



Snippets

from our collection

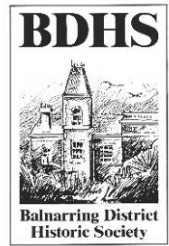
Balnarring and District Historical Society Inc.

® A002.25691B

P O Box 183 Balnarring 3926

November 2023

Editor: I. Hackett



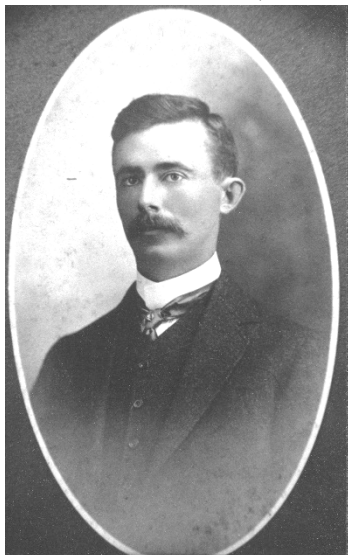
KONDA

(Information from *All Our Somers* by Bruce Bennett and from Robyn Agg)

The story of 'Konda', the house at the corner of Sandy Point and Balnarring Beach Roads, covers almost 120 years although the building no longer stands on its original site.



'Konda' or 'Karonda' was the name given to the home of William (Lad) Mairs and his wife, Eugenie (Ninette), neé Symone. Lad was one of the sons of settler, David Mairs, who during his lifetime built up an extensive grazing property covering over 2,000 acres. David Mairs Snr. died in 1902, leaving the land to his three surviving sons. The eldest, John, or Jack as he was known, wasn't interested in farming and his brothers, David and Lad, bought out his share. Jack pursued a career in the Civil Service while his two brothers ran what had been the family farm in Bittern.



William (Lad) Mairs

After Lad married in 1905, he built a home for himself and his family on lot 127 Bittern. A creek ran through the land and a spring guaranteed water. Their home paddock opened onto what was then known as Mairs Road, since re-named South Beach Road. This was almost opposite the west gate of Cerberus Naval Depot. Originally the name was 'Karonda', given as a tribute to the home in Germany where Ninette's parents' family had come from.

Lad and Ninette had two children, Ninette and Tom. Their son, when he was small, could not get his tongue around the name "Karonda" and it became known in the family by the shortened 'Konda', as Tom called it.

By the 1920s the Mairs had left the area and 'Konda Paddock', after having been bought by Barrett and Wiseman who greatly improved the quality of the pastureland, was now part of the Boadle property. About 1928 Konda, described as "the old house on a paddock opposite the naval depot", became home to Fred and Ellen Bennetts and their family who leased it from the Boadles. Ellen ran the newly-built store on the Palm Beach Estate. Palm Beach was an early development at Balnarring East (Somers) opened up by Knight & Harwood. Fred, a carpenter at the naval base, commuted to work by bicycle. The house Konda was later moved to a different site in Sandy Point Road where, for a time, it became the home of Lox Needham. Later again it was moved to its current site, lot 113 A, about 12 acres, at the corner of Sandy Point Road and Balnarring Beach Road.

In the mid to late 1930s the property was sold and it became the home of Peter Leslie and Florence May (Les and Minnie) Grant. The Grants had a small farm and Les also worked as a contractor and carrier. Their children attended the Balnarring School. Sadly, Colin, the youngest of their children, died in 1945 when he was only six years old. The little boy had planted acorns in jam tins and had watched them sprout into small trees. His mother gave one of the seedling trees to the church they attended, the Methodist Church in Balnarring Beach Road, where it was planted in the grounds. The other was given to the Balnarring Kindergarten and it grew into a magnificent oak tree that stood in front of the building. This oak was cut down some years ago but the one at the church still flourishes.

After Les died in 1966 Minnie became the sole owner. In 1964 she had bought the long, narrow strip of land along the north-western boundary of the property. This had been the former access to the railway yards and was adjacent to the Shire land at the corner of Frankston-Flinders Road and Balnarring Beach Road. The train line from Bittern to Red Hill had been opened in 1921 and ran for thirty years. After its closure the assets were sold. This added just over an acre to the size of the Grant property.

The property changed hands again when Mrs Grant, then living in Ringwood East, sold the farm to Lawrie and Robyn Agg for \$19,000. They couple were looking to move from Glen Waverley to a semi-rural area where they could bring up their family. Robyn knew the area well as she had come on camping holidays to Balnarring Beach throughout her childhood. They moved in, in November 1972. At first they came down only for weekends but then decided not to wait until the house was completed. The house was old and much work needed to be done to it to turn it into a home for themselves and their three children. One of the first things they changed was the outdoor toilet; the new one was located *inside* the house. The Aggs kept a cow for milking and the children had Shetland ponies until they outgrew them and graduated to bigger horses. It was an ideal place for raising children. Balnarring at that time just had a general store, there was no urban-style development and many open paddocks. The youngsters explored the area on horseback and often rode to the beach then along to Somers or to Point Leo.

Because of the addition of the former railway land, the property was on two titles. In 2006 the process of re-aligning a boundary was started in order to allow approximately half of the lot to be sold. The land had to be surveyed again, power and water brought to the second block. This took about four years in all and, when completed, effectively resulted in two lots of about six acres each. The eastern lot

was sold. This enabled the completion of the extensive renovation work to the house.

The house had been a typical Edwardian-style dwelling with a front door opening into a central hallway and rooms opening from the hallway. At its far end, the hall met another passageway running at right-angles to it. To the left this led to the kitchen and utility area; to the right was another room. The altered layout was more open plan, achieved by the removal of one of the interior walls and allowing a circular flow of traffic between rooms.



The alterations to the building revealed a number of surprises. The removal of a wall in the kitchen showed the original horizontal wooden laths of the interior lath and plaster walls.

The kitchen had a wood burning stove which sat in a brick fireplace. The fireplace surrounds were tiled. When the tiles were removed the older brickwork was on show. The bricks had been painted bright red.

There is also an old shed on the property believed to be the premises where the Shire's blacksmith worked.

A new house sign was made to put up near the front door. This one, in brass, perpetuates the original name, 'Konda'.



MT ELIZA v BALNARRING

A description of one of the earliest tennis matches played at Balnarring

Written by an unknown poet with apologies to Banjo Patterson and the Mt Eliza Tennis Club.

It was on the banks of Westernport, 'mongst sand and rocks and scrub
That they formed an institution called Balnarring Tennis Club.
All the women got together for some Mid-Week teams to make,
For the challenge wasn't offered that those ladies wouldn't take.
But their style of playing tennis was irregular and rash -
They had mighty little science but a mighty lot of dash:
For the courts were open paddocks, where the grass obscured the lines,
And they hewed their wooden rackets from the local mountain pines.
And they used to train for matches hitting rocks about the scrub;
Those enthusiastic ladies of Balnarring Tennis Club.

It was some miles north of here, in the city's smoke and steam
That a tennis club existed called the Mt Eliza team.
As a social institution it was a marvellous success,
For those ladies were distinguished by exclusiveness and dress.
They had fancy metal rackets that were nice and smooth and sleek,
For their cultivated ladies only used them once a week.
So they drove down the Peninsula in search of sport and fame
For they meant to show Balnarring how they ought to play the game.
Now you ladies can imagine how the contest ebbed and flowed.
When Balnarring they got going it was time to clear the road;

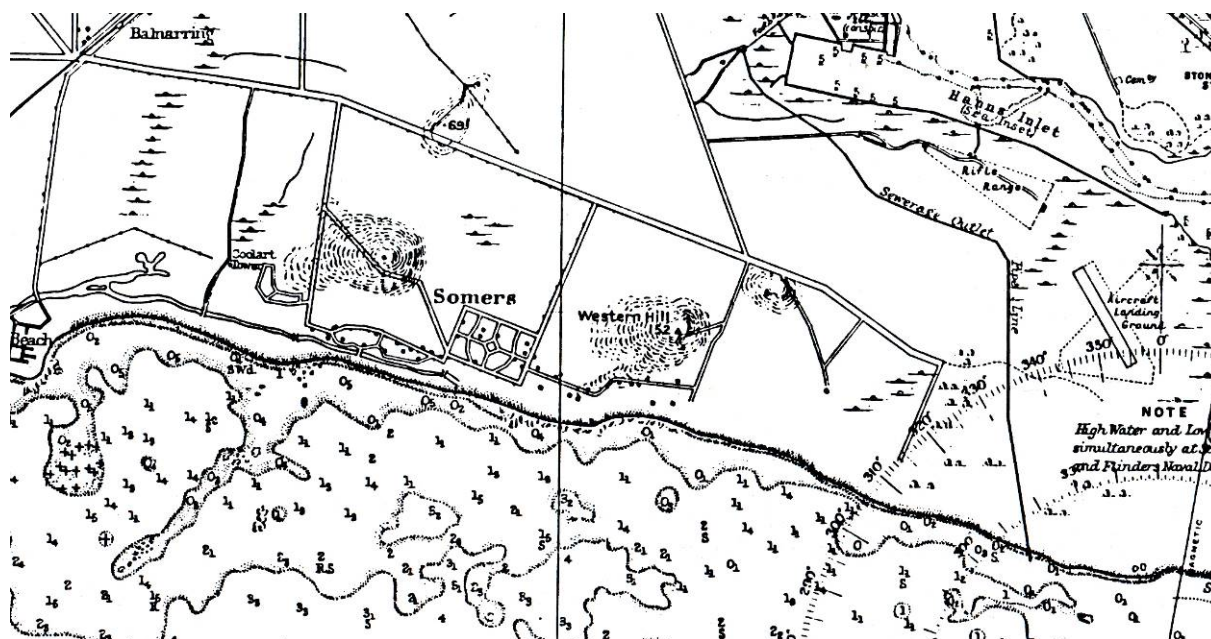
And the game was so terrific that ere half the match was gone
 A spectator's leg was broken – just from merely looking on.
 For they rallied with each other till the court was strewn with dead
 While the score was kept so even that they neither got ahead.
 And the Mt Eliza captain, when she tumbled off to die
 Was the last surviving player – so the game was called a tie.
 Then the captain of Balnarring got up slowly from the ground
 Overcome with great exhaustion, yet she fiercely glanced around;
 There was no-one to oppose her – all the rest were in a trance,
 So she scrambled to the backline for her last expiring chance
 For she meant to make an effort to get victory to her side
 She threw up the ball – swung - missed it – then she tumbled down and died.

By the old Balnarring clubhouse, where the breezes shake the grass,
 There's a row of little gravestones that the members never pass.
 There's a rude inscription saying: "Tennis players shed a tear
 For the Mt Eliza ladies and Balnarring girls lie here."
 And on misty moonlit evenings, when its calm on Western Port,
 You can see their shadows flitting 'round that phantom tennis court.
 You can hear the rackets swishing as they swing to hit the balls,
 And the voices of the players as they argue out the calls.
 So remember when you meet us, that lunching at this pub
 Are the current Mid-Week Ladies of Balnarring Tennis Club.

EMERGENCY LANDING AT THE BALNARRING AERODROME

(Information from contemporary newspapers and from Bruce Bennett)

In the late summer of 1935, newspapers from Townsville to Tasmania carried the story of an emergency landing of a plane at the Balnarring aerodrome.



The flat land used by the mail planes was at the corner of Camp Hill Road and Sandy Point Road, behind Somers and to the east of the swampy land. (Map surveyed by Commander G.D. Tancred 1948. The naval aircraft strip shown in this map did not exist in the 1930s.)

The plane, the *Golden West*, on the mail flight from Launceston to Melbourne via Flinders Island, had run into bad weather. This might not have caused so much interest had not one of the company's planes recently gone missing, just three months prior, over the ocean near Wilson's Promontory with the loss of all passengers and the crew which included one of the brothers who had founded the company. This was in November 1934,



Victor and Ivan Holyman were the sons of William Holyman, the founder of a shipping firm, Holyman & Sons, which handled trade and a passenger service between the Bass Strait islands and Tasmania. They bought their first plane in 1932, a de Havilland DH83 Fox Moth to fly the old sea routes between Flinders and King Island and Launceston after a rival had started an air link. The two groups merged to form Tasmanian Aerial Services in 1933. They acquired a new De Havilland DH 84 Dragon to make a run, three times a week between Launceston and Melbourne

In November of the that year, 1933, the Commonwealth Government called for tenders for a subsidized airmail service as part of the Empire Air Mail Scheme and in July, 1934 Holyman's Airways Pty Ltd was registered. The company was successful in their bid and two new aircraft, de Havilland DH86s

were bought. These aircraft had been specially developed for the mail route and hurried into use. They were single-control models with the pilot seated in the nose of the aircraft. The first run was made on 3, October 1934. On October 19th, one of their two airliners, *Miss Hobart*, went down near Wilson's Promontory. Victor had been the co-pilot. He was described as "an airman with rare ability" and had learned to fly during the years of World War One when he served with the aerial wing of the Royal Navy.



A De Havilland DH 84 airliner

His brother, Captain Ivan Holyman, took over management of the company. A second-hand de Havilland DH84 was purchased to replace the missing aircraft and this was named the *Golden West*.

On the morning of February 9th, the plane, flown by Pilot Paterson, was carrying the mail and four passengers. When it left Launceston at 9.00 a.m. weather conditions had been excellent but misty rain, which greatly reduced visibility, had moved in before the plane reached Flinders Island an hour later. There the pilot received news that Wilson's Promontory was fog-bound and damage to the plane's wireless aerial was discovered. Thus, it was unable to receive or transmit messages. The *Golden West* left on time to continue its flight to Melbourne. Conditions worsened and visibility was extremely poor when the plane flew over Westernport and, as it proceeded towards Port Philip, the land fog became denser. Pilot Paterson made the decision to turn back to Somers where he landed the plane without incident. About an hour and a half later, after having waited in vain for conditions to improve, the plane took off again for Melbourne. By hugging the coast where visibility was

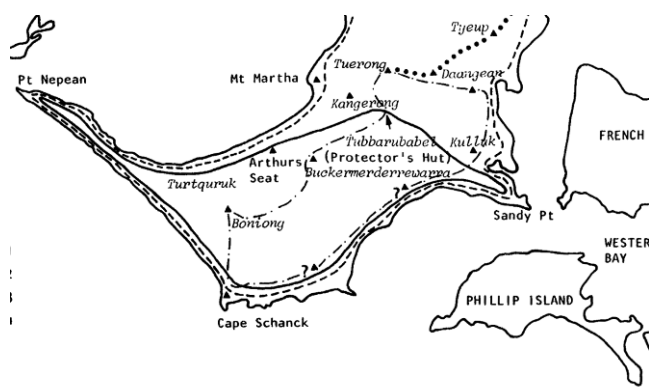
relatively good, Pilot Paterson landed the *Golden West* at Laverton at 3.25 in the afternoon after “one of the most unpleasant flights” he had made.

The company had two planes, one that left from Launceston and one that left from Melbourne on the same day. Both flew via Flinders Island. The other plane, the *Loina*, had “battled her way through rain and fog” after a delayed start from Melbourne and had remained at Flinders Island until conditions improved before completing the final leg.

‘Balnarring aerodrome’, as some of the newspapers termed it, was rather a grandiose name for the area where the mail plane set down. This was a paddock on the west side of Camp Hill Road between the township and Sandy Point Road. The land here was flat, allowing the planes to taxi and the paddock was marked with a big carbide ash circle. The area was used mainly for sports as the football ground was nearby. The paddock was used by the mail planes as a temporary stopover if the weather was bad. Some of the early Somers residents recalled the mail planes flying across the area. Ray Stone related that, as a school boy, he often saw the planes pass overhead and how, occasionally, they landed if the weather was bad. He stated some passengers stayed in the plane while others walked to the store for a cup of tea. Once a bigger, 3-engine plane landed. An excited Ray and his friend went from school to see it. Ray was dinked by his mate, Roger Simpson, as they only had one bicycle.

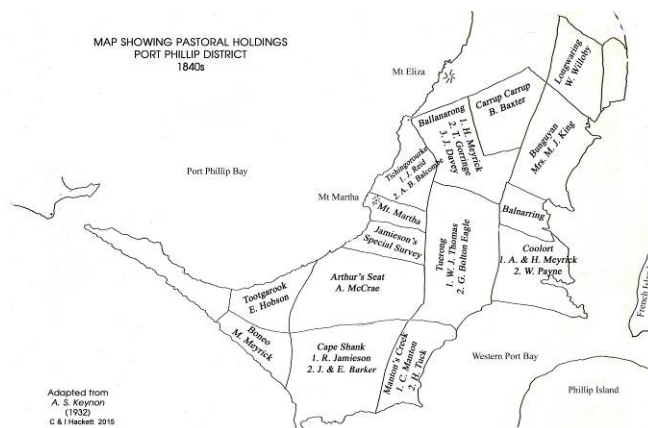
COOLART – THE LAND

Today Coolart covers 87.5 hectares (just over 216 acres). This is a mere fraction of the original area known as “Coolart” throughout its long history.



The traditional land owners are the coastal Bunurong people. This Western Port side of the Peninsula from Point Nepean to Cape Schanck and further north was home to the BunWurrong Baluk clan. The northern section towards Hann's Inlet was known to them as ‘Kulluk’ (one of the many spelling variants of the written name) meaning ‘sandy point’. It was a special place, an encampment to which the people continually returned. They

were displaced after the arrival of Europeans. A map drawn by Assistant Protector William Thomas marked Kulluk by a square on land where Cerberus now stands.



In the late 1830s the British Crown offered land on the Mornington Peninsula for grazing under licence. The Collert (Coolart) run covered 16,880 acres (6,800 hectares). It was described as “open forest of gum, lightwood oak and honeysuckle with good grass. Tea tree.” “Thick forest” further inland.

Two cousins from Wiltshire, Alfred and Henry Meyrick held the first licence from 1840 to 1846.

The area also included the runs Tamazon and Kangerong (as recorded by Billis and Kenyon). Despite difficulties the Meyricks persevered and established a small station a few miles along the coast from the sandy point which gave its name to the run. Land was cleared, swampy areas drained, yards fenced and a hut erected. Their homestead is indicated as being in the vicinity of today's Coolart. Henry writes of ploughing 8 acres for potatoes and oats and they ran cattle after that finding sheep were unsuited to the conditions.

William Payne took over the run when the Meyricks decided to abandon the peninsula for Gippsland. In 1848, when renewing the lease, the area of the run is given as 6,000 acres but two years later this has been increased to 10,800 acres. Coolart's boundaries were given as Warrangite i.e Warrengine Creek near Hastings; the bluff three miles along the coast from Coolart (Palmer's Hill) and the 'camping ground', possibly an Aboriginal encampment thought to be today's Balnarring Heights area, the sea to the east (?S) and inland to the 'Arthur's Seat Ranges. (? possibly Red Hill).

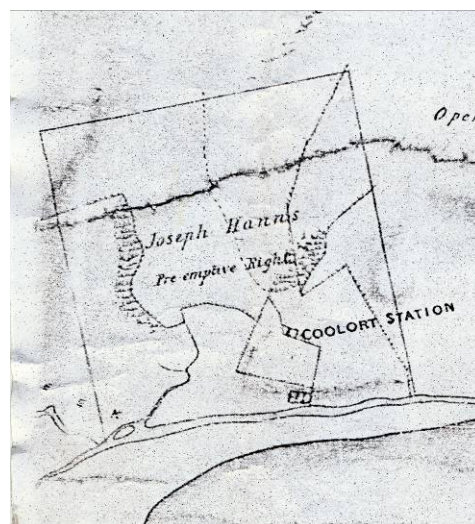
Payne turned Coolart into a successful cattle station during the thirteen years he held the lease and, when he sold it on, it was advertised as having *"950 head of cattle (capacity for 1100 head), verandah cottage, men quarters, stables, dairy, milking yards, stockyard, barn, cultivated and grassed paddocks"*

Early maps indicate the dwelling and farm area in the same place as today's homestead and buildings.

Payne sold on the lease in 1853 and it was bought by Harry Drew, a Melbourne jeweller who was about to be married. However, his fiancée didn't relish the idea of living so far from Melbourne so he sold it on the following year. It was quickly snapped up by Joseph Hann, a Wiltshire farmer, recently arrived and ambitious to set up a station.

During the 1850s laws regarding land ownership were changing and what had previously been Crown land occupied under lease, could now be purchased freehold. The land was surveyed and opened for closer settlement by selection. To ensure the earlier 'pioneers' would not be ousted by newcomers, those who had already established a station had pre-emptive right to 640 acres (one square mile) around their homestead.

Hann immediately applied for his pre-emptive right, was rejected the first time as he hadn't been on the land for long enough but in 1857 was granted the 640 acres. He also held land adjoining his P.R. Some was still under lease and some may have been purchased. Coolart's eastern and northern boundaries were now much closer to the homestead while the western boundary still stretched to the Palmer's Hill area. This encompassed about 2,000 acres in all. The 1855 report by the District Commissioner of Crown Lands states: *This is an original run. Improvements considerable. Consisting of good dwelling house, outbuildings, stock pens etc. and cultivation paddocks"*



Hann was accompanied by his family – his wife and four sons, three of whom were adult.

When large tracts of land in Queensland were opened up for settlement, the Hann family moved north in 1862 to establish their 'empire' there. Coolart's lands including stock (cattle for beef and dairying) were sold.

The property stayed much this size through the next five owners.

Sumner, Grice & Benn, an agricultural & mercantile firm, bought the property and, probably using indentured labour from Great Britain where unemployment was high, developed a 'model farm' on the 2,000 acres. The property was run by a manager. Shorthorn cattle were

bred on pastures improved by the introduction of superphosphate and a fair amount of building work was undertaken. The homestead was improved, bridges built, a system of drainage developed. Sumner's family spent holidays there. The homestead must have been substantial because the officers of the *Galatea*, the ship on which the Duke of Edinburgh was touring, were given a luncheon at Coolart during an organised kangaroo shoot. The early buildings on today's Coolart are thought to date from the 1860s.

When the partnership ended in 1875 John Benn bought freehold the 2000 acres.

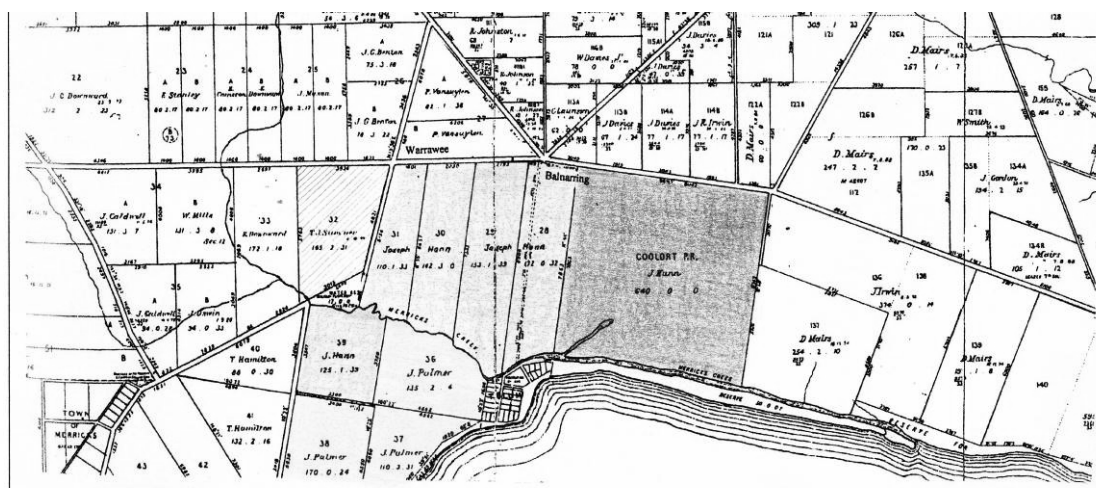
During Benn's ownership Coolart became a showpiece. It was divided into 40 paddocks of varying sizes. Benn bred sheep, shorthorn cattle and horses including draught animals, Shetland ponies and thoroughbreds. It was considered one of the most prosperous properties on the peninsula.

Toward the end of Benn's ownership negotiations had been undertaken to put in a road from the main Hastings - Flinders Road to link with the new coastal township of Tulum.

This was built in the latter part of the 1890s effectively cutting Coolart into two.

The land still covered approximately 2,000 acres but was now in two sections.

On Benn's death, in 1895 the property was sold for £10,000 to F.S. Grimwade.



© 1864 PARISH PLAN (BALNARRING + BITTERN)

Coolart became a country holiday retreat for the industrialist and parliamentarian but it was also a working property run by a manager. Grimwade bred horses and continued to run and breed Shorthorn cattle and Shropshire sheep.

The homestead was re-built with a large mansion replacing the former homestead. Grimwade also added to the stables area and built a new coach house. The grounds immediately surrounding the homestead were landscaped as a formal garden. As well, there were orchards and kitchen gardens.

Tom Armstrong, a grazier from Sale, was the next owner. In 1908 the property carried 2,200 sheep on the 2,000 acres. He had the paddocks wire-netted against rabbits.

Soon after he bought the property, Armstrong leased a large part of the land to owners of starving stock from drought-stricken areas of Gippsland. He kept the property for three years before moving on.

In 1910 George Fairbairn acquired Coolart as a wedding gift for his daughter, Alison, who wed Captain Balmain, a career military officer. The Balmains were returning to Australia from India and Coolart became their country home where they could enjoy riding and hunting. The stock came with the property and it continued as mainly a sheep station. Balmain sold the property when the family left Australia in 1922 to live in England.

Stewart Robertson, a pastoralist from N.S.W., was the next to own the 2,000 acres. He continued to use the land primarily for sheep but he also bred horses and grew oats, rape and barley.



He held Coolart for only three years but made one major change. The area to the west of Balnarring Beach Road was subdivided and sold, reducing Coolart's lands to the area bounded by Balnarring Beach Road, Sandy Point Road to the north and Camp Hill Road to the east. Roughly 900 acres remained.

John Feehan who took over the property in 1925, ran cattle and bred race-horses. During his ownership he gifted several acres of land in the south-east corner of the property (along the creek and beach front), to the governor of Victoria. Lord Somers had been seeking a site for a holiday camp for young people and Coolart's location matched all the criteria. When Feehan sold the property, Coolart was advertised as offering good fishing and shooting as well as its proven suitability for stud purposes.

832 acres were offered at auction in 1937. It was passed in but bought soon after by businessman, Thomas Luxton

Coolart ran Border Leicester sheep and Shorthorn Cattle under Luxton's ownership. Passionate about birdlife, Luxton had the land legally declared a sanctuary and set about creating the lagoon to attract water birds.

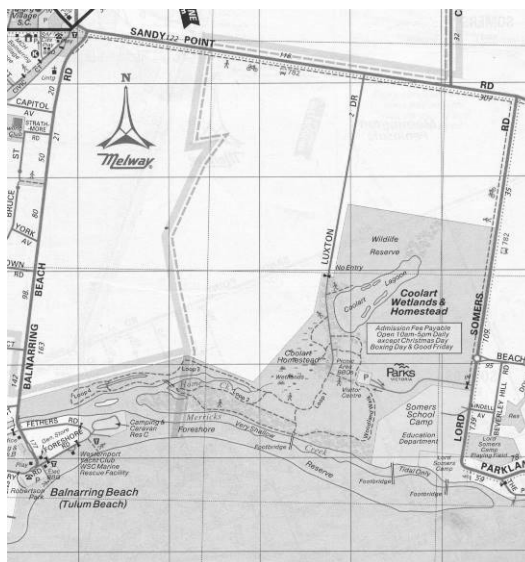
During the years of WW2, 85 acres of Coolart's land was compulsorily acquired by the Commonwealth Government to establish an Air Force Training Base and Luxton sold about 20 acres to the government. This area was along the coast. (The Commonwealth also used the neighbouring Children's Camp to house officers.) At the end of the war some of the land was returned to Coolart.

Margaret Luxton Roffey took on the farm after the death of her father in 1968 and Coolart continued to run sheep and cattle.

When the family decided to sell Coolart the land was subdivided into lots of approximately 50 acres except for the central area around the homestead which was purchased by the State Government to be run as the Historic Coolart Reserve.

Since 1977 Coolart has been State owned and managed by Parks Victoria. This area of 87.5 hectares (216 acres) with the imposing homestead built by Grimwade and the beautiful lagoon created by Tom Luxton is what remains of the huge expanse of land taken up by the Meyrick cousins over 180 years ago.

(from a talk given to the Friends of Coolart by Ilma Hackett)



The material in this publication may not be reproduced in any way without permission from the Editor.