna) Laurie worked on Annie's property without pay just to keep the place going. Eventually Annie gave him a half share. Later, during the Korean War when wool prices boomed, Laurie bought several hundred wethers from Bungendore and sheared them at Congwarra shed. He got one pound per pound for the wool. 'I got more for that wool in one year than during the five years of the Depression.'

There was an ex-WW1 digger who was a shearer at Tidbinbilla who Laurie also employed. In his spare time he fished in local creeks and would go to town with 2 or 3 pound and blow it. He was fairly elderly by this time, having been 18 at Gallipoli. His name was not recalled.

RMC cadets would camp at Connellys Corner, at Rock Valley and above Stauntons. Once when the Melbourne Cup was on the radio they came to ask Laurie if they could listen too. They dug trenches and Laurie found some above Stauntons: 'a man would break his bloody neck'. The cadets came back and filled them in.

Laurie recalls no bushwalkers, though a few people rode over to the Cotter to go fishing.

For many years Laurie and Edna had the job of riding weekly over Fishing Gap into the Cotter to read the stream gauge near the junction of Stockyard (or Ginina) Creek and the Cotter (they didn't go together; one or the other would go). You had to cross the river ten times and when the river was high the trip was even more difficult. They were paid 2 pound per week by the government, which Laurie later succeeded in having raised to 3 pound at Jack Noone's suggestion. Phib Flint had packed in the materials for the building of the weir at the gauge [see Helen Flint

summary]. Tom Green had also tendered for that contract. Kevin Flint read the gauge before Dallenders. You wound it up to go for seven days. Laurie usually did the trip on Sundays. Edna had ridden horses since she was young, and 'was game' to do the trip. Jack Maxwell sold her a horse which was good in water. On one trip (they were usually day trips) Laurie camped a night fishing with Athol Lloyd and Gus Burke and Harry Knight. One of the horses took off so Laurie and Athol had to walk home.

Though sheep predominated, Tidbinbilla was really better for cattle than sheep and so was not very affluent. Laurie used to take salt up to Red Hill for the cattle. You wouldn't see them but they'd come in for the salt. Pop Monk of Tuggeranong used to say that Red Hill would be 'a great place to grow apples' because of its soil, only it was a little too high.

Discussing Calvary, Laurie gave a variation of the story told by Beryl Fisher in her interview. Michael Maloney and John Noone bought some sheep. It was the worst thing they ever did because they mortgaged their properties to buy the animals. Dingoes got the sheep and they lost their properties. Maloney had to move to Calvary and Noone moved further up the Tidbinbilla valley. The road up Black Hill to Calvary was not used by many in Laurie's time.

Rayners Mill had seen other timber millers before Rayner himself came to the valley in the 1930s, though the mill was not actually operating when Laurie arrived in the '20s. Annie Flint used to bake bread for the millers, 'the best bread you ever tasted'. Rayner brought in a steam traction engine. He employed Eric Blewitt to haul logs to the mill with Bert Reid's bullock team, as he had no bullocks himself. Rayner, 'a wild bugger', had a truck and car and used to bash the car around a bit. 'He was a hard man, only a young fella really'. He'd come down with his wife to Flints for a cup of tea. His father was also at the mill for a time. The logs for the Paddys River bridge came from the mill and were drawn to the bridge site by Gerry Sheahan with a team of horses.

Rayner left and got other work. Some years later a Queanbeyan builder [possibly named Scheele] sought Laurie's permission to take timber from the area (Laurie owned the land). For five years he drew timber with an army truck and trucked it back to Queanbeyan; it was not milled on site. Later again, probably around 1960, another couple of men came for timber but white ants in their felled white gum put an end to the operation. Around the early 1960s Laurie bought a block off Eddie Green and with Don Gill and Sid Barnes cut timber on it and dragged it down to the road to be trucked to town.

Of the early selector Kaye at the top end of the valley, Laurie says he used to cart the mail from Tharwa and that Edna, then a little girl, would run to meet him because he brought lollies. He was generally at his hut on weekends only.

Hubert Noone at Riverlea was always on about wombats getting under the fences and he used to put the bottom wire rather too close to the ground to try to keep them out.

The Czech eucalyptus cutters came from Uriarra to Tidbinbilla. Bushfire (presumably the 1939 fire) had burnt out the area being worked at Uriarra and so forester Cyril Cole came to Tidbinbilla and asked Annie Flint if she would agree to the distillers working her property. She agreed providing they actually cleared the areas they worked, which they never did as the cut trees coppiced. She asked for no royalty provided the distillers cleared the country. The burning of timber to fuel the still did have some clearing effect though. Dallengers received a gallon of oil from the three men from time to time. The Czechs started at first light: 'you could hear them from the house'. Broadleaf peppermint needed 18 hours steaming, while narrowleaf only required 7. When four 44 gallon drums of oil were full a truck would come for them. Laurie once showed the bosses of the Melbourne oil company over to the Czechs' camp; when Laurie commented on local elevations, one of the Melbourne men checked it with an altimeter. By the time Laurie left Tidbinbilla around 1960 the still hadn't been used for some years.

Of H.F.Gillman, the bard of Nil Desperandum, Laurie says he was a 'runaway from Ireland', who had been at Adaminaby, then Brindabella and then had come to Tidbinbilla. He was always well dressed and had a walking stick. As is well documented, he took gates off their hinges at Tidbinbilla Station and planted them. Gillman's sudden departure was like this: one day Mrs Sheedy at Tharwa post office gave Hubert Noone a letter for Gillman. Hubert rode to Nil in the dark and Gillman wouldn't open the door. Next day Hubert went back and gave Gillman the letter which contained wonderful news, 'it freed him to go home'. Later from Ireland Gillman wrote to Ivy Maxwell that 'I'm a very wealthy man today but I'm too old to enjoy it.' He also wrote to Bert Reid, offering him Nil for 100 pounds. So Bert bought the property.

Laurie and Tom Green put up the poles for the phone line to Greens and Flints. The phone was useful but wasn't private, being a party line. Once in about 1954 when a 4-year-old relative Heather was scalded by boiling water, Laurie was able to ring for medical aid. The phone also made it easier to order things to be brought out by the mailman.

Merve Tong had Mt Domain before Driver and Martin bought it. Laurie had a lot of time for Merve. Merve usually travelled by in a sulky. He planted willows along Tidbinbilla Creek above the house for stock feed, as his father had done at Naas.

John Staunton named some local places after the Boer War and the first World War. He called a hill Spion Kopje, and named another hill near Stauntons Gap The Pyramid [a name which survives today].

Once Frances Staunton's sister and Anastasia Staunton went to Sydney. A taxi driver there offered them a lift to the station but Anastasia refused and walked. Apparently they boiled the billy in Hyde Park. Another time, John Staunton was shearing at Michelago and walked over the hills to Rock Valley in a morning. George Green offered him morning tea but Staunton said 'No thanks I've just had breakfast at Michelago!' Son Bill, recalls Laurie, always wore sandshoes.

Laurie and Edna decided to move into Canberra around 1960 for the education of their 7-year-old adopted son. They made an agreement with Charlie West to run the property for five years, but it didn't work out all that well. Laurie and Edna lived at Vaughan Gardens in Griffith, and Laurie worked with Survey, then the Services Club at Manuka, then at the National Library. Edna worked at the National Library for quite a lengthy period. They moved to Murrumburrah in about 1980. Sadly, Edna died suddenly last year.



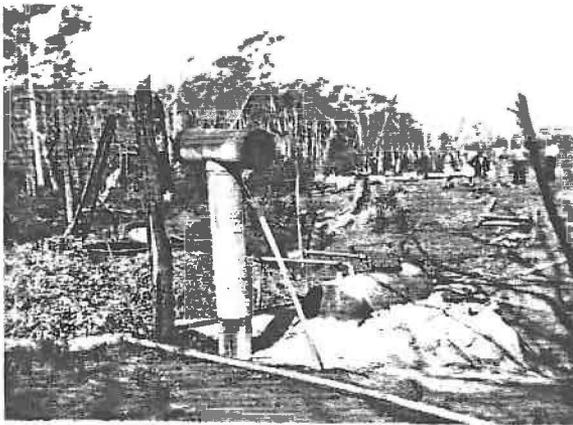
Laurie Dallender and Esme Reid relaxing by the Studebaker during a holiday at Narooma in the late 1920s. (Claire Lewis Collection)



Esme Reid washing her hair at what is believed to be Little Peppercorn Hut. (Claire Lewis Collection)



Sid and Annie Flint on their wedding day in 1912. (Bill and Monica Flint Collection)



The eucalyptus distillery at Nil Desperandum in the 1940s. (Thelma Cabban Collection)

## Jean Reid

*Jean was born Lucy Jean Wilson at Gloucester in 1917. She lived on a property at Quirindi and then moved to Sydney where she worked at the GPO. She met Jack Reid of Tidbinbilla Station while he was in the army and they married in 1944. Jean and Jack came to Tidbinbilla Station to live and remained there until 1958 when they moved to another property, Little Forest, near Frogmore. Jack (who was interviewed for the Namadgi Oral History Project) died in 1990. Their sons Wayne, Bruce and Milton were all born during the Tidbinbilla period.*

### **Tape 1, Side A**

Jean was working at the GPO and boarding with an aunt of Jack Reid's at Wollstonecraft in Sydney. As servicemen were in need of pen friends the aunt suggested that Jean might like to write to her nephew serving in New Guinea. She did, and on one period of leave he came down and met Jean in early 1944. They married in August. Shortly after when returning to his unit, Jack had an attack of malaria, and then his father Bert Reid broke his ankles at Tidbinbilla and needed Jack to help run the property. So Jack was able to leave the army, and he and Jean came to Tidbinbilla Station in November 1944.

Jean had grown up on a dairy property at Quirindi. She describes the work at the GPO with her sister Mavis, and how she had to know all the country post offices for letter sorting. The amount of wartime mail was huge. She loved the work. As Jean mentions later, the hardest thing to leave when departing Sydney was her work friends.

After living in the city the distance to Tidbinbilla seemed daunting at first but Jean got more used to it over time. She talks of the 'magnificent' view of the property with the creek, willows, poplars and the mountains behind. 'I liked it from the word go.'

Shopping was in Queanbeyan and it took about an hour to get there. Reids went to Queanbeyan rather than Canberra because Jack's family had lived there and they knew people there. Jean says later that most local people went to Queanbeyan because that's where their preferred services and friends were.

Bert Reid is described as tall, 'very straight' and rather distinguished looking. Jean recalls him going into the mountains with packhorses to the snowleashes. She and Jack once took some wire netting into one of the leases by vehicle and during afternoon tea with Doug and May Maxwell at Bulls Head one of the young Maxwell boys said to Jack, who was having trouble with the car, that he should dump and burn it.

Remembering Bert's wife Florrie, Jean says of this 'dear little woman', 'My goodness she did it hard'. There were few conveniences at Tidbinbilla and

no water laid on to the laundry tubs for example. Jean describes the layout of the house, and how she and Jack shared the old pise section with Bert and Florrie before moving into the shearers quarters. Another two-room hut down the creek slightly was known as Paynter's Hut, named after a station worker of that name.

Discussing domestic life at the station, Jean describes ironing with flat irons and then the use of better 'Mrs Potts' irons, and the need to be careful about not dirtying or scorching the men's white shirts which they wore to town. Khaki shirts were worn when working on the property.

Young Lou Margules used to be with Bert a lot and a story is told how when asked to get some carrots from Bert's vegetable garden Lou found they were so big only two would fit in the billy. Bert's garden was watered from the creek. Jean had not heard of 'bandicooting' potatoes until Bert introduced her to it. Jean was starting to grow flowers and showed some Russell lupins to Bert to which he said 'You can't eat them', and Jean thought 'Oh you brute!' Bert was a pragmatist. Jack Reid put in a windmill to supply water to Jean's garden and for other household use. Throughout the interview Jean emphasises how important to her the abundance of natural water was at Tidbinbilla.

By Jean and Jack's time Jack's siblings had moved. Esme and husband were in Manly, Reita and husband were in Mayfield, Alan was running Wyora, and Neville and wife Gladys were at Oakey Creek.

Only a year after Jean arrived, Bert died from a stroke which was a great shock. He'd had a hard life of stockwork exposed to the elements in the mountains. His bullock team wasn't being used much by then; Bert and brother Harcourt had one day hooked it up for Jean's benefit, and its earlier uses are described briefly.

Two of Jean's sons were born in the Allawah Private Hospital and one in Queanbeyan. She comments that the boys escaped many illnesses like measles etc even when visiting cousins were sick. 'It was too cold to breed germs.' Later in the interview she says how in the late 1940s a Canberra nurse would come around the district checking the health of babies.

## **1B**

About the most serious accident was when Wayne fell off his horse as a boy and broke his elbow. The compound fracture got infected and he had to go to Sydney where it was thought amputation might be necessary, but it healed.

Riding was a major pastime for the boys: 'it was part of them and they were part of the horse'. They also trapped rabbits (once catching a fox), and Jean took them fishing in Tidbinbilla Creek (though not in the more risky Paddys River). A six-foot wire fence around the house helped keep the kids safe.

Wayne and Bruce were both at school by the time Milton was born. Jean and Jack in 1953 secured a governess, Miss Ambler from Blackfriars School in Sydney, to teach at Tidbinbilla, and built a schoolhouse. She was there for a couple of years and also taught Gay and Annette Martin; Annette's illness with hydatids is mentioned [see also Jo Waterhouse summary].

Alan Reid and wife Marie (nee West) during Jack and Jean's time came in from Wyora and lived in the pise section with Florrie. Jean and Marie did the cooking together during shearing, Jean doing the cakes etc and Marie the meat and vegetables. Shearing at the four-stand shed took a few weeks. Men who worked at the Tidbinbilla shed included Doug and Ned Blewitt from up the hill at Nil Desperandum, and their mother Elsie and one of their sisters also helped with the cooking. Other Tidbinbilla workers included Fred Green, Charlie West and wife Joan (nee Goodall), and a returned Second World War man, Jack, who despite having only one lung was a very good worker.

Jean got on well with her neighbours and was particularly close to Harold and Vivian Woods and Charlie and Edna Woods; Jean would drive Edna up to Willow Vale at Naas to see Edna's mother Mrs [Florence] Read.

Mrs Read would keep the grass cleared from the yard with a shovel so as to deny cover to snakes. Once there was a snake around the cat and Mrs Read attacked with the shovel, but she killed the cat as well as the snake!.

Snakes were Jean's biggest worry at Tidbinbilla, and she tells how once when Bruce was in the outside toilet there was an incident with a tiger snake. Another time there was an elusive brown snake and Jack ended up sitting on the roof with a gun in order to spot it on the move.

When Jean arrived at Tidbinbilla the lights were kerosene and she feared them tipping over; then came kero aladdin lamps which were better. Then came a generator which powered lights and an electric iron. Then came mains electricity which enabled a fridge and vacuum to be run.

When she came to Tidbinbilla, Jean brought her characteristic bright outlook with her. 'When we lose our sense of humour, life won't be worth living...You've got to see more good than bad', she says. The clean air and water and open spaces of Tidbinbilla appealed to her after Sydney.

The routine of trips to town (Queanbeyan) is described. It was usually Friday and the men would go to the saleyards, and meet and yarn and go and have a drink. The women would do the shopping and also meet one another.

## 2A

Jean gives a detailed description of when, after Milton was born, she went to Canberra to get her driver's licence. Being able to drive gave her a degree of independence, and was especially important during emergencies.

Regarding local roads, there were no major improvements during her time at Tidbinbilla, and lots of bends and lots of gates were features of roads in the district. Floods in Tidbinbilla Creek sometimes meant you were housebound for a few days. On one occasion when the Reids were having a woolshed dance in aid of Kempsey flood victims in the early 1950s it rained heavily and the creek rose and there were difficulties getting cars across. When the Murrumbidgee was high and you couldn't use Point Hut Crossing, Reids went via Tharwa Bridge rather than the Cotter.

Talking of local weather, Jean says the only weather conditions she didn't like were the cold winds which could at times blow for weeks. Snow could often fall on the mountains but rarely fell down at the house. She remembers the 'glorious' scene of the elms covered in snow, and how Bert shrugged it off with 'I see enough of it up in the mountains'.

Though Jean cannot recall the pise section of the house being demolished, it did occur during her time, Jack, Everard Oldfield and another man doing the job. It was a shame that it had deteriorated to the point where it had to go. Florrie had lived in it for some years after Bert's death, though she herself died at Neville and Gladys's property Oakey Creek. Jean remembers how Florrie, though beautiful, was round-shouldered from all the hard work over the years. 'It must take its toll on you mustn't it.'

Florrie used to take the boys for walks up near the woolshed. Miss Ambler (known as Amby) used to take them blackberrying, picking bucketsfull sometimes.

Talking of local women, Jean says Mrs [Lucy] Maxwell was 'the hardest, toughest working woman I think I have ever come across'. She had few conveniences, and she milked, made butter, sold eggs and had the biggest strawberry patch. She had earlier run the mail; mailman in Jean's time was Mr Storen. The mailman would also bring bread that had been ordered; Florrie had always made her own as Bert probably wouldn't have eaten bought bread. Jean didn't bake bread but got it from Tharwa Store.

Jean remembers well the day that neighbour Eric Blewitt was killed by the horse. She and Marie went up to the Blewitts' house but Eric, lying inside, was already dead. Jean liked Eric who she describes as a quiet man.

While Eric had worked for Bert Reid, he hadn't worked for Jack. Jack often employed Everard Oldfield. One November at shearing time it snowed and at 3am Jack and Everard went out to get the sheep in under cover; the cacophany of barking dogs and shouts was more than Jean could stand.

Jean and Jack had the tennis court built: 'we really had some fun then'. Among the people who would come for weekends were Frank and Betty Jolly of Ferguson [Tractors] in Queanbeyan.

## 2B

Charlie Woods was a good player, and other players included Keith and Eddie Green and Laurie Dallender. The bigger crowds played at the Tidbinbilla courts next to the school. Everard Oldfield and wife Sylvia would come to the Reids' for weekends and once when the weather was constantly alternating between sun and mist the Reids and Oldfields alternated between tennis outside and card games inside.

After Kath and Darcy Gilmour bought Nil Desperandum as a weekender, they and the Reids became good friends. Access then was via Tidbinbilla Station and Gilmours would arrive each Saturday and have morning tea with Jean who appreciated their company. One time Jack and Jean took their tractor up to help Gilmours and their friends pull briars. The Reid boys used to swim in the pool built by Gilmours in Hurdle Creek.

Jean loved to fish and recalls a time when she had a set line and Edna Dallender went with her to the creek. Jean remembers precisely the size of the biggest trout she caught in the creek — a 14 1/4" inch rainbow. Fishermen from Queanbeyan and picnickers would also visit Tidbinbilla Creek.

Jean also enjoyed walking, a favourite spot being up above the woolshed. She loved the tall timber and rushing water. She even enjoyed the cleared sections of the property (and during the first few years of their marriage Jean and Jack used to ride over it a lot). The favourite walk for Jean and the boys was to a cave above the woolshed, an area called The Ram Paddock; the view from there was part of the attraction, and the cave was a spur to the boys' imagination.

There were three or four woolshed dances at Reids during Jean's time; there were others at Greens and dances also at Tharwa Hall. Sometimes people would have too much to drink and still be there next day; fights were mostly restricted to Tharwa Hall dances. Greens used to hold beauty contests for both sexes [see also Keith Green summary] and Jean was one of the judges. Jean took her babies to dances as she didn't have a baby sitter; her mother in law Florrie had angina so was not asked to look after the kids. The accordion was a very popular instrument. The woolshed dances were the major social occasion for the district. Of the funny things that happened at dances, Jean remembers how once Harold Woods forgot to take his wife Vivian home from a dance; she spent the night at Greens and next day they rang Harold and asked to speak to Vivian, just to put him on the spot! (On another occasion when coming home from town, Arthur Martin stopped near Tuggeranong Church to yarn to someone and

when that fellow asked after Arthur's wife Jo, Arthur exclaimed 'My God, I've left her in Queanbeyan!')

Once when out setting rabbit traps Jean saw on Jack's saddle a strap belonging to her. Because Jack had not asked her for use of it she rode off with his horse and he had to walk home.

Most local people had cars after the war, but Jean and Jack still rode the paddocks a lot, and Edna Dallender also still rode a lot (eg when visiting her uncle Hubert and aunt Dossie Noone at Riverlea).

At the end of the war there was a welcome home celebration for local men who'd been in the services; the function doubled as a celebration for the cessation of hostilities. Returned men like Jack were presented with certificates.

### 3A

Jean makes the point that her early life on the land had prepared her for what was expected in country life.

Asked if Tidbinbilla Station had a certain status being the oldest property in the valley etc, Jean says it did. She also ponders on its early history and the lifestyle of earlier owners.

Asked how well off the Tidbinbilla district was, she says the land was as good as any around. The cattle were almost always in good condition and fleeces were good; there was the odd dry time and once Reids had to send their cattle away to Warren. The mountains helped to bring rain and the cooler climate ensured relatively good pasture. On the other hand, wetness also meant problems with fluke in sheep.

Jean talks of the connection between trees and rain, and of how she dislikes over-cleared, flat areas like Lockhart, as compared with the timber and water and mountains of Tidbinbilla. She was not too concerned by ringbarking at Tidbinbilla in her time, but is worried about over-clearing today in rural Australia.

She enjoyed seeing the wildlife at Tidbinbilla, and mentions the birds, wombats, echidnas, platypus and kangaroos. It was the older generation which had seen wombats as enemies because of their damage to fences. She enjoys the nature reserve at Tidbinbilla but is concerned about kangaroos overbreeding. She used to envy Edna Dallender with her trips to the Cotter to read the stream gauge. Edna worked hard; Jean never saw her in a dress but always in riding breeches. Jean was impressed by all the hard-working women at Tidbinbilla, none of whom had had an easy life.

Jean and Jack left Tidbinbilla Station in 1958 because with the government's resumption of 800 acres for pine plantations the property was no longer big enough for their three sons to have a livelihood. The

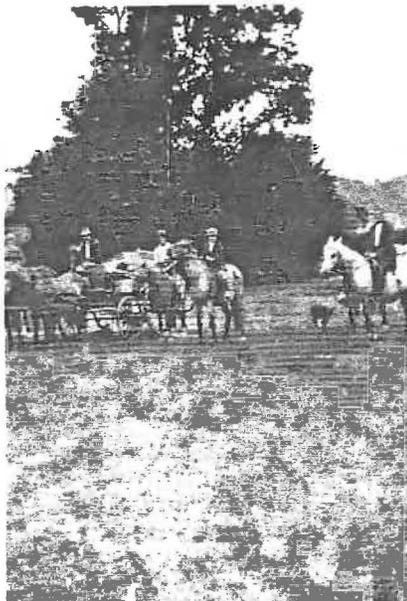
departure was hardest for Jack because of his lengthy family ties. They resettled successfully at Little Forest. It was water that Jean most missed when they moved: 'you can build a house or a woolshed but you can't make a stream'.

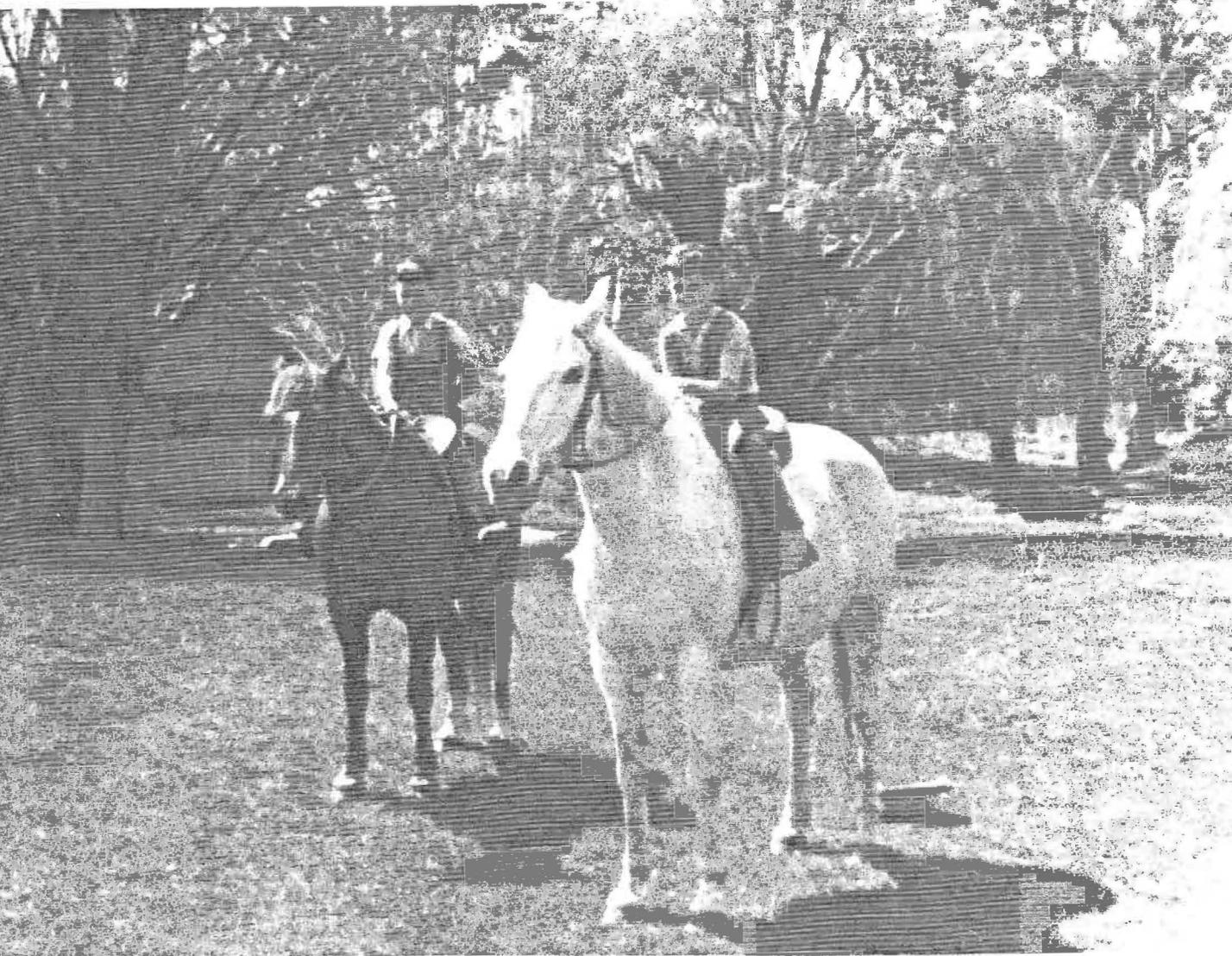
The coming of the pines was the only real intrusion from outside at Tidbinbilla. Canberra was still fairly small and Jean says she and Jack didn't feel that the city was then encroaching on the district. Certainly there were no changes in the roads: 'you could go to town and come home with your eyes closed — you knew the road so well'.



Jack Reid. (Doreen Blundell Collection)

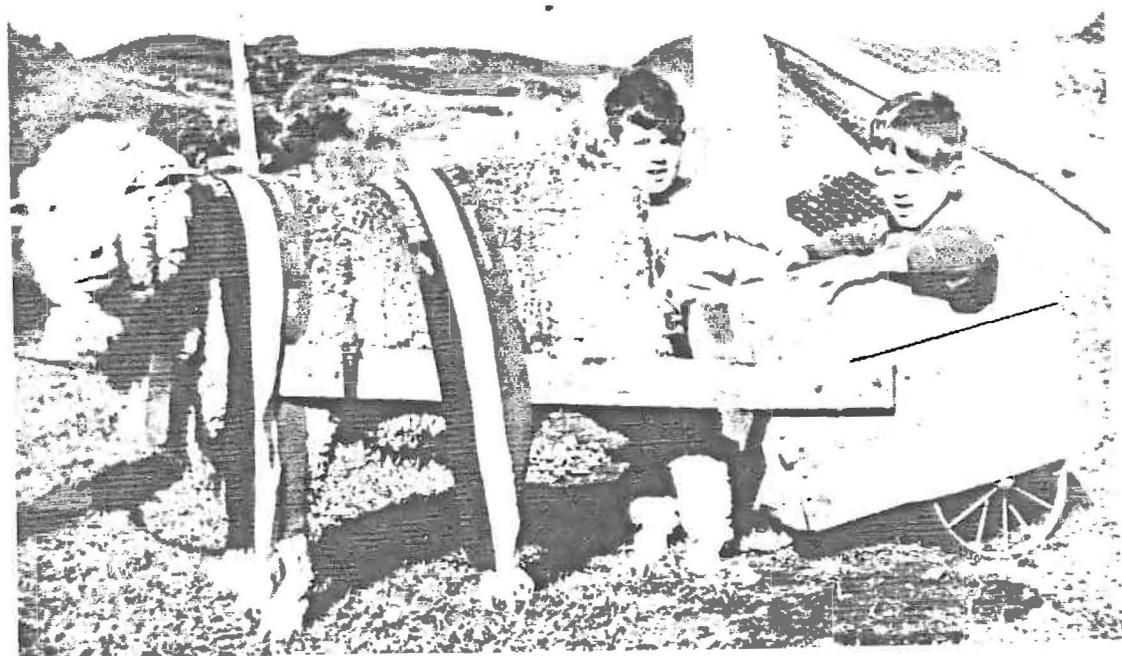
Loaded wagon and riders, probably Bert Reid at right. (Phyllis Morton Collection)





Jean's sons Wayne and Bruce on horseback near the house at Tidbinbilla. In the background stands the meathouse. (Jean Reid Collection)

Wayne and Bruce Reid making imaginative use of a prizewinning sheep at Tidbinbilla Station. (Claire Lewis Collection)



## **Thelma Cabban**

*Thelma was born Thelma Blewitt in 1925, her parents being Bill and Ethel Blewitt (nee Green). She grew up at Gibraltar (today's Birrigai outdoor education centre). In 1947 Thelma married Sid Cabban and they moved to Dalveen in the Brindabella valley. After a time in Canberra, Thelma in 1965 moved to Thuddungra which is where she still resides. Thelma's brother-in-law Peter Cabban also lives at Thuddungra and he says a few words on the tape. The Blewitt family had gone from Gibraltar by 1948 when Bill and Ethel moved to Young. Two of Thelma's sisters, Doreen and Valerie, were also interviewed and their summary is found later in this report.*

### **Tape 1, Side A**

Thelma explains that Bill and Ethel moved to Gibraltar from Williamsdale in the early 1920s. Ethel's father George Green may have owned the property and the Blewitts took it on. When Thelma was born, Bill was away shearing, so Ethel's brother Tom Green drove her to hospital in Queanbeyan for the birth.

Thelma remembers the parlour in the original pise section of the house, with its huge fireplace and hobs on either side; she used to sit on the hobs as a child listening to the adults' conversation when visitors were staying. The mantelpiece had a fringe of oilcloth with 'lace' edges. There were four rooms and a passage in the old house, and the old kitchen was somewhere outside. Blewitts extended the home with timber obtained possibly from Rayner's mill. The ceiling in the house had been cloth which had been whitewashed; it was coming apart so Bill replaced it with sisalcraft. The iron roof was probably the original one. Windows were small-paned and had to be cleaned with Bon Ami, which was tedious. The house was fairly dark internally.

There used to be a pise 'apple shed' which Blewitts used as a wash house. Water came from tanks, and water for the garden was piped from a well up from the house (the source of this water is dry today).

The old fruit tree where Birrigai's foundation plaque is today is a plum planted by Blewitts. There was an old orchard to the east of the house, and the impatient Blewitt children would bash unripe apples against a gum tree to soften them for eating ('No wonder we got diarrhoea', says Thelma).

The vegetable garden was extensive and supplied the family's needs; surplus was given away locally. It grew cauliflower, cabbage, spuds, spinach, beans, peas, beetroot. There was a flower garden at the front of the house, and a tree-lucerne hedge which Thelma's brother Haley clipped carefully.

Thelma says during the 1939 bushfire they hosed the hedge to keep it from catching alight. Mum, Dad and elder sister Doreen (also interviewed) were caught on the road from Queanbeyan by the fire, so the other kids had to hold the fort and water everything; Thelma was operating the phone exchange constantly dealing with anxious calls from terrified Tidbinbilla residents. Peter Cabban explains how the fire jumped from Brindabella Mountain to Tidbinbilla Mountain and burned for a fortnight.

The tractor at Birrigai was not owned by the Blewitts, and came later. The concrete slabs on which it stands were the site of Blewitts' garages.

At Gibraltar School Thelma was taught for a little while by Marian Myers, and then by Norman Cornwell. Miss Myers boarded with Blewitts and gave Thelma her first toothbrush; she left to marry Jim Constable at Forbes. Teacher Carl Morisset also boarded with Blewitts in earlier years. Cornwell boarded too for a while but the effort was too much for Ethel so he moved to Reids. The kids disliked Cornwell whom they called 'Loppy'. Ethel went crook on him for giving Doreen detention after school once because Doreen was needed for work at home. Some of the kids tried to puncture his tires once by putting a stick with tacks in it on the road. Cornwell imposed fairly strict discipline and used the cane (including on the girls) but not excessively. Thelma got to like him in later years.

The schoolchildren planted trees in the grounds (eg a waratah which the frost killed); one afternoon a week was in the garden and one afternoon was sport. In the mornings pupils would line up and march inside, singing the national anthem. Thelma didn't like wearing shoes to school so she used to put them in the mailbox on the way to school of a morning and get them out in the afternoon; some of her siblings went barefoot too. She generally liked her school years. As she and her siblings finished school they went straight to work.

Discussing food, Thelma describes the way that potatoes were stored underground with bag lining above and below and earth on top, potatoes being dug out as needed. Pumpkins were stored on an old mattress in the loft of a shed. Meat was corned or cooked fresh; when a beast was killed, half would be shared with another family. An 'Electrolux' kero fridge succeeded the drip safe. Butter was made every third day, with the kids sitting on the lid of the churn while Ethel turned the handle. Blewitts had up to 12 cows, milked by Ethel and particularly Doreen; Thelma was often late to school after helping with milking. Blewitts sold quite a bit of butter to the Czech eucalyptus distillers.

## 1B

Kathleen Maloney also sold butter to the Czechs. Christmas dinner at Gibraltar included ham, turkey and plum pudding. Relations the Blacks would often stay from Sydney.

Ethel made most of the family's clothes with her treadle sewing machine, though some things were bought. Thelma and the others wore many of Haley's cast off clothes; Thelma had been expected to be a boy and was dressed like one till 9.

Thelma talks of her nickname 'Toss' which was probably thought up by teacher Carl Morisset. Later in the interview she tells how she hated the name, and when running the phone exchange told people not to call her Toss, she preferred Aggie, her middle name.

The Blewitt girls were often helping to run the house as Mum was so often out with Dad rabbitting etc. Doreen and Thelma baked bread from an early age; Thelma describes how they cooked for Phib Flint when he called in and sometimes fell asleep with his head on the plate.

The boys didn't help around the house. Haley from age 7 was rabbit trapping and later went into bees. He built his own house at Gibraltar and later sold it to Les Morton who moved it to Williamsdale.

Bill annually whitewashed the exterior walls of the pise house, using a kero tin full of water and lime which would be boiled. Fat was added to make it stick, and clothes blue was used to whiten it. It was also applied to the pise apple house, and turkeys attracted to the fat picked at the walls and no doubt hastened the building's demise.

Blewitts shopped in Queanbeyan. They only went to Canberra to register the car or to inquire about work in the early '30s while the Depression lasted. Ethel would see Mr Brackenreg (in the Forestry section of Interior) to get Bill or Haley work in the pine plantations, say one week in four for Bill. Forestry work at Pierces Creek provided employment to many.

Trips to Queanbeyan took an hour. Up to the age of 14 Thelma only got into town once per year and would not have known the way home; the sisters used to alternate to see who'd go to the Queanbeyan Show each year. Aged 17 Thelma made her first trip to Sydney by train with Edna Dallender; it opened her eyes and though it was a holiday she got work and stayed with Laurie Dallender's niece Dorothy Minson. Then next winter when Ethel and Bill were ready to go rabbit trapping again, Thelma was called home to help run the place. Ethel and Bill trapped from April to August when they went on the shearing trail out west to a property on the Bland River, Ethel piece-picking and cooking, Bill shearing. Their various motor vehicles are described.

At age 14 Thelma ran the phone exchange at Gibraltar for three months. She had to fill in dockets relating to the calls and was punished by Mum for making a mistake on one. The exchange was open 9am to 6pm but many callers (eg Bert Reid) would ring after hours which was annoying, but then country men made their work calls in the evening so it was a fact of life. As discussed a little later in the interview, the exchange figured in

some dramas, like when Bert Reid broke his ankles while snigging timber with the bullock team; Bert's wife Florrie rang and Ethel had to pick him up in the car. On another occasion Bill Blewitt and Doug Blewitt both broke bones in horse accidents and Ethel took them in to hospital. The '39 fire saw some local women making desperate phone calls to the exchange — Elma Green was just about shouting and Thelma had to hold the receiver away from her ear.

Because so many local people went past Gibraltar on their way to town (and some dropped their kids there while in town), the house was a local focal point. Visitors would also play cards, and Lucy and son Pat Maxwell used to come and listen to 'Ben and Sam' on the radio.

Ethel rabbitted with the kids and with Bill. One night a strange sound frightened off Ethel and Doreen; it turned out to be a cow eating a grass tree. As Ethel never rode, the kids took a horse to pick up the rabbits. Rabbits were kept alive until a rabbitter called Dwyer (living up Mt Domain way) was going into town and then they'd be killed for the trip. Ethel trapped right up to Flints, and she and Bill regularly camped on Tidbinbilla Creek near the present BBQ site; the camp had a whitewashed fireplace and Bill and Ethel slept in a tent with beds and kangaroo rugs.

Ethel once walked from the Leura lease where she and Bill were fencing for Bert Reid. She enjoyed walking through the bush, and never had varicose veins. She helped clear Gibraltar and she and Thelma had to scrub one hill 5 years running.

## 2A

The first year saw the trees ringbarked, then during the next four the suckers were chopped down.

When Thelma left school at 14 she worked for Jack and Kathleen Maloney as a domestic help, being paid 12/6 per week. She was there for under a year. Sunday afternoon was the only time off, and Thelma would walk to Harold Woods and get a lift with him to tennis. Jack was a bit of a cranky man, but Thelma got on alright with Kathleen, whose family had been farmers near Acton. Calvary was probably part of Jack's land and he used to have lambing ewes up near there; there was no-one living there at this time.

Thelma then went to Tom and Elma Greens to work, for 15s per week; Greens also took her into town of a Saturday and they all played cards at night. She had her 17th birthday there at Rock Valley, and then left when her parents wanted her to work with them out on the Bland. Her 18th birthday at Gibraltar was marked by snow; she and Edna Dallender went to town and almost got caught by snow on Tharwa Hill.

Lucerne was among the crops grown at Gibraltar, and Blewitts ploughed with a horse and single-furrow plough and cut the crop by hand with

scythes. Draughthorses on the place were Baldy (who was later buried near Woods crossing, hence Baldys Gully), Punch (which was actually owned by Tom Green and made its own way back and forth between Gibraltar and Rock Valley, bending the gates in the process), and Simon who was overworked and killed by Lindsay while pulling a two-furrow plough.

Rabbit carcasses were boiled up and fed to the dogs and chooks and pigs. Rabbit was sometimes eaten by the family, and Thelma describes the recipe for 'Brown gravied rabbit'.

Thelma saw something of the eucalyptus distillers at Nil Desperandum when visiting her cousins. The Czechs were friendly and they worked hard so they were liked.

The Gibraltar sheep were shorn at the Rock Valley woolshed. At Gibraltar they were crutched in the open by Bill using a man-powered machine. When the kids were young they loved to take turns at turning the machine, but as they got older Bill had to pay someone to do it, and that was Doug Blewitt from Nil.

Thelma recalls a trip to Rayners mill when quite young. The track was rough and the trees very high and the area was shady. Bill walked among the stockpiles of sawn boards making a selection, and they carted the timber home in the dray (consequently Thelma had to walk). This was the timber for the house extensions.

Thelma like other locals was interested by the erection of the koala enclosure in 1939 and she went up and took a photo of a koala [the koala is not obvious in the picture]. She learned at school that koalas were getting scarce because of land clearing.

Bill could impersonate curlews, but Thelma never saw one. She saw lyrebirds displaying when she was rabbiting up Gibraltar Creek. When the *Southern Cloud* aircraft crashed [in 1931], Bill had heard it go over and he later used to say to the kids to keep an eye out for the wreck when they were up the creek near Kangaroo Flat. Thelma said it was too rough to find a plane. [The plane crashed in the Snowy Mountains.]

Native cats used to attack young poultry and were caught in rabbit traps. There were foxes, feral dogs but no dingoes. Wire snares placed under fences to catch kangaroos are described. Once a wombat was caught which was skinned and tanned. Kangaroo rugs were tanned by a man named Fitzgibbon. Thelma describes her mother's tanning of sheep skins later at Young.

Listening to the radio was part of recreation at home; the wireless was powered by a 2 volt battery. As well as playing at the main tennis courts, Blewitts also had their own court at home. Rounders and card-playing

were other activities. From 14 years Thelma went to dances, at Tharwa Hall and at Rock Valley where they were held twice a year. Instead of 'bringing a plate', people brought a basket, so it was a 'basket supper'. Musicians were Una and Bevis West, Les Morton, and Bill Blewitt played the accordion. He played at home too, and sometimes while he played the kids would polish the floor by sliding around in their socks.

Thelma says it was a happy home and, generally, it was a happy district. The sense of community was seen at tennis and at the big Empire Day bonfires at Gibraltar.

## 2B

Thelma and her siblings walked a lot, whether it was getting the cows in (and the calves might take fright and run away again just as you'd got them to the yard), or to the pigsty where the kids carried separated milk in kero tins for pigfeed. She never walked up onto the top of the Tidbinbilla Range.

Discussing local personalities, Thelma says that Phib Flint and Jack Maloney had 'an awful set on each other' and were very competitive. She tells how Jack tried to cut down a willow that Phib was in and how Phib said he calmly rode it to the ground! She tells 'hearsay' stories about George Green and George Hatcliff with some corn whiskey, how Tom Green said he could remember being carried to Rock Valley when very young, and how Phib talked of the 'screaming woman' (an animal, probably a glider). Thelma didn't know Anastasia Staunton but heard how George Green and John Staunton were one day struggling to get a bag of wheat into a dray and Anastasia came along and lifted it easily.

During the Depression and later the family managed economically, and Thelma says they never went hungry. The telephone was helpful because it paid a wage of 3/1/6 every 4 months. Once Thelma and Lindsay were at home and ran out of meat. She used some of the phone money to get sausages, and then killed (rather slowly) a sheep for them to eat. When her parents got home she got a 'clip under the ear' for both. Poultry were eaten regularly, and chooks were not seen as a luxury at Gibraltar.

Bill and Ethel do not seem to have suffered due to their heavily physical lives. Ethel did die young though, of uraemia, at 59. Bill had prostate cancer for years but lived to 75.

Thinking of Tidbinbilla today, Thelma says 'I still call it home', although her actual home Gibraltar has been demolished which angers her. She is angered that Flints house too was demolished but is pleased that Rock Valley survives. She is concerned about present kangaroo and rabbit numbers.

Asked whether she thinks that because her parents were away so much it made her and the other children grow up faster, Thelma says it's possible and it may also have made them stronger persons.

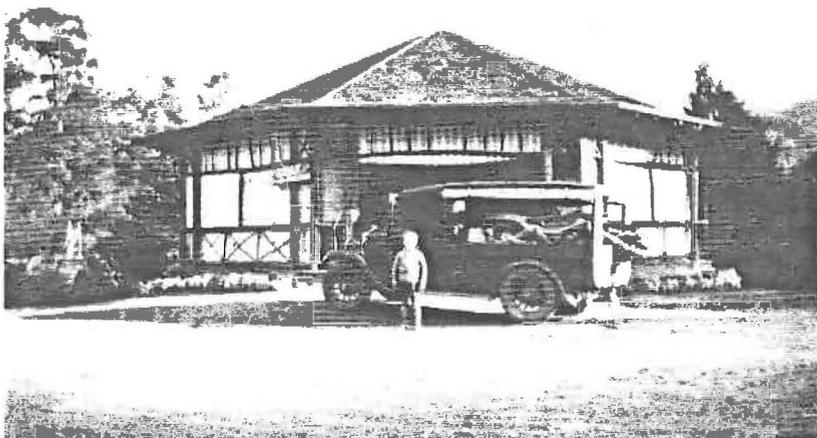


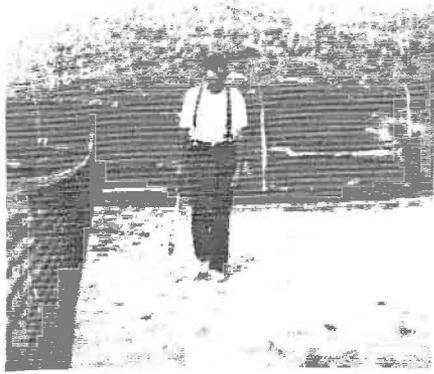
Thelma, aged 16, in front of the water tank at home. (Thelma Cabban Collection)

Thelma in front of a pise building at Rock Valley. (Thelma Cabban Collection)



The Cabban family had the Cotter Kiosk from 1932 to 1947. Here Peter Cabban stands in front of the kiosk with the old Rugby truck in 1932. (Thelma Cabban Collection)

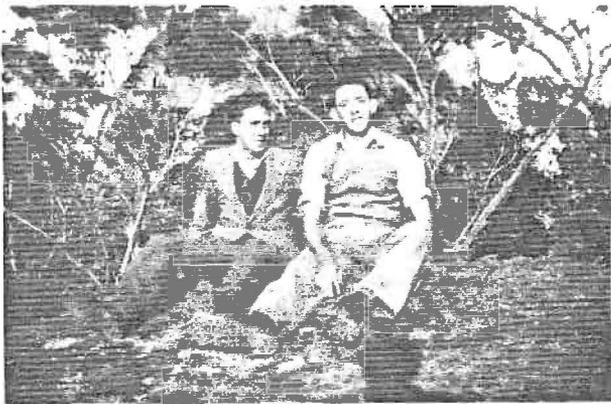




Bill Blewitt on the tennis court at his home Gibraltar. Note the ringbarked timber on the hill behind. (Thelma Cabban Collection)



Haley Blewitt clipping the tree lucerne hedge at Gibraltar. (Thelma Cabban Collection)



Cousins Jack Wright and Lindsay Blewitt at Gibraltar Rocks. (Thelma Cabban Collection)



Gibraltar School teacher Marian Myers on her wedding day at Forbes on 2 April 1934. (Thelma Cabban Collection)

Betty Black (sister to Thelma's mother Ethel) in the garden at Gibraltar. (Thelma Cabban Collection)



## Sheila Lawton and Doug Blewitt

*Sheila nee Blewitt and her brother Doug were two children of Eric Blewitt and Elsie nee Green (Eric was brother to Bill Blewitt, and Elsie was sister to Bill's wife Ethel, of Gibraltar). Sheila, born in 1921, and Doug, born in 1926, grew up at Nil Desperandum after the family moved there in the early 1930s. Following Eric's death at Nil in 1949, Elsie sold the property to Darcy and Kath Gilmour. Today Sheila lives in Ainslie and Doug resides at Michelago. The interview took place in Nil's kitchen.*

### **Tape 1, Side A**

The Blewitts came to Nil in 1931. Eric had left his job at Burra Station and needed work. A job came up with Bert Reid so he took it and the family moved to Nil which was then owned by Bert. Blewitts gradually bought the property off him.

On arrival in 1931 the house was in fairly good order, though it hadn't been lived in for years (there was no ceiling in the lounge and there were rabbit burrows under some of the walls). The present kitchen was then Doug and Ned's bedroom, and Sheila, Eileen and Barbara slept in the adjoining room; Eric and Elsie slept in the next room, and the next room with the fireplace was the lounge. The present kitchen at that time did have a ceiling, but no board floor. The rear verandah was in a closed in form.

The present kitchen was put in around 1940 and Eric and Doug cut the hole for the chimney with a crosscut saw; the brickwork was done by Joe Mason of Queanbeyan. A new kitchen was necessary because the first one used by Blewitts (the present bathroom) was far too small. At the same time the main verandah was built; Elsie wanted it so as to give the house a finished look and so she could sit in the afternoon sun. The room built at the end of the verandah became Doug and Ned's bedroom. Eric had put a sisalcraft (brown paper or cardboard, and tar) ceiling in the lounge not long after the family moved in.

There were no outbuildings, so Eric and Doug built some with iron and bush timber. Blewitts planted the trees just off the main verandah, but had no fruit trees and the flower garden was only small. A race brought creek water to the vegetable garden over by the creek.

Talking of their Gibraltar School experiences, Sheila says that Marian Myers was a nice teacher who explained things well. Doug recalls Norman Cornwell's liking for the cane and how he once gave Doug 12 cuts (Doug couldn't write for two days). Cornwell would lift both feet off the ground when bringing down the cane. Doug and Sheila believe this corporal punishment was good for discipline. Cornwell played sport with the pupils and was friendly outside school.

The Blewitt kids took an hour to walk to school, but they also rode. Eric had to put boards across Tidbinbilla Creek to enable them to cross; a flood might mean Norman couldn't get out from Reids where he was boarding so no school, hooray! Once Doug fell off his horse while riding to school and broke his arm, which meant 6 weeks off school. He and Alan Reid used to race Cornwell to the gates (they on horses, he in his car) and close them before he could get there. Sheila liked school, Doug hated it.

The pines at the school were then 3' high, with the trees along the front being 6'.

At Nil the family used to carry water up from Hurdle Creek in kero tins. On washing days a 44-gallon drum on a slide drawn by draughthorse Dolly was used to bring water from the creek. Only after the verandah was built was a watertank erected at the house, but water was still not piped inside. Elsie did the washing in an open-air copper near the present large water tank. The copper was also used for heating water for bathing in a tin tub. Later a chip heater was installed.

The family was self sufficient in vegetables, and they killed their own meat (earlier they had got it off Bert Reid who also supplied sugar and flour, all of which was part of Eric's pay). Blewitts either made their own butter (beating the milk with a spoon or shaking it in a treacle tin) or bought it from their relatives at Gibraltar.

The girls helped with the housework as Elsie in the winter would be out trapping rabbits most mornings for extra income. She had 40-50 traps. Skins were sold for 2s per pound, and carcasses were 2/6 a pair. Carrier Pat Maxwell took them into Queanbeyan every second day, the carcasses being hung on a string in the meantime.

## 1B

Eric, apart from working for Reid got one week in three on the roads. He worked on Brindabellas roads, including Two Sticks Road (ganger Harry Wark was an in-law) For years Eric also worked on the Tharwa road with Charlie Skipper, filling potholes with Skipper's horse and dray.

As for clothing, Sheila says 'we only had one of everything', including pairs of shoes. Elsie made the girls' aprons out of flour bags. There were plenty of blankets and Eric tanned and made his own kangaroo and possum skin rugs. Doug details the tanning process: how Eric would fell a tree and hollow it out into a trough and place the skins in it in bark and water and turn them every second day for three weeks. The possums were trapped with rabbit traps (despite being protected at the time) and it took 60 to make a double-bed rug.

Blewitts had a T-model Ford and drove up via Reids. The road was very boggy and often the car got stuck and you'd have to walk the rest of the

way, sometimes with not a little mud on you. Once when Elsie had to go to hospital, Phib Flint drove her and Eric in; at Point Hut Crossing the river was up and they had to open the car doors to let the water through and not be swept down. The crossing could be dangerous. Tharwa Bridge was used more than the Cotter because the road to the Cotter was very poor.

Blewitts shopped in Queanbeyan because Canberra was too expensive. Trips were monthly. When they bought flour in town it was a 150 pound bag which lasted a month. Elsie baked 8 loaves at a time, and baked extra for the three eucalyptus distillers (when at Hurdle Creek) who bought a loaf a day off her.

Sheila first went to the cinema when aged 16 in Sydney. She was frightened by an aeroplane on the screen, thinking it was going to come right out and she yelled out, she says, 'like a country bumpkin!'. Local dances at Rock Valley or Tharwa were the Blewitts' main entertainment at home. Rarely were there books at home. There was a battery-powered radio.

The nearest telephone was at Reids' Tidbinbilla Station. Doug rang for the ambulance from there when his father was killed in January 1949. Doug describes how Eric and Doug were drenching the stallion with a bot bomb when the horse reared and struck Eric on the head. Eric was killed instantly. After Eric's death, with Sheila already working, Doug working on Booroomba and Ned away bee-keeping at Brungle with cousin Haley Blewitt, Elsie was alone and so decided to sell Nil Desperandum.

Elsie used to cook at Reids during shearing to earn extra income. Shearing lasted there about three weeks. Eric used to shear his own sheep there at weekends.

Elsie had little leisure time. She did enjoy crochet which she did by the kero lamp in the kitchen. She also did fancywork, like supper cloths made as wedding presents.

Eric's work for Bert Reid included ploughing (by horse), shoeing horses, dipping and a lot of ringbarking and scrubbing. Eric drew logs for Rayner's mill, and Doug says it was Rayner's bullock team that was used [see also Laurie Dallender summary]. The Blewitts' couple of hundred wethers were run all over the Tidbinbilla Range, right over into the Cotter; the range was dry so there was less fluke. Eric and Doug used to muster them and Doug describes mustering in snow one time and having to make a track with his horse so that the sheep could get through. Sheila says 'Dad knew as much about the top of that mountain as he knew about down here'. The name Camels Hump was not known to them. Another place was called by Blewitts The Bare Patch (it was rocky and nothing grew). Doug and Eric poisoned for foxes around Tidbinbilla Peak, and maybe 20 skins a winter would be sold.

Eric and Doug fenced the boundary of the 250 acre holding. Doug describes the L-shaped boundary.

There might at times be up to ten horses at Nil (including those of the kids). Eric used to race horses at Acton, Williamsdale and Bredbo. The whole family went along for the day which was quite an outing. Eric raced for fun, not profit. There might be 15-20 horses in some races, though not all of them were that good.

In the cultivation paddock over Hurdle Creek Eric used to sow wheat, oats and barley which was for the cows and horses. He ploughed with a double-furrow plough borrowed from Bert Reid; it was drawn by two horses. It took one to one-and-a-half days to plough the three acre paddock.

## 2A

The Czech eucalyptus distillers (Steve Lajcin, Martin Teckle and Jan Jandura) who worked at Hurdle Creek for a few years were quite friendly and played cards (yes, 500 again) with Blewitts during rare spare time. One time they got young Ned drunk! You could hear them talking in their camp on calm nights as their hut was fairly close to Nil on the house side of the creek; they were speaking Czechoslovakian. Their English was good with the exception at first of Jan. They came up from their main camp [see Eddie Green, Laurie Dallender, Keith Green summaries] after that had been cut out; then after about three or four years at Hurdle Creek they went back to re-cut at their main site, then came back to Nil again. They felled trees with an axe and stripped the leaves with a cutter made from a crosscut saw. The Czechs worked year-round, and rarely had colds. They took it in shifts to keep the boiler fired when distilling. It was hard work but they made money out of it. Bill Cranswick came from Queanbeyan to pick up the full oil drums (10 or 12 drums were needed to make it a worthwhile load). After the Czechs' first horse, Maze, died, Eric helped them get another one, Prince.

Doug recalls the koala enclosure being erected in 1939. A gang of five or six men worked for a couple of months clearing the fence lines and erecting the fence. Doug says about 8 or 10 koalas were brought to the enclosure in little cages and released. Bob Norgrove had the job of inspecting the fence weekly. During the Second World War timber fell on the enclosure, the koalas escaped and that was the end of the enterprise.

Regarding social life, Sheila says her family often went to dances at Tom and Ada Oldfield's at Top Naas, and you might get home at 5am. Doug, Barbara and Eileen went to dances at Tharwa Hall in the horse and sulky, so if it was a rainy night you didn't go. From Nil the 14 mile trip to Tharwa with a good trotting horse took about an hour. Uncle Bill Blewitt was one accordion player at the local dances. Dances were also held at Rock Valley woolshed, and it was here that there was a send-off for Elsie

when she left in June 1950 (the watch presented to her is held by Sheila today). Doug, Sheila and siblings often visited their cousins at Gibraltar, and the Reid family.

Local wildlife is briefly discussed. As for the climate, Sheila feels that Nil was not as cold as Canberra, and Doug agrees that the house was well sited. Snow may have fallen at the house only two or three times during their experience. Once or twice the kids built a snowman.

Doug and Sheila agree that Elsie's Falls was named after their mother.

Talking of their feelings at being back at Nil, Doug and Sheila are both impressed by the house's good condition. Sheila says how the place brings back memories and how she wishes she still lived the country life. Doug has fond memories of riding around the range and comments on the range's potential for horse-riding for tourists today.



Doug Blewitt and Sheila Lawton on the Nil Desperandum verandah on the day of the interview. The very cold, wet day kept us in the kitchen for most of the time. Snow did not seem very far away. (Author photo)

## Doreen Blundell and Valerie Cootes

*Doreen and Val (sisters to interviewee Thelma Cabban) are daughters of Bill Blewitt and Ethel nee Green. Doreen was born in 1921 and was still a baby when the family moved to Gibraltar. Val was born in 1929. Doreen married Pat Blundell in 1943 and three years later moved to Burra. She now resides in Queanbeyan. Val went to Young in about 1950, two years after her parents moved there, and married Keith Cootes. After nearly forty years at Young she and Keith now live in Kambah.*

### Tape 1, Side A

The Blewitts came to Gibraltar in 1922; Ethel's father George Green was involved in getting them to move there. Ethel was pleased to come to the Tidbinbilla district, because not only was it close to her family but she had been scared of swagmen frequenting the Royalla area where she and Bill had been living. Bill already had some familiarity with Tidbinbilla through his work.

Doreen and Val describe the pise section of the house, and the extension that was built subsequently. The lounge room ceiling was sisalcraft, most of the rest of the ceiling was boards. There were photos of various family members in big oval frames hanging on the walls. The floors had lino on them. Outside buildings included a pise 'dairy' and a corrugated iron 'granary'.

The flower garden at the front of the house included chrysanthemums, cosmos, sunflowers and snapdragons. As well as the old orchard, another one was planted near the garage and included apples, pears, apricots and peaches. The six-foot wire fence around the house garden kept stock out; there were no kangaroos near the house as they kept well away in the hills.

The tractor there today was not Blewitts', for they ploughed with a horse. When Dad ploughed for potatoes, the kids would come along behind and drop the spuds in every third or fourth freshly turned furrow. Grain crops planted for the cows were hand-cut by scythe.

Recalling school memories, Doreen and Val say how Miss Myers was nice, boarded with the Blewitts and was one of the family. Another teacher was Margaret Smith who boarded with Woods's; she would walk through the paddocks to school in gumboots and have the children pull them off; once the pupils accidentally pulled her off her chair! Norman Cornwell boarded too before moving to Reids; he was alright, though Doreen didn't like him because she had to cook for him on his first arrival. Val says he *never* took his coat off in the classroom even on the hottest days, and that he ate his lunch while sitting in his car. Doreen recalls how he was a very good knitter. Doreen liked arithmetic, Val spelling; Gibraltar School was their only formal education. All the pupils in a class sat together on a

bench or form, and the different classes were one behind the other. Behind the teacher was the fireplace with blackboards to either side. There was no real library but there were some books and Doreen borrowed *Dot and the Kangaroo* to take home where her father read it to her. Miss Myers once took the class on a walk to see some bush flowers past Pipe Tree Gully which was near Redmans/Redmonds Hill which seems to be the hill on which the Birrigai rockshelter is located. The sight of RMC cadets marching toward the school on their route marches was frightening.

## 1B

Once a doctor did medical inspections at the school, and there was a dentist who extracted two of brother Lindsay's teeth. When the school closed in 1942, Val and sister Edie had to leave home to find work and became waitresses at Barton House [Brassey House?] hostel in Canberra. Doreen stayed at home after finishing school in order to help run the household: 'the worst of being the eldest', she says.

The Gibraltar house had two rainwater tanks for house use, and water was piped from two springs for the garden and washing. Ethel and Doreen ironed with flat irons heated in front of the fire, then used petrol irons which could sometimes suddenly shoot flame. Kero lights were used for years, as were some candles. It was always a problem at night if the light went out when you were walking from room to room.

The children when very young shared beds, sometimes up to three in a double bed. There were wool blankets, and calico sheets which Ethel used to bleach by leaving hanging on the line in the frost for a few days. There were kangaroo and possum skin rugs, tanned by Jimmy Fitzgibbon. There was also a goat skin rug (uncle Phib Flint once sent along some goat meat but Ethel wouldn't eat it).

Regarding food, the Blewitts used to salt some, and their hams kept from winter to Christmas. When Tom Green or Phib killed a bullock, half would be given to Blewitts on a turn and turn about basis. A sheep was killed once a week for fresh meat. Poultry was eaten from time to time, and rabbit was resorted to when fresh meat ran out. Cockatoos were on rare occasions made into pies, and kangaroo tail soup was tasty (Ernie Thurtle, who lined the walls of the house, used to set wire snares to catch kangaroos). The Blewitts bought their first kero fridge after receiving their first child endowment payment. Doreen and Ethel milked up to 10 cows, and butter was sold to the Czech eucalyptus distillers and others. It might take five minutes to milk one cow, which produced on average one and a half gallons of milk. Doreen baked bread, and the family made all sorts of jams; bread and jam was popular at home. 'We were good eaters.' There was always meat and vegetables and pudding at night. The Blewitts often had extra people to feed, like the Green sons left there when Tom and Elma went to town, or Phib Flint who called in. Gibraltar was something of a halfway house.

When Elma and Tom were away in Sydney, Doreen milked their cows too. From when she left school at 14 to when she married eight years later she ran the Gibraltar household when her mother was away working with Dad. She helped operate the telephone exchange, and also worked for Jack and Kathleen Maloney.

Doreen and Val's eldest brother Haley was working by 14, first on the roads, then at Pierces Creek forestry. Then he moved into bees, and Doreen sometimes helped him rob wild bees' nests in the bush. They also poisoned rabbits together, leaving home at 3.30 in the morning and returning mid afternoon. Using thistle root baits they might get 500 rabbits in a morning. Haley skinned three rabbits a minute. Skins were sold for 6d per pound to Jim O'Malley.

About the worst illness that occurred at Gibraltar was when sister Edie got scarlet fever (which she might have contracted while visiting Lindsay in hospital in Canberra). Ethel burnt sulphur to kill the germs at home, and government officers fumigated the place (it was a notifiable disease). Mostly when a visit to the doctor was necessary, it was always to Dr Hart in Queanbeyan.

## 2A

When Bill (who, incidentally, was called Will by the family but Bill by others) and Ethel came to Gibraltar they had a horse and sulky, but then bought a T-Model Ford. The kids loved riding on the Ford's running boards. Once a wheel came off while going up Grannys Hill [the rise on the way up to the present TNR visitor centre]. Owing to petrol rationing, during the war Blewitts used the horse and sulky for local trips. Sometimes Bill rode his pushbike to Maloneys when crutching sheep.

Bill and Ethel may have gone to Queanbeyan every ten days or so, though most grocery items were bought at Tharwa Store and paid for annually when the wool cheque came in. They rarely went to Canberra because it didn't have the rural stores and services needed (eg stock and station agents, skin buyers). The shops in Canberra weren't so good anyway, apart from Kingston.

Ethel got the phone exchange in 1928 and was paid to run it. While opening hours were 9 to 6, it was really a 24-hour job. You had to be there all the time to take calls. The Blewitt children knew how to operate the exchange from an early age, and were conscientious. Playing tennis on Gibraltar's own court, or milking the cows both might be interrupted by having to go and answer a call. Woolbrokers would send telegrams on local people's wool appraisals and Blewitts had to forward these on.

Blewitts bought a radio in 1932. The children were allowed home by the teacher so they could listen to the Melbourne Cup (the teacher came too).

Mrs Maxwell used to come over to listen to radio serials, which included Ben and Sam, Dad and Dave, Martins Corner, and Hagans Circus.

Doreen stayed with Aunty Betty Black in Sydney in 1935 for a couple of months. Sydney seemed so big, and home so small, but she was happy to come home.

Bill went away shearing and Ethel went to cook or otherwise to accompany him. Local stations that they worked on included Booroomba, Tuggeranong and Tidbinbilla. Further afield, they went to Cootamundra and Stockinbingal. Bill was shearing in Yass when Val was born, so George Green drove Ethel to hospital, and he was shearing when Lindsay was born too. Blewitts' own sheep were shorn at Rock Valley.

Ethel and Bill fenced Bert Reid's Leura lease [near Mt Bimberi] and Ethel walked home. She had a 'wonderful' sense of direction and could 'walk for miles and miles and miles, it didn't worry her at all'.

When Doreen went rabbit trapping she used to have 12 to 15 traps which were swung over the shoulder onto the back for carrying. The dead rabbits you'd carry in a chaff bag to a shady tree where they'd be skinned. Doreen also helped with clearing. Ti tree was once extensive, and had been cleared by government men and had to be kept in check. Bill had various men at different times to do clearing work. Included were Dick Gregory and Bert Hildred; they lived on the property and got keep plus two pound per week. Discussing earlier photos of rung timber at Tidbinbilla, Val says it looks better today with regrowth in the nature reserve, but if you were trying to earn a living from the country ringbarking was a fact of life. She says also that when young she wasn't affected by Dad killing a sheep, but nowadays she wouldn't like it.

Snakes were pretty common and were killed on sight. There was once a snake in the roof of the house. Cases of snakebite were virtually nil.

Leisure activities for the Blewitt children included hide and seek on moonlit nights, or burning grass trees at night.

## **2B**

Discussing wildlife, Doreen and Val say they saw echidnas, though not many. Sometimes when they were going to school they'd see lizards caught in wire fences and would throw stones at them. Once a goanna several feet long chased Doreen, and Dad had to come and kill it. There was a pet magpie which would come in and sit on Doreen's bed and go and pick at baby Lindsay's eyelashes; it could talk very much like Ethel. There were also two pet parrots in a cage, as well as pet farm animals.

Regarding the eucalyptus distillers, Val says how when Bill was being driven by Ethel to Pierces Creek one day to work on Forestry, they passed the Czechs who were on their way to Tidbinbilla to commence their

distilling operations. Ethel used to take them into town a lot, and they'd call at the house when with Tom Green. At first their English was not good and they used a language textbook. Their camp beds were made of saplings and chaff bags, and their camp was exceptionally clean. They began operations at the site of today's kangaroo enclosure carpark, then moved to Nil Desperandum, then moved back to their first camp.

At the 1939 koala enclosure, Doreen and Val's cousins Barbara and Ned Blewitt used to run around the top of the wire enclosure (on the section of wire protruding into the yard on timber arms). The 'department' responsible for the enclosure placed a caravan at the site which was there for a good while.

Dances were an important part of local social life, and quite a few were held at Rock Valley woolshed. A couple were held in the Gibraltar living room. Bill used to play the button accordion, and Jack Maloney played the fiddle or violin. Tunes played by Bill included 'Daisy' and 'Underneath the Spreading Chestnut Tree'; another is recalled, its first line or refrain being 'There aint no sense sitting on the fence all by yourself in the pale moonlight'. He used to sing Clementine when he got up of a morning.

The Queanbeyan Show was the biggest day out for the family; the girls would wear a new dress, there'd be a picnic lunch and other Green relatives would be there. Tuggeranong and Cuppacumbalong races were another occasion. Uncle Eric Blewitt had some winners, as did his brother Tom, and Eric's daughter Eileen rode in a few races.

Discussing whether a sense of community existed at Tidbinbilla, Val says everyone helped one another, and Doreen says they all got on well. It was reflected by the tennis matches on the courts by the school. Asked if people put locks on their doors, Doreen and Val laugh and say definitely no.

Incidents were drunken Bill Dallas came knocking on the door in jest one night, and the time that Jack Paynter fell from Bert Reid's truck and was killed near Silly Corner, are related. There is a brief description of Bert and Florence Reid, and of Bert's bullock team passing through Gibraltar on the way to the snow leases.

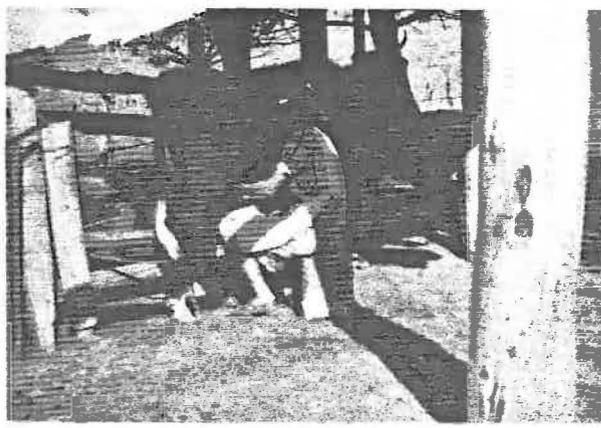
Regarding Aboriginal sites, Doreen says Bill once found a stone axe, and the Blewitt children were often at the cave which sounds like the Birrigai rockshelter. Uncle Willie Green told the Blewitt kids that a flat, red rock near Ghost Gully and the school was where Aborigines had been killed, but they tended to think he was just trying to frighten them, though it could have been true. Doreen believes an Aboriginal grave existed near Gibraltar Rocks.

During the Depression a few swaggies came by Gibraltar asking for food. Doreen recalls one sleeping under 'the pretty bush' (a eucalypt) when she

came home from school one day. Ethel didn't like them and usually gave some bread to the kids to give them. No work could be offered them.

Reflecting on their lives at Gibraltar, Val says it was a happy childhood; she 'never got belted'. Doreen says 'I suppose we had a pretty good life'. She didn't think it was that hard then though it is when seen from today's perspective. Some of the games played when young are described, including billy carts and the polishing of the floor [as described by Thelma Cabban].

Val and Doreen love to go back to Tidbinbilla, because of their personal connection and the long Green association with the area. 'It feels like we all belong there', says Val.



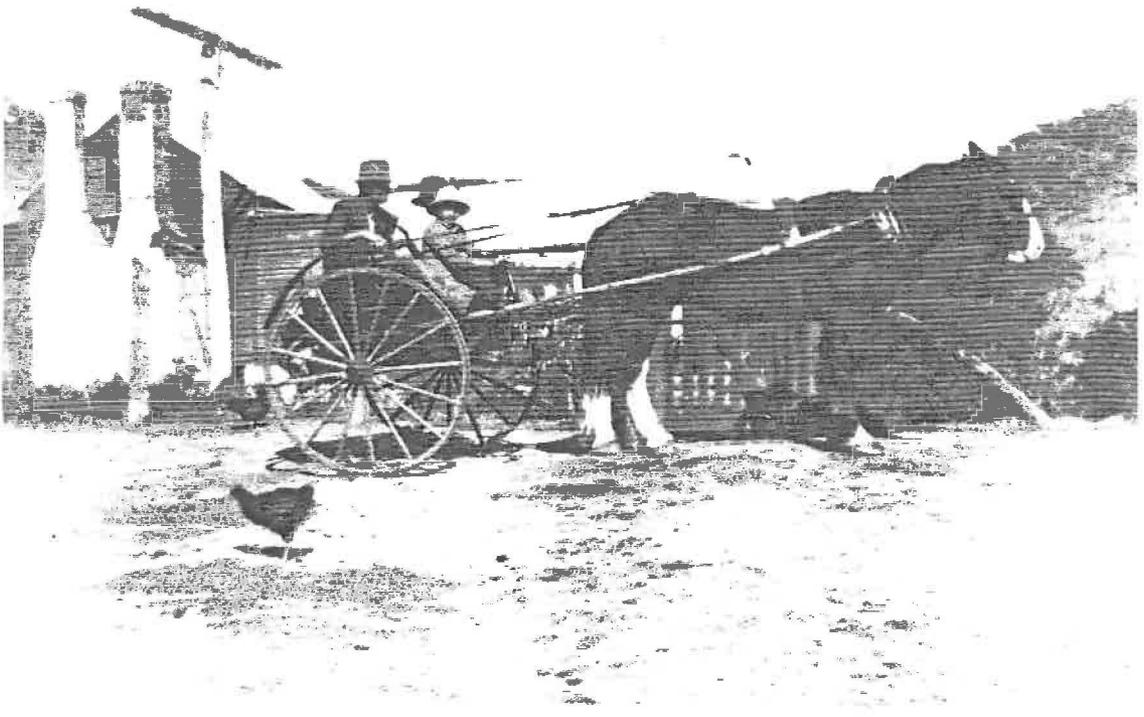
Doreen at a task she knew well at Gibraltar. (Thelma Cabban Collection)



Val, Thelma, Ethel and Bill Blewitt at Gibraltar, with Ethel and Bill about to leave for shearing sheds out west. (Thelma Cabban Collection)



On the Gibraltar verandah in early 1933. From left: teacher Marian Myers, Val Blewitt, -, -, Hazel (with hand to mouth), Doreen (with hand on hip), Thelma at right. (Doreen Blundell Collection)



Bill, Ethel and Lindsay Blewitt at Gibraltar in the late 1930s or early 1940s about to leave for their rabbiting camp on Tidbinbilla Creek. (Doreen Blundell Collection)



Val feeding a pig at Gibraltar in the early 1940s; one of the home's pise walls is in the background. (Doreen Blundell Collection)



Doreen and Val's sister Hazel (nicknamed Jack) who died of a brain tumour aged 10. The photo was taken at Christmas at Gibraltar when Hazel was 9; she died the following May. (Doreen Blundell Collection)  
Note the use of kerosene tins as plant pots.

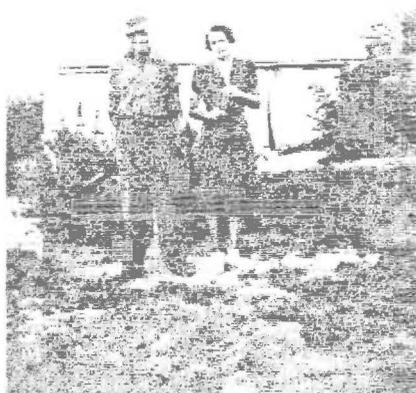


Lindsey Pleyritt being carried from Gibraltar to the United Kingdom in 1955.



Pat Blundell on leave in army uniform admires a sunflower at Gibraltar c 1941-43; note especially the 'Telegraph-Telephone Office' sign. (Doreen Blundell Collection)

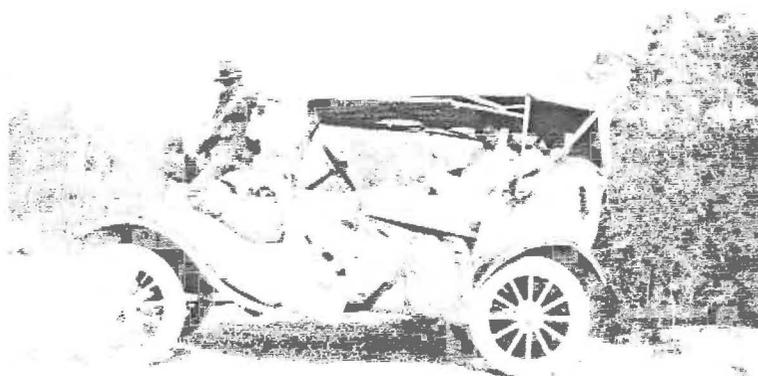
Doreen with Pat Blundell at Gibraltar in the 1940s before they were married. (Doreen Blundell Collection)

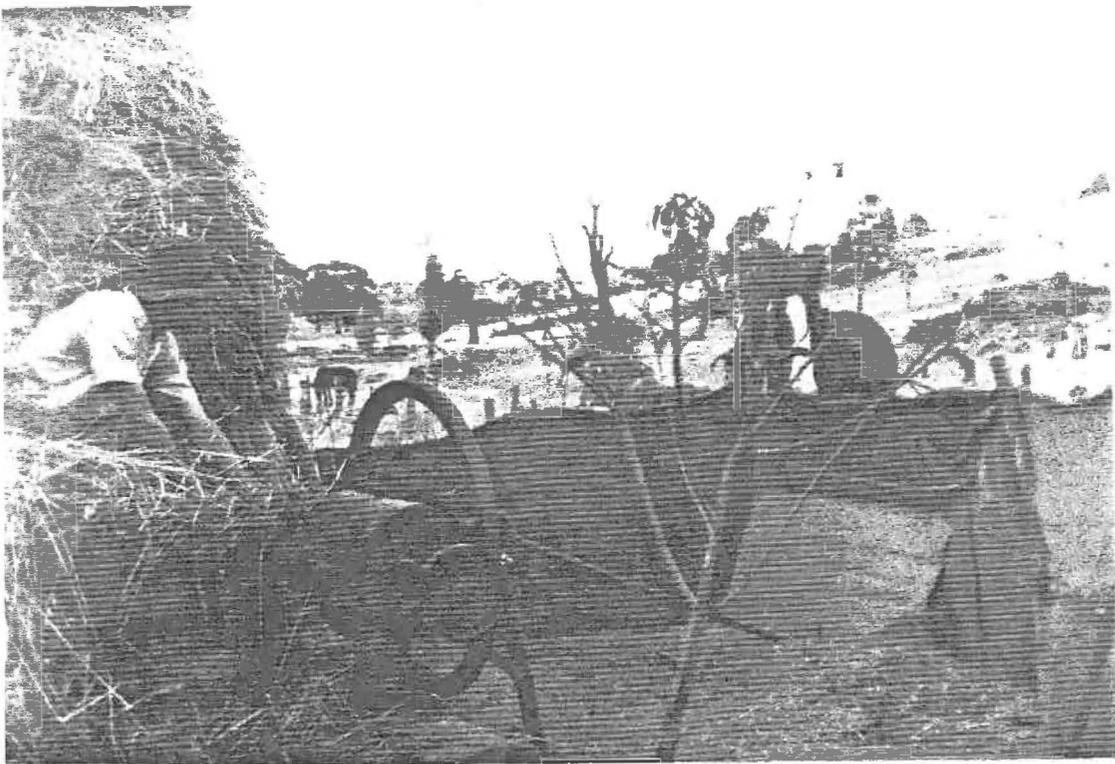




A young Bill Blewitt with well turned out horse and sulky. (Doreen Blundell Collection)

Though Bill Blewitt was better known for his accordion, the man here is thought to be him, with a violin. Running boards were useful for extra storage. (Doreen Blundell Collection)





Bill Blewitt cutting chaff at Gibraltar; note the horse harnessed to the horseworks (obscured) supplying the power to the cutter, and the driveshaft and the spinning cutting wheel. (Doreen Blundell Collection)



Haystack making at Gibraltar. Eric Blewitt possibly at left, then Wallace Black 2nd left, Pat Blundell possibly at right. (Doreen Blundell Collection)

## Gladys Larkin

*Gladys was born in 1918 and was the tenth of thirteen children born to Thomas Woods and Mary nee Maloney of Gibraltar Creek. She left home at age 17 to work in a Sydney hospital. Later she met Bill Larkin in Queanbeyan and they married in 1942. Today Gladys and Bill live in Narrabundah.*

### Tape 1, Side A

Gladys recalls that her parents met either at a dance or a cricket match; they would have been near neighbours and Mary prior to their marriage in 1900 would have been living at Calvary or at 'The Pines' on Maloneys Creek. Before Gladys was born [actually after, 1922], Tom went to Quirindi to take up a property but failed and returned to Gibraltar Creek.

Of her various teachers at Gibraltar School, Gladys most clearly remembers Marian Myers, who she describes as a lovely, young, country girl who always helped the pupils. Gladys enjoyed English (she read books from school or the books at home which her parents had from the days when they had time to read) and also geography. She walked 3 miles each way to school, often without boots which the family couldn't afford. She also rode, sharing a horse with her sister Muriel.

At school the children planted trees (some are probably still growing there). Arbor day was a big event and included nature study walks with the teacher up Mt Eliza. Empire Day was also celebrated and the Union Jack would be raised and songs sung. Visits by the inspector were traumatic.

Teacher Mavis Smith boarded at Gibraltar Creek in 1920 and she married uncle Martin Woods in 1921; they moved to [Quirindi, Queanbeyan c.1924, and then] Harman [in about 1930]. Mavis was jovial and originally from Goulburn. She'd drive Tom's horse and sulky to school and the Woods kids would have to harness the horse for her.

Tom had grown up at Yarralumla and the pise Gibraltar Creek house was built by him and brothers Martin and Jack and their father Edward. George Green and George Hatcliff may also have helped. The Woods family called the property simply 'The Creek'.

Though there were thirteen children, the house wasn't too crowded because the children had been born in threes and had progressively grown up. Gladys, with sister Muriel, had 'to do all the chores around the place', including getting the cows in for milking before school (made difficult by the thick fogs). Gladys describes how butter was made from the cream (it was shaken in a treacle tin before they bought a churn). She also describes how Mary made 12 to 14 loaves of bread per week in the big brick oven; after the oven had been fired the ashes were removed and the loaves placed inside for baking, after which fruit cakes would be baked as well.

The water supply was tanks, though the water was not piped inside. A kero tin would be filled at night for washing up. Over the open fire hung a 'fountain' used for heating water, and it was the children's job to keep it full, or else. Mary used to get the kerosene taste and smell out of kero tins by washing them in lots of soapy water. Gladys describes how her mother made soap.

Mary also grew vegetables by the acre, and the children helped. In planting potatoes, Tom ploughed with a horse-drawn single furrow plough and Gladys and Muriel would come along behind dropping seed potatoes in from a bag hung around the waist. Part of the paddock was sown with corn, which the girls used to hate doing so they'd put whole handfuls of seed into holes just to get it done quicker; 'we were villains', she laughs. The corn was threshed with a hand-powered machine.

Gladys and Muriel grew up together and did lots of other jobs, like digging out ti-tree and briars. 'I think we did everything but kill a sheep.' There were no boys of working age on the place as Arthur had gone shearing (and also worked on pine plantations around Pierces Creek) and Cecil was too young.

Gladys's sister Mary (known as May) died when young from burns [25 June 1908]. Logs were being burned in a paddock after clearing and she fell into one of the fires. Taken to Queanbeyan hospital in the sulky she was dead before arrival. Sister Evelyn also suffered burns at home.

## 1B

Asked about illness, Gladys says the family rarely got sick or just endured it. If you had an earache Mum heated salt on a spade and put it in a bag; you then placed the bag against the ear. It worked.

A brief discussion concerning the phone follows; Woods got the phone on before many others locally.

Regarding transport, the Woods family rarely travelled by car. Tom never bought a motor vehicle. When Arthur was at home his Essex car was used, and Tom also paid Les Morton to take him to Queanbeyan, but apart from that it was horse and sulky and the trip to Queanbeyan took 4 to 6 hours each way. Most shopping was done at Tharwa, and Clarrie Jeffery would bring out the bulk items like flour and sugar etc. Roads were badly corrugated.

Gladys trapped rabbits to control their numbers and for dog food; every week the rabbits were boiled up for the dogs. She and Muriel collected dead wool (wool from the carcasses of dead sheep) and earned some pocket money. Dad sold the wool to Queanbeyan's Thomas Green or Jim O'Malley and Gladys tells how she used 6d to buy a yodelling record from Deafy Cooper's music shop in Queanbeyan.

The family was very musical, and Gladys could play mouth organ, accordion, banjo and violin. She just played at home as she and her sisters rarely got to a dance because of their very strict father. When Gladys did get to go it was with Mum as a chaperone; she got on well with her mother.

Mary's Maloney background is discussed; her mother (Gladys's grandmother) Susan lived for a time at Gibraltar Creek in Gladys's youth. The Maloneys all had dark hair and most were tall, though Mary was slight in build. Tom Woods was much taller than her.

Gibraltar Creek was mainly a sheep property. The sheep were dipped at Booroomba (Tom paying for use of the dip) and you'd start at 4am and be back to The Creek by about 10am.

The clearing work done by Gladys when young was mainly digging out tree and briars; Tom couldn't afford to pay a man to labour on the property. Sometimes Gladys and Muriel were kept home from school to do this sort of work. After reaching her leaving certificate at school, Gladys left and for some time was at home. In 1935 she left home; she 'wanted to get away' and 'start a new life' because of Dad's strictness and because of boredom at home. As had been the case with her sisters, a job in Sydney was arranged by Tom, at Lewisham Hospital where the girls were under the supervision of nuns. Sister Finnegan was nice but strict; Gladys had to be in by 10pm, but got locked out 'plenty of times'. Despite having left, Gladys loved to come home at holidays. Mrs Maxwell would pick her up at Queanbeyan Station and fill her in on all the gossip. Gladys describes Mrs Maxwell and what a hard worker she was.

The Woods's holdings ran up the Gibraltar Creek valley as far as Kangaroo Flat. Gladys and Muriel had to muster sheep on horseback and got to know that country well: 'You couldn't lose us', she says. One flat was known as Sugarloaf Flat. Sometimes they'd drive the horse and sulky up the valley to pick up sheep.

Gladys rode for pleasure but the greatest recreation was walking around the local hills, to Gibraltar Rocks, Mushroom Rock, Andersons Hill etc; one she didn't get up was the saddlebacked feature called Reids Hill (named after a bushranger, not the Tidbinbilla Reids). She saw some Aboriginal stone tools on her walks.

Tom wouldn't let his daughters play tennis at the main courts, though there was a court at The Creek. Due to Tom's strictness Gladys didn't get out much at all to see other people.

## 2A

Woods's were a Catholic family and mass was said at Gibraltar Creek every 2 or 3 months. Mary used to make a huge amount of food beforehand for

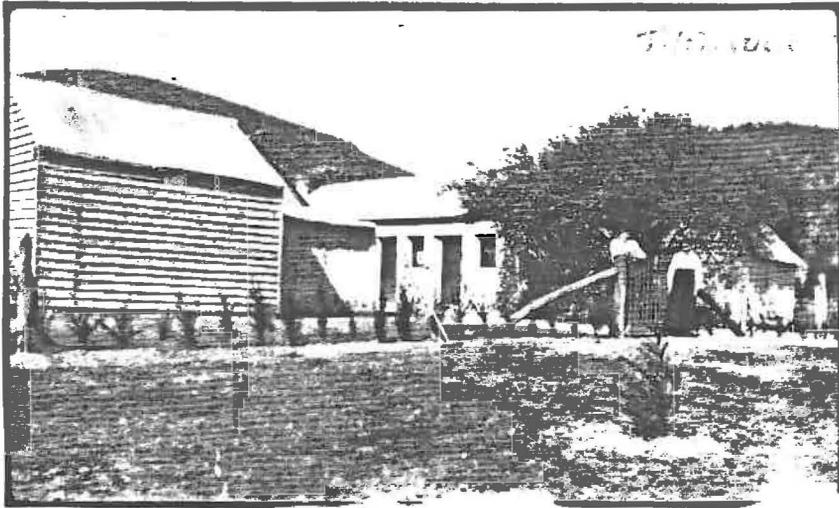
the banquet that followed the service and Father Haydon used to bring lollies for the kids. Father Haydon brought Father Dunleavy and once Dunleavy fell off Haydon's motorbike. The altar was a table raised on treacle tins to give it extra height. Other Catholic families of the Tidbinbilla district that came were Stauntons, Flints, Maloneys, Maxwells and Noones. John Staunton was brought to mass at Woods's once virtually on his deathbed and lay on the couch during the service. Bill Staunton and his wife used to visit Woods's on Sundays and Bill played the violin and danced jigs. In fact he drove Mary home in his T-Model Ford after she had given birth to Cecil [in 1924]. Rarely did Gladys visit these other people, though she did have some outings, such as school picnics.

Gladys and Muriel loved fishing and swimming in Gibraltar Creek. 'We knew all the holes where all the fish were, and we'd come home with bundles of trout.' They used Arthur's rods and reels. They also enjoyed the willows along the creek, many of which they had planted.

Gladys never saw koalas nor gliders, there were lots of kangaroos and wallabies, and traps were set for dingoes; these were shotguns wired to fire when the dingo passed at night: 'You wouldn't go walking around our place at night time'.

Sometimes swagmen came to The Creek during the Depression. Mum always gave them some food. The kids were scared of them.

Reflecting on Gibraltar Creek now, Gladys says the area means a lot to her and brings back lots of memories. Though she wouldn't like to live in the country again, she loves to revisit the area and is proud of the plaque at Woods Reserve which commemorates her family. The so-called 'good old days' were full of hard work, though they were enjoyable too.



'Gibraltar Creek' in about the 1920s. All buildings (including the rear rise portion) were demolished in about 1965 when the property passed out of the Woods family's possession after 70 years. (Harrie Quince Collection)



Tom and Mary in front of the pise section of the house in about the 1950s.  
(Harrie Quince Collection)



The family, Christmas 1945: (l-r) Dulcie, Cecil, Gladys, Eileen, Muriel, Evelyn, Vera, Mary, Ethel, Kathleen, Beatrice, Alice and Tom (Arthur missing). (Harrie Quince Collection)

## Jo Waterhouse

*Jo was born Johanna Jones in Cooma in 1915. In 1937 she married Arthur Martin and after a time working and living on Lanyon and then in Canberra, Jo, Arthur and their young family moved to Mt Domain, Tidbinbilla, in about 1944. Six years later they moved to Gibraltar and remained there till about 1954. They moved first to Queanbeyan and then to Cootamundra. Returning from Cootamundra, Jo lost Arthur in 1960. She married again in 1977 to Tom Waterhouse. Tom died in 1982. Today Jo lives in Kaleen; her two daughters, Annette and Gay, are in Canberra while son Bimby lives at Bega.*

### Tape 1, Side A

Jo was born in Cooma and Arthur was from New Zealand. During the depression Arthur fenced with Jo's brother Jack, and Jo and Arthur married and spent three months looking after Jim Prowse's sheep near Rules Point. They moved when Jo became pregnant with Bimby and Jim got Arthur the job of head stockman at Lanyon. The Martins lived at Lanyon for 2 years or so. With the outbreak of war Arthur got work in Canberra, met Bert Driver who had a butchery, and they decided to become partners in a property. After looking around they chose Mt Domain; Jo was uncertain at first — 'Well I hope you don't buy that rotten place, right out in the hills' — but came to like Tidbinbilla very much.

Six thousand sheep were bought at Wagga and walked to the property by the Martins, with Arthur in a truck, Jo walking most of the way to Yass, and young Bimby riding; baby Annette turned 2 at Yass. The trip took three months.

When they moved in, Martins had to get rid of the turkeys left by Merve Tong; they'd perch on the verandah rail.

Mt Domain house was pise with two big rear rooms (one of which they used for shearers and for Bert and Pattie Driver when they came out at weekends), a kitchen-living room with stove built into the fireplace, two bedrooms, verandah and small room off the verandah. The house was propped as one wall was leaning. Jo scrubbed the floorboards and lino was put in the living room.

Meat was hung in a screened meat house. Jo tells of salting meat and how Arthur put meat in a cask with brine. There was tankwater, and creek water was carried up for the vegetable garden. 'It was tough going but I didn't mind that — it was something for me to do I suppose.' They'd be up by 6am and in winter to bed by 6pm.

After a time they got a radio which ran off the car battery. They had card nights (playing 500) with the Greens of Rock Valley. Jo knitted and sewed at night and Arthur read a lot; lighting was with kero lamps. Bathing was

done in an iron tub in front of the fire. Clothes washing was done by boiling items in a bucket over an outside (uncovered) fireplace built by Arthur; baby's nappies were boiled on the stove inside.

Bimby and Annette's education was at Telopea Park School and they boarded at Queanbeyan. After Annette got sick with hydatids the expense ended the boarding and Bimby continued his education by correspondence from Mt Domain.

Arthur and Bert would buy sheep at the Queanbeyan sales, graze them at Mt Domain, then sell them at the Goulburn markets. Droving them from Queanbeyan to Mt Domain took two days, and Jo and Arthur would stay the night in the Tuggeranong Church. The trip to Goulburn took a week (7 miles per day between stock reserves) and the kids would be in it too. Crutching was done at Mt Domain by Charlie West and Joe Goodall and later shearing was done at Greens' woolshed. Jo and Elma Green helped one another with the cooking during shearing time. Shearing then was never in winter (as now) but was after Christmas.

When making trips to town you'd take a billy of milk for the baby (Gay was born 1948) in case punctures or breakdowns caused delay. Town was Queanbeyan and shopping trips were six-weekly; special trips might be made to Canberra. After shopping Jo would take the kids to the Monaro St cinema while Arthur had a beer with mates.

The mail only came to Laurie and Edna Dallenders so Bimby from age 6 would ride down to get it. From age 14 he was breaking in horses for local people. He competed in rodeos as well.

Aged 9 Annette would drive Gay down to Tidbinbilla Station to the governess employed by Jean Reid for schooling [this was probably from Gibraltar; see also Jean Reid summary]. Policeman Bob Hilton said it was okay for Annette to drive through the paddocks at that age.

Arthur and Bert got their start together with a snow lease near Kiandra from 1943. They took only cattle up to the lease for the summer. Bimby accompanied his father on trips to the lease while Jo stayed with her parents in Cooma. Jo briefly mentions stock being run on Jumbuck Flat at the upper end of Blue Gum Creek.

Potatoes were the main crop grown at Mt Domain; Jo describes digging them with the tractor, sorting by hand and bagging them. Bert took them into Queanbeyan and Canberra for sale. The paddock was by the creek. Turnips were also grown but for stockfeed.

Jo and Arthur went to dances at Tharwa Hall and bedded the children in a corner, 'Martins Corner', nicknamed after a current radio serial. Pat Jeffery acted as MC. Bevis West and Mavis Woods both played piano at dances

which finished about 3 or 4am. Violins and accordions were other instruments

## 1B

The men would have rum or other spirits in their cars and would have a drink outside between dances; sometimes drinks would get stolen, and there were fights. There were dances also at Greens' and Reids' woolsheds after the end of shearing.

Martins moved to Gibraltar about 1950 (by now vacated by the Blewitts) because it was a better property. Jo says you could see the road and so it was less isolated than Mt Domain. The house is briefly described. Jo here got a kero fridge which couldn't be afforded at Mt Domain. Asked if the family income as modest, Jo says 'we never went hungry' and the children were always dressed nicely; people's purchasing expectations were lower than too.

The moves to Queanbeyan and then Cootamundra are sketched in.

Arthur had played in the Tharwa cricket team while at Lanyon but didn't continue at Tidbinbilla. The local tennis courts were not used much by now either. Martins mixed with Alan and Marie Reid and Jack and Jean Reid at Tidbinbilla Station. They didn't see much of Eric and Elsie Blewitt; Eric's death in 1949 [see Doug Blewitt summary] 'shocked the valley'.

There was quite a bit of contact with the Czech eucalyptus cutters, particularly Steve Lajcin and Jan Jandura. Jo made bread and butter puddings for them and sent them other food. They in turn bought lollies for the kids who helped them with their English. Fleas were a problem at Mt Domain initially but Steve gave Jo eucalyptus oil to mop on the floors and it killed the fleas. In their hut the Czechs had a table with legs of bush timber.

Phib Flint would call in on his way to the snow leases and Jo would give him a meal. He'd also ask her to decant his bottle of rum into two bottles with water, ready to drink.

Mt Domain was the end of the road in the valley. Many Canberra people came out to pick blackberries and asked Jo for billies of hot water for tea. Jo made them welcome.

Jo and Arthur had known Helen Flint at Lanyon and she became Bimby's godmother. Jo and Helen would go into Queanbeyan on the Lanyon truck to see the pictures. While at Lanyon the Martins shopped some of the time at Tharwa and Bimby was christened at St Edmunds Church there.

Native cats and foxes took many of Jo's young turkeys which she raised for sale to hotels in Canberra and Queanbeyan at Christmastime. The turkeys would chase grasshoppers and fail to return by night so you'd have to look

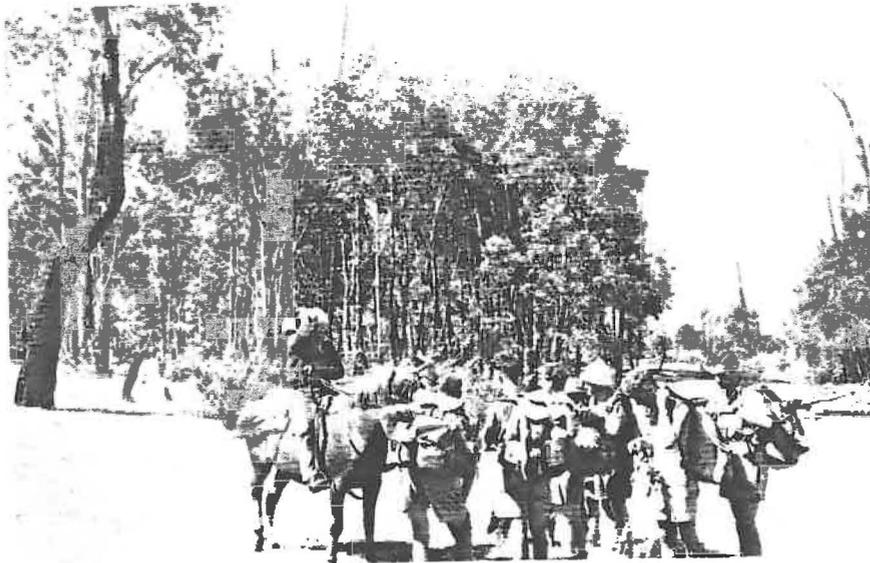
for them. One morning only 6 or 7 were left out of 70 or 80 thanks mainly to foxes. A native cat was caught one night in a rabbit trap by the fowlyard; Jo recalls it as a 'pretty thing' and how its hide should have been tanned.

Once at Rock Valley Tom Green shot a snake. Left hanging dead on a fence, next morning it was seen with another snake coming out of its mouth. Another time a two-headed calf was born at Tidbinbilla.

Further discussing wildlife, Jo says how crows were a problem at lambing time and how Bimby would shoot a few. Kangaroos became less shy over time and would steal the chickens' feed, forcing Jo to feed the chooks earlier in the day.

Jo had her 'happiest days' at Tidbinbilla, with a young family and good friends. When they left, the Martins were thrown a farewell party at which Jo sang 'Old Friends are Always the Best'. Afterwards Jo received a letter from Elma Green wishing Jo was still there. Not long after the Martins' moved to Cootamundra, Tom and then Elma died.

The interview closes with brief comments on the importance of friends, contrasts between the Tidbinbilla and Cootamundra landscapes, and how Annette made up for her short formal education.



Arthur Martin meets a group of bushwalkers in the Tidbinbilla valley in about 1948. Tidbinbilla has been a destination for walkers for a number of decades. Some of the young men in the group had just walked through from the Snowy Mountains. (Bert Bennett Collection)



Gay with her and Bimby's poddy calf at Gibraltar. Note the weatherboard wall, presumably part of the Blewitts' extension to the original pise home. (Jo Waterhouse Collection)



Bimby on a horse that he had broken in, at Gibraltar about 1954. (Jo Waterhouse Collection)



Gay and Annette Martin at Mt Domain in about 1950. (Jo Waterhouse Collection)

## Dave Kerr

*Dave was born in 1933. He worked with the CSIRO and then from 1960 to 1964 he was a ranger in Kosciusko State (now National) Park. After two years at Gaden Trout Hatchery, Dave was appointed inaugural manager of Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve (TNR) in 1966. Dave and wife Myra and their children lived at Tidbinbilla until 1974 when they moved into Canberra. This interview deals with that period during which the Tidbinbilla valley changed from a collection of grazing properties to a nature reserve.*

### **Tape 1, Side A**

The prime aim of TNR at the time that Dave took up his position was an educational one. It was felt that environmental education for the community was not then well advanced, so TNR was to be a venue where people could learn about Australian native animals and their environment. This grew out of a groundswell of feeling that the natural Australian environment should not be simply exploited but should be conserved. It was decided that there would be large enclosures for native animals at TNR so as to allow the animals to be seen more readily by the public.

When Dave and Myra arrived in 1966 the boundary of the reserve only came as far as Rock Valley and didn't include the property. Then during the next couple of years Rock Valley and other properties were resumed and by about 1968 the front boundary was down to the main road as is the case today.

In 1968 too the report by Margules and Associates set out a development program for the reserve, and it included the ringroad which would encircle the animal enclosures. Construction of the Visitor Centre began in 1968, the ringroad was built in several stages over 3-4 years, and work on the enclosures and waterfowl ponds had begun a couple of years earlier. Dave, Mick McMahon and Terry Thomas constructed the first two walking tracks (Lyrebird and Mountain Creek); later in the 1960s or early 70s the works gang from the Department of Interior built the Cascades and Red Hill tracks. Forestry built the Camels Hump or Camelback firetrail in the 1970s.

Few Tidbinbilla district people were employed, though Vic Sayer was taken on as a storeman in 1972-73. Agricultural ranger Les Morton (husband of interviewee Phyllis Morton) provided some services at weekends up until TNR had sufficient ranger staff of its own.

Mountain names such as Camels Hump and Mt Domain were introduced during Dave's time as previously there hadn't been names for these features. Camels Hump is likely to have come from Mt Macedon in

Victoria which is where Myra came from, and Mt Domain perpetuates the memory of the Staunton property.

Dave then talks of the lyrebird study area run by the CSIRO and which was about finished by Dave's time. There was a hut with recording equipment, and microphones scattered through the bush. The track to the site went off the Camelback trail about 200 metres past the Cascades track and was an old logging track, as were several others which were able to be utilised by TNR.

Discussing European cultural heritage policy of the time, Dave says there really wasn't one. TNR had been borne out of the desire by the Royal Society initially for a *nature* reserve, consequently, as the 'previous land use was no longer appropriate' the evidence of that use would be 'erased'. In hindsight Dave has some mixed feelings about this policy, referring to the huts in Kosciusko that have been retained through community action, though he sees Tidbinbilla as a different situation.

The condition of several sites at the time is described. Regarding Rayner's mill, there was little evidence of the mill, with a few small pieces of machinery, stumps and tracks. Flints' /Dallenders' pise house was still standing but in a 'pretty bad state of repair', with the roof falling in; TNR employee Mick McMahon was camping in it. Restoration would have been expensive and no thought was given to restoration at the time. Not much evidence remained of the main eucalyptus distillery: some pipes, a ship's tank, and the vats which already were missing the sheets of steel which are absent today. The (second) Mt Domain house was used as ranger accommodation by several staff in turn. Once Rock Valley had been acquired it too was used for accommodation and a depot; the woolshed was not suitable for depot use and was pulled down about 1968.

Regarding Aboriginal sites, again there was no set policy, but these sorts of sites were seen as being historically significant and a part of the natural environment and so were preserved. Dave investigated many Aboriginal sites with Jim Webb (whom he had known through the CSIRO and who had told him about the TNR job in the first place). The first site discovered was Hanging Rock and it became archaeologist Jo Flood's first dig. Other sites (including Billy Billy Rocks and the Bogong Shelters) are mentioned, as are two stone cairns on the ridge above the Lyrebird track which Dave and Paul Marchant located [these cairns were visited by the author on 26 July 1995].

Talking of early TNR staff, Dave describes Mick McMahon as an old bushy who earlier at Ingebyra was bulldozing for gold and had a run in with Kosciusko superintendent Neville Gare.

## 1B

At the time Dave arrived at Tidbinbilla, Mick was acting as caretaker of the reserve and had been there for about 6 months. In addition to various

bush skills, Mick was a tractor driver and at TNR drove a tractor with a blade. It was this which was used, for example, to push over the Flint/Dallender house.

By 1970 the staff had built up to 4 rangers, 2 plant operators, a carpenter, and a 'clerk' (Jim Murphy) at the Visitor Centre. The scope of works at the reserve had got beyond the departmental works gang so TNR got its own gang.

Apart from the Kerrs, other TNR staff with families included Bob McQueen, Terry Thomas and Mick McMahon.

Visitation increased dramatically during Dave's time at TNR. Initially about the only visitors were shooters (who had to be 'educated' about the area's reserve status) but by 1973 there were about 74,000 visitors annually. Publicity through TV and newspapers had assisted this growth.

The arrival of koalas and emus represented an endeavour to re-establish fauna which had previously lived in the district. The koalas came from Phillip Island and the emus from northern NSW consultant Dave Flahey. Management problems (apart from shooters) included rabbits, foxes and feral pigs.

When Dave and Myra first arrived they lived in the new government-built house near the bird feeding area for 18 months. It had all mod cons, and was in contrast to the Waste Point house they occupied for a time at Kosciusko where generator power was only available for a few hours each day. Moving from the government house they lived for the rest of their time at TNR in Stephen and Marcia Boyden's house which had only recently been erected by Boydens prior to their being resumed. Boyden, an ANU professor, had intended to live there permanently. Resumption of this and other properties had followed a meeting between minister Doug Anthony and various representatives over the former front reserve boundary and its need to be pushed out to the road.

The Kerrs' telephone was a bit dodgy. The old line was patched with fencing wire and the posts were really held up by the line itself. The party line was not private, and any policy discussions had to take place in the departmental Canberra office rather than over the phone. Mrs Maxwell in particular used to listen in, and you knew it was her because you could hear her cockatoo in the background! Once Vic Sayer was making a call to someone and suddenly said 'And isn't that right Mrs Maxwell', to which she responded 'Oh yes', and then hung up.

Dave and Myra bought eggs off Mrs Maxwell and milk from Vic Sayer. Dave and Myra were very friendly with Vic and Beryl Sayer who were managing Tidbinbilla Station for Dave Povey; Sayers had earlier worked down Bobeyan way. Kerrs played tennis with the Sayers and the Flints

would sometimes be there too. Dave also got on well with Keith Green who then was taking his tourist bus to TNR.

Myra was the only woman driver around so she drove her and others kids to Tharwa School (four gates to open before you got to the main road). Myra, a teacher, also taught at the school for a time.

The Kerrs fitted in well with the local rural community. At Kosciusko there was animosity to Kosciusko State Park and thus to Park staff from locals because of the cessation of traditional snowlease grazing, but the situation at Tidbinbilla was different. At Tidbinbilla Dave feels that while people were 'not amused' at being resumed, the land settlements were equitable. At the end of the tape he comments on a 'sense of reservation' among the Tidbinbilla people but says also that country people are often reserved anyway, and he and Myra didn't take this personally.

The Kerrs' good relationship locally extended to Tharwa, where they got papers, bread and some groceries from Val Jeffery's store. Dave had known Val and some Naas men from the 1950s when they had done National Service together.

The reasons for the move to Stirling in Canberra are given. While at TNR Dave had done a degree part-time at Macquarie University and after graduating in 1972 went for and got the job of biologist with the projected Gudgenby Nature Reserve, so by 1974 there was no point in staying on the reserve. The move was motivated also by the children's educational needs.

By this time the road from the Cotter to TNR was sealed, but not the road to Tharwa.

Dave looks back on his Tidbinbilla years as an enjoyable period and it was a great challenge to get the reserve up and going. He talks of the 'quite magnificent' view from their house toward the Tidbinbilla Range and how the 'scenery and scene are burnt into my memory'. 'It's one of the prettiest little valleys around.'

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### **Photographs copied under the project**

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#### **Beryl Fisher**

Cattle at Booroomba, about 1927. (Beryl Fisher Collection)

#### **Helen Flint**

1

The weir built on the Cotter River at the upper end of what is now Bendora Dam. The structure was constructed with materials packed in by Phib, Kevin and Helen Flint in 1939. (Helen Flint Collection)

2

Bushwalker George Jefferis on the top of a wintery Tidbinbilla Range. (Helen Flint Collection)

#### **Keith Green**

1

George and Mary Ann Green's buckboard, 1957. (Keith Green Collection)

2

Branding cattle at Rock Valley in 1953; l-r: George Arnold, Tom Green and Laurie Dallender. (Keith Green Collection)

3

Horsemen photographed after a Boxing Day gymkhana at Rock Valley about 1952. (Keith Green Collection)

4

Rock Valley after the 1948 snowstorm. (Keith Green Collection)

5

Hut built by Keith Green and Lindsay Blewitt in the mid 1940s; they lived in it for nearly a year and Doug Blewitt lived with them for a time. The cart was from Gibraltar. (Keith Green Collection)

6

The drive to Rock Valley in the 1940s. (Keith Green Collection)

7

Keith at Rock Valley in the 1950s, about to ride to Jumbuck Flats. (Keith Green Collection)

8

Snow on Turkey Hill, 1948. (Keith Green Collection)

9

Keith, sitting on the stockyard rails at Rock Valley, dressed as a cowboy for a fancy dress party in Queanbeyan in the 1950s. (Keith Green Collection)

#### **Phyllis Morton**

Certificate issued to Phyllis at Gibraltar School in 1931. (Interesting to note that the teacher has misspelt Phyllis's name.) (Phyllis Morton Collection)

1

Local girls at the tennis courts next to Gibraltar School in the early 1930s; l-r (front) Kathleen Flint and Eileen Woods, (rear) two of teacher Miss Margaret Smith's nieces, Gladys Woods, Vera Woods, Muriel Woods, Phyllis Flint. (Phyllis Morton Collection)

2

Gibraltar pupils about to leave school in the late 1920s; standing l-r Eileen Woods, Pat Maxwell, Ted Wright, Vera Woods, mounted l-r possibly Edna Flint, Les Morton, May Wright, Kevin Flint, Kathleen Flint, possibly Phyllis Flint. Note that the children are holding flowers or plant cuttings, and also the stone-bordered flower bed in the foreground in the shape of Australia. (Phyllis Morton Collection)

3

Phyllis at Congwarra at about age 17. (Phyllis Morton Collection)

4

Loaded wagon and riders, probably Bert Reid at right. (Phyllis Morton Collection)

5

Congwarra with Eric Brown's car in front. The photo was taken before the house was extended in 1937 and after the radio aerial pole was erected about 1934. (Phyllis Morton Collection)

6

Phyllis's mother Lizzie Flint. (Phyllis Morton Collection)

7

Les and Phyllis Morton at Tuggeranong in the 1970s. (Phyllis Morton Collection)

Bill and Monica Flint

1

Betty (or Betsie) and sister Lizzie Green at Booroomba about 1908-10. Betty married Wallace Black and Lizzie married Phib Flint. When the sisters' mother Mary Ann Green had her first child, Willie, it was a difficult birth so Mrs McKeahnie advised her to come to Booroomba for the next birth and consequently Lizzie was born at that homestead. The clothing, picket fence and plantings are all worth noting. (Flint Family Collection)

2

Phib Flint and 'Joe' at Congwarra. The car is the 1936 Ford V8 (owned by Kevin Flint) which was used to drive to Staunton's Mt Domain during the bad 1939 bushfire. (Bill and Monica Flint Collection)

3

Phib and Lizzie, possibly in Queanbeyan in the 1920s. (Bill and Monica Flint Collection)

4

Phib, and Kevin and Helen's son Brian, feeding turkeys at Congwarra about 1950. (Bill and Monica Flint Collection)

5

Sid and Annie Flint on their wedding day in 1912. (Bill and Monica Flint Collection)

6

Phib Flint in Queanbeyan. (Bill and Monica Flint Collection)

7

Thomas Flint (brother to Phib and Sid) and Lillie Ingram on their wedding day. (Bill and Monica Flint Collection)

8

Phib (right rear) and sister-in-law Lillie Flint (centre rear) and members of her family, sometime prior to 1951. (Bill and Monica Flint Collection)

9

Phib with niece Ella Robertson and girl. (Bill and Monica Flint Collection)

10

Shearing at Congwarra about 1973; Bill and Monica's son Robert at left, Bill's brother Harold in centre, and Ted McAlister classing at right. (Bill and Monica Flint Collection)

11

A snow-covered Tidbinbilla Range rises behind part of Congwarra, about 1973; photo by Hedda Morrison. (Bill and Monica Flint Collection)

Bert Bennett

1

Arthur Martin meets a group of bushwalkers in the Tidbinbilla valley in about 1948. Tidbinbilla has been a destination for walkers for a number of decades. Some of the young men in the group had just walked through from the Snowy Mountains. (Bert Bennett Collection)

Jo Waterhouse

1

A get-together at Rock Valley in the 1950s. Arthur Martin is in the centre wearing the tie, and behind him Jo Martin (now Waterhouse) holds two beer bottles. To the right of them stands Elma Green, and at left rear is Tom Green. Jo's brother Jack Jones from Adaminaby is at right with the striped tie. At front left sits eucalyptus distiller Steve Lajcin and the three children to the right are Gay, Bimby and Annette Martin. (Jo Waterhouse Collection)

2

Gay with her and Bimby's poddy calf at Gibraltar. Note the weatherboard wall, presumably part of the Blewitts' extension to the original pise home. (Jo Waterhouse Collection)

3

Bimby on a horse that he had broken in, at Gibraltar about 1954. (Jo Waterhouse Collection)

4

Gay and Annette Martin at Mt Domain in about 1950. (Jo Waterhouse Collection)

Jean Reid

1

Jean's sons Wayne and Bruce on horseback near the house at Tidbinbilla. In the background stands the meathouse. (Jean Reid Collection)

Thelma Cabban

1

The Cabban family had the Cotter Kiosk from 1932 to 1947. Here Peter Cabban stands in front of the kiosk with the old Rugby truck in 1932. (Thelma Cabban Collection)

2

Bill Blewitt on the tennis court at his home Gibraltar. Note the ringbarked timber on the hill behind. (Thelma Cabban Collection)

3

Gibraltar School teacher Marian Myers on her wedding day at Forbes on 2 April 1934. (Thelma Cabban Collection)

4

Betty Black (sister to Thelma's mother Ethel) in the garden at Gibraltar. (Thelma Cabban Collection)

5

Haley Blewitt clipping the tree lucerne hedge at Gibraltar. (Thelma Cabban Collection)

6

Thelma, aged 16, in front of the water tank at home. (Thelma Cabban Collection)

7

Cousins Jack Wright and Lindsay Blewitt at Gibraltar Rocks. (Thelma Cabban Collection)

8

Doreen at a task she knew well at Gibraltar. (Thelma Cabban Collection)

9

The eucalyptus distillery at Nil Desperandum in the 1940s. (Thelma Cabban Collection)

10

Val, Thelma, Ethel and Bill Blewitt at Gibraltar, with Ethel and Bill about to leave for shearing sheds out west. (Thelma Cabban Collection)

11

Scene outside the Rock Valley woolshed in the 1940s; Sid Cramp left, Tom Green 2nd left, Bill Fox on right. (Thelma Cabban Collection)

12

Thelma in front of a pise building at Rock Valley. (Thelma Cabban Collection)

Doreen Blundell

1

Bill, Ethel and Lindsay Blewitt at Gibraltar in the late 1930s or early 1940s about to leave for their rabbiting camp on Tidbinbilla Creek. (Doreen Blundell Collection)

2

Haystack making at Gibraltar. Eric Blewitt possibly at left, then Wallace Black 2nd left, Pat Blundell possibly at right. (Doreen Blundell Collection)

3

Bill Blewitt cutting chaff at Gibraltar; note the horse harnessed to the horseworks (obscured) supplying the power to the cutter, and the driveshaft and the spinning cutting wheel. (Doreen Blundell Collection)

4

Lindsay Blewitt having some fun at Gibraltar, late 1930s or early 1940s. (Doreen Blundell Collection)

5

Val feeding a pig at Gibraltar in the early 1940s; one of the home's pise walls is in the background. (Doreen Blundell Collection)

6

Doreen with Pat Blundell at Gibraltar in the 1940s before they were married. (Doreen Blundell Collection)

7

Pat Blundell on leave in army uniform admires a sunflower at Gibraltar c 1941-43; note especially the 'Telegraph-Telephone Office' sign. (Doreen Blundell Collection)

8

Jack Reid. (Doreen Blundell Collection)

9

Doreen and Val's sister Hazel (nicknamed Jack) who died of a brain tumour aged 10. The photo was taken at Christmas at Gibraltar when Hazel was 9; she died the following May. (Doreen Blundell Collection)

10

A young Bill Blewitt with well turned out horse and sulky. (Doreen Blundell Collection)

11

Though Bill Blewitt was better known for his accordion, the man here is thought to be him, with a violin. Running boards were useful for extra storage. (Doreen Blundell Collection)

12

On the Gibraltar verandah in early 1933. From left: teacher Marian Myers, Val Blewitt, -, -, Hazel (with hand to mouth), Doreen (with hand on hip), Thelma at right. (Doreen Blundell Collection)

Laser copies only of the following photos were made:

Wayne and Bruce Reid making imaginative use of a prizewinning sheep at Tidbinbilla Station. (Claire Lewis Collection)

Laurie Dallender and Esme Reid relaxing by the Studebaker during a holiday at Narooma in the late 1920s. (Claire Lewis Collection)

Esme Reid washing her hair at what is believed to be Little Peppercorn Hut. (Claire Lewis Collection)

Beryl Fisher's mother Bessie Woods at Paddys River about 1928-30. The woolshed had been erected a short time before by Beryl's brothers Harold and Charlie and stands today, with alterations. Note the ringbarking in

the background. (Beryl Fisher Collection, copy kindly supplied by Vince Fisher)

'Gibraltar Creek' in about the 1920s. All buildings (including the rear pipe portion) were demolished in about 1965 when the property passed out of the Woods family's possession after 70 years. (Harrie Quince Collection)

The family: (l-r) Dulcie, Cecil, Gladys, Eileen, Muriel, Evelyn, Vera, Mary, Ethel, Kathleen, Beatrice, Alice and Tom (Arthur missing). (Harrie Quince Collection)

Tom and Mary in front of the pipe section of the house in about the 1950s. (Harrie Quince Collection)