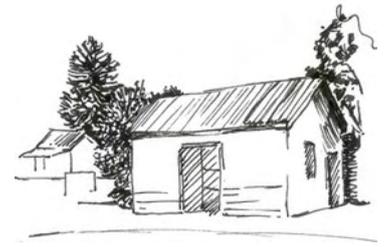


# Bundanoon History Group

## Monthly Newsletter

March 2021



### From the President

We were rewarded with a good turnout at the Annual General Meeting on Monday 1 March, followed by an interesting talk on Aborigines in the Southern Highlands by Narelle Bower. The following Committee was elected at the AGM:

*President:* David Brennen  
*Vice-President:* Don Gray  
*Treasurer:* David LeCheminant  
*Secretary:* Steve Press  
*Committee Members:* Amy Press, Beryl Seckington, Kerri Goulding, Di Gray, Ralph Clark, Graham Morgan

Thanks to everyone for standing. Once again we have some very experienced Committee Members, complemented by some new faces. Welcome David LeCheminant as new Treasurer and Steve Press as new Secretary. Also, a huge thanks to Irene Brewster (ex Secretary) and Graham Morgan (ex Treasurer) for their very significant contributions to the BHG Executive these past three years.

If you were unable to attend the AGM, the President's Report can be found on the BHG Website.

<https://bundanoonhistory.org.au/information/>

**Golden Vale Homestead:** Whilst this has proved one of our most popular visits, some Members were disappointed that they were unable to get tickets. Unfortunately, the National Trust was restricted on numbers by Covid regulations, and tickets sold out in record time. Because of this, and to be fair to all, your Committee is reviewing the events' booking procedures. They will report back in May.

**The Old Goods Shed is open again:** After being closed to the public for 12 months, we re-opened on 21 March. Bad weather kept most visitors away but presented the opportunity for a good old spring clean. Thanks to Carol Gill and Janet Benn. Christine Cassin will now be managing the Volunteers Roster for Shed Open Days.

Stay safe and best wishes, **David**

**Email:** david.brennen@yahoo.com **Tel:** 0432 608 474

### Fundraising: Mothers' Day Raffle

by Trish Arbib – Raffle Co-ordinator

Because of COVID-19 the BHG had almost no income in 2020 and so our major fund raiser this year is the Mothers' Day raffle. Thank you for so many wonderful donations to be given as prizes. Our baskets are overflowing.

As in previous years you are being asked for your help by selling tickets to family and friends. At the next BHG meeting on 5th April I will be handing out a letter to each of you with raffle tickets attached. (We will hand deliver to those who aren't at the meeting.) Please don't feel obligated, but any help is greatly appreciated.

Tickets are also being sold by BHG volunteers at the Bundanoon market on April 4 and 18, and outside the Bundanoon newsagent on May 2. Thank you to all those who volunteered.

The raffle will be drawn at the Mothers' Day lunch at the Bundanoon Social Club on Mothers' Day, May 9th.

So thank you everyone. It's a great team effort.

### The Bundanoon Heritage signs



*The final post being installed outside Potters' Pantry*

**President & Editor:** David Brennen    **Vice President:** Don Gray    **Secretary:** Steve Press    **Treasurer:** David LeCheminant

**Committee:** Ralph Clark, Dianne Gray, Kerri Goulding, Beryl Seckington, Amy Press, Graham Morgan

**BHG Bank details:** BSB: 641 800 Account: 017104781 Ref: (your name or reference) **Website:** www.bundanoonhistory.org.au

I am pleased to report that all the posts have been cemented in place plus Ralph is putting the final touches to a printed Heritage Trail Guide. All the signs will be mounted this week, ready for Easter ... phew. Please lock into your diaries, Thursday 22 April at 4 pm when we will hold the official celebratory event at the Old Goods Shed. All members and family are invited - details will be confirmed in a separate mail.

### A Financial 'Hellhole'

by Ian Smith, Archive Co-ordinator. Photos from BHG Archives

On 19 September 1916 Edwin William Jenkins, born 1895, enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force. He was a student wool classer, single, Roman Catholic and living with his mother Gertrude in Greens Avenue, Dundas. He had auburn hair, blue eyes, weighed 54.4kg, and was 5' 5" (165cms).

He served on the Western Front in 38 Battalion, was wounded in the right shoulder and arrived back in Australia on 24 July 1919.

In 1920 Edwin purchased 'Rockdale' from William Taylor. This property was originally part of the land owned by the Sydney and Melbourne Coal and Land Company (owners of the Erith Coal Mine). Today the farm site is accessed off Coalmine Road and the road to Viewpoint Lookout whence a steep dirt road leads to the property site. In 1906 it was acquired by James Bleakley who farmed it before selling it in 1916 to William and Annie Taylor. 'Rockdale' covered 120 acres freehold in four lots (16, 40, 41, and 81); Edwin paid £400 for the property comprising a deposit of £100 and £300 mortgaged. The Secretary of the Bundanoon Repatriation Committee considered Edwin's purchase was on a sound business footing, and the holding was sufficient for home maintenance.

In 1920 Edwin received a Soldier Settlement loan of £624 for the farm plus another loan enabling him to buy a Jersey milking cow, six other cows, and a horse.

It would seem at this stage that Edwin would have been looking optimistically to the future as he

embarked on a career as an orchardist.

After Edwin sought an advance on his loan in June 1921 a Lands Department inspector visited 'Rockdale'. He described it as being 'situated in a deep mountain valley 4 miles from Bundanoon. The last mile is over a steep precipitous track.' Apples and summer fruit were grown on four acres, providing Edwin's income, and he had an extra three acres ready to plant to apples. But, 'out of 120 acres only 8 acres or so can be considered profitable.' The rest the inspector described as 'rough, mountain country on which he [Edwin] runs one cow, one heifer and five yearlings.' Improvements were 'a comfortable W.B. [weatherboard] cottage of five rooms in good order, a vehicle shed, a stable and primitive bails and pig stys.' Water was had via a water wheel to an overhead tank, and he had 2000' of 2½" piping. He received £80 from last season's fruit crop.



*Hell Hole Farm seen from View Point. Early 1900s*

Subsequently, at Edwin's request, the Department took over the mortgage by paying £260 to the vendor while also approving £40 to purchase a cart and harness; Edwin's liabilities now totalled £360 with the property as security. The proposition though was considered 'sound enough' as the assets ex land were valued as: cottage £250, shed £50, stock £50 and water service £75. Two years later, in December 1923 the Department valued 'Rockdale' at £850 noting the £410 worth of improvements made by Edwin. Despite being difficult to access and the rough, broken nature of its land, the property's value partly stemmed from being four miles from Bundanoon which was 'becoming a popular tourist resort.'

However, it wasn't long before things began to take a turn for the worst. In October 1924 Edwin applied for his repayments to be deferred for a few months as a hailstorm had caused his harvest to be almost a complete failure, returning him only £50. In support of his application Edwin said since 1920 he'd cleared 10 acres of forest, built a shed, and installed £60 worth of fencing. He now had two acres sown to oats for hay and hoped to plant out another three. He also looked forward to planting an additional one hundred fruit trees. At present he had 400 fruit trees in full bearing and earned £25 from wattle bark (probably for tanning). The Department granted a deferral of payments to 1 February 1925.



*Hell Hole Farm early 1900s*

Next year, matters did not improve. In early September 1925 Edwin said he couldn't meet his August periodic repayment (of £10/16/9). By December he had missed all his repayments, and reckoned his next repayment would follow the new season's crop in February 1926. The Department granted an advance till 29 March 1926; in early May they reminded Edwin that he owed £27/0/5 noting they would 'be glad to know when your remittance may be expected'.

A departmental inspection in December described how 460 fruit trees were planted on 4½ acres of sloping ground, plus another 5½ acres cleared; there was 1,307 metres of fencing. Including the house and shed, 'Rockdale' was valued at £1,115/10/-. However, an accompanying sketch map indicated signs of incipient neglect - beyond the orchard trees had been ringbarked but thick scrub and young trees had taken over, cleared land to the west was now

regrowth secondary scrub and ferns. The eastern side was cleared but was very steep.

Perhaps Edwin was cursed for just days after the inspection a bush fire swept through the property destroying 150 young trees and badly scorching the older ones; the fencing was badly damaged but the house was saved, with difficulty. Soon after, on 15 December, a somewhat despondent Edwin saw the District Surveyor in Goulburn. He said he didn't know how he could make a living off the farm and 'was desirous of disposing of it as soon as possible'. To add to his woes Edwin couldn't see how he could meet his financial liabilities. A report of this meeting concluded that 'Rockdale' was really too steep for fruit growing, road access (which Edwin had to maintain) was steep and difficult, and prospects of further development were very limited. To compound this the District Surveyor thought it would be difficult to find a purchaser willing to pay more than £500 for the property, despite the improvements and a valuation of £1115/10/-.

Since 1920 Edwin had made £400 from fruit growing and £150 from other sources (including a retail fruit business partnership with Mr. L. Mildenhall earning him £2 per week). His income in 1926, however, would be practically nil. On top of this Edwin had entered into a second mortgage with Mr. C. Scott whom he owed £200/-/-. His total indebtedness now amounted to £616/13/8.

Unsurprisingly, Edwin considered he now had no chance of making a living from 'Rockdale' and his only course was to sell the property and find other employment. At this stage in his life Edwin was still single and lived at 'Rockdale' with his mother and father, both over 70 years old.

Following a recommendation from the Soldiers Appraisal Board, in May 1927 the Minister for Lands approved waiving Edwin's advanced interest arrears while the advance principal would now be repayable from March 1928. Having insufficient capital to carry on and his health preventing him from restoring 'Rockdale' to a profitable state, in mid-1927 Edwin got permission from the Department to sell the property, provided his loan and interest were fully repaid. In October he

reported he'd listed the property with Cromer Bros. (estate agents) of Pitt Street, Sydney and later with several other agents, whilst also making it known locally it was for sale. Alas, he was still unable to repay any of the loan or interest.

Though the Department's inspector couldn't see how 'Rockdale' would be profitable with road access so difficult he was sympathetic to Edwin's plight reporting that 'progress has been retarded by adverse circumstances over which he had no control, drought, fires, storms, bush fire, and serious family illness.'

Seeking a more secure source of income, by May 1928 Edwin was in Sydney studying to be a teacher, returning on weekends to work on the farm. He agreed with the Department's suggestion to lease the farm for a term of at least three years at a rate that would allow him to pay back his loan commitments and to let the property pay for itself.

By October 1928 things were looking slightly brighter for Edwin as he now had a teaching job at the primary school at Bullio Roadside, Hanworth via Taralga. His parents and sister would maintain the farm in his absence. He was allowed to make repayments of £2 per month; he couldn't pay more as he was on a low salary and his parents also needed his support.

Things got a bit more upbeat in November 1928 as Mr. C. Scott, the holder of the second mortgage and his personal friend, was willing to purchase the farm. Mr. Proust (the Deputy Surveyor, Goulburn) advised the Under-Secretary of Lands that it was 'an exceptional opportunity of closing an unsatisfactory case.' At this stage 'Rockdale' was valued at £700-800 but it was thought difficult to find a buyer at £500 and Edwin's aged parents were now planning to leave the farm and so it would now most likely deteriorate further. Alas, in February 1929 Mr. Scott decided not to go ahead with the sale.

Sometime in 1929 Edwin was transferred to Mount Fairy School, south-east of Lake Bathurst.

Still hopeful of a sale, in April 1929 Edwin had listed 'Rockdale' with estate agents in Sydney, Bowral and

Bundanoon and advertised several times in the Sydney newspapers. On 30 August he happily told the Department that a Mr. Jones would lease 'Rockdale' for two years. Alas, 3½ months later the offer fell through. Ever optimistic, Edwin said that his agent 'Lavender Farm Exchange' was sure that others would be interested.

Sure enough on 12 February 1930 Edwin told the Department that a Mr. D.M. Barrett of Colo Vale 'an experienced orchardist' would lease the farm for two years with an option to purchase at £800. Mr. Barrett did indeed take over the farm but no lease had been signed and by 30 June the proposed lease had fallen through.

By 1930 the Depression had taken hold, causing the State Government to cut teacher's wages. By August 1930, his salary had been reduced to 10/- per week. Also having to help support his parents, Edwin couldn't see how he could make any repayments. The Department told him he owed a total of £117/11/1 but he wouldn't be required to repay anything until after 31 October 1930. An inspection of the property in 26 September found that Edwin's parents and sister were living in Bundanoon but were looking after the property and orchard, all was satisfactory and buildings were insured. After some enquiries Mr. Lowe, the inspector, concluded there appeared no prospect of leasing or selling the property; its location and difficulty of access being great drawbacks and would '....be difficult to dispose of the place even at any price.'



1950s - Hell Hole - Abandoned by this time; only visited by walkers and flower pickers

Things took a bit of a turn for the better when, on 7

April 1931, a Mr. E. R. [perhaps Ernest Richard] Reading of 'Rosedale' Sutton Forest wrote to the Department saying he'd inspected 'Rockdale' with a possible view to purchasing it, but the track down 'was undoubtedly steep' and the orchard was 'in a sadly neglected state' while 'white ants are getting a hold in the house and some of the flooring boards and lining boards are eaten through. The place generally is in a deplorable condition.' Despite this (which may have been a bargaining ploy), he thought there was 'a reasonable living to be made from the place providing 12 months work is put in first brushing the wattles and bracken fern ....and pruning and spraying the orchard.....I would be prepared to have a go at the place under reasonable conditions.' He noted he 'was a returned man'.

Edwin wrote supporting Mr. Reading's application - he had known him for ten years and that he was 'a worker and the type of man likely to make a real effort to make the property a paying proposition.' However, as with all other proposals, ten days later Mr. Reading had inspected the property again and had 'finally decided to have nothing to do with it.'

Meanwhile, in early April 1931 the Department decided that given Edwin's ongoing debt and his inability, despite his efforts, to lease or sell 'Rockdale' it was now time for it to take possession of the property and sell it by tender. Edwin would still be liable to repay his debts. On 28 April 1931 Edwin agreed to this proposal, hoping the Department would be more successful in finding a purchaser if it took possession.'

Here the immediate story of Edwin's travails ends. We know that 'Rockdale' wasn't immediately sold as for sometime up to 1934 Edwin's parents, sister and niece ran it as a guest house; indeed it wasn't until 1937 that it was eventually sold. Edwin in the meantime continued teaching. He ended up being transferred to Gloucester, NSW, where on a happier note on 24 August 1935 at St. Joseph's Church he married Angela Landers; Edwin's parents were also living at Gloucester by then. Edwin died in 1956 at Wyong.

An outstanding question is why 'Rockdale' is now colloquially called 'The Hellhole'. Some say it was a

term of affection for its location. However, dictionaries define a 'hellhole' as, for instance, 'a highly unpleasant place', 'a very unpleasant place', or 'an oppressive and unbearable place'. Did Edwin then end up referring to 'Rockdale' as the 'hellhole' because of the financial hole it put him in?

### Coming Events

**NOTE:** It's no longer required to pre-book for Members' Meetings in the Soldiers' Memorial Hall. Just turn up and register, Morning Tea will be served on entry.

**Mon 5 Apr 10.15 am:**

*BHG Monthly Meeting* at the Soldiers' Memorial Hall. Speaker: David Brennen, *History of Golden Vale Homestead. Sutton Forest.* Morning tea is back on.

**Fri 9 Apr 10.00 am:** Self drive to *Golden Vale Homestead. Sutton Forest.* Sausage sizzle. Event Sold out.

**Thur 22 Apr: 4.00 pm:** *Official Launch of the Bundanoon Heritage Trail* – all members and family welcome, details to be confirmed.

**Mon 26 Apr :** *BHG Committee Meeting.*

**Mon 3 May 10.30 am:**

*BHG Monthly Meeting* at the Soldiers' Memorial Hall. Speaker: John Hines - *Memories of Bundanoon/Penrose.*

**Sun 16 May Self Drive trip to Windellama:**

Everyone welcome, it's going to be fun. Please see Ralph's Flyer attached to this Newsletter.