ST. MARYS!
WHERE'S THAT?
A BRIEF HISTORY
OF
THE AREA

MAIN STREET, ST. MARYS.
ST. MARYS!
WHERE'S THAT?
A BRIEF HISTORY
OF
THE AREA

Compiled by John Ashwood and Students from St. Marys District High School

Published St. Marys District High School

Typesetting and layout by John Ashwood
Printed by Advocate Printers (Burnie) Pty. Ltd.

ISBN 0 646 06621 8
CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE            EARLY SETTLEMENT

CHAPTER TWO            RURAL LIFE

CHAPTER THREE          SCHOOLS AND HOSPITAL

CHAPTER FOUR           CHURCHES AND GRAVEYARDS

CHAPTER FIVE           MINING

CHAPTER SIX            CHARACTERS
INTRODUCTION

This short history of the town of St. Marys and surrounding countryside is an attempt by a group of students to fill an obvious gap in the information available on the area.

Twelve students from grade nine and ten have spent considerable time determining which areas needed focusing on and the format that the book would take. Information was gathered from a variety of sources ranging from mining publications to interviews with elderly residents.

The people who participated in creating this book are: (from left to right)

Back Row : Mr. J. Ashwood, K. Newman, F. Burgess, E. Clement, M. Baker, J. Crockett, A. Lowe,

Front Row : D. Young, J. Woods, G. Hendley, B. Statham. (Insert, K. Garrett)

We hope the reader will find this book both interesting and informative.

John Ashwood,

Group Co-ordinator.
CHAPTER ONE
EARLY SETTLEMENT

Records of discovery of the Fingal Valley may be traced back until as early as 1642 when Abel Tasman, captivated by the majesty of the volcano-like St. Patrick's Head, landed near the site of present day Falmouth and climbed the mountain.

It was not until 1831, however that the St. Marys area was fully explored, and mapped from Mt Nicholas to the Break O'Day River.

Initially, the township of St. Marys consisted of one hut and one house. These were situated on less than one acre. The hut, owned by Mr Groom of Harefield, was occupied by William Greenwood, and Mr Robert Leach owned and lived in the house.
In 1858, Cullenswood was more established than St. Marys. It had a variety of stores, including a hotel, along with many houses. It did in fact, resemble a small town.

However, by the year 1880, St. Marys was a growing town which incorporated a blacksmith's forge and a few shops, and Cullenswood had dwindled.

Once it had established itself, St. Marys became a convict station. It housed the three hundred convicts who were being used in the construction of the St. Marys Pass. This road, which provided a much needed link with the bustling whaling station and shipping port of Falmouth, and gave easier access to the towns of Scamander, St. Helens and Scottsdale, was forged through virgin forest and solid stone.
The Falmouth whaling station was settled around 1825 and was quite small. By 1900 Falmouth had a population of 760. With the decline of the whaling industry Falmouth centred itself around agriculture.

The year 1866 saw the building of a railway which linked St. Marys with the other towns in the valley as well as St. Helens and Conara. This added to the growth of the St. Marys township and provided a reliable service to the larger farms of Cullenswood, Killymoon and Frodsley, which also prospered.

St. Marys was given the status of being a large service town with the establishment of coal mines, dairy farms, a cheese factory and the Elephant Pass, and by 1900, the population had soared to 290.
The facilities in the town included two hotels, two large general stores run by H. C. Dawson and E. B. L. Dawson, a commercial bank, the Launceston Bank for Savings, along with a courthouse and police station, several cake shops and a fish shop. In later years St. Marys also had a picture theatre in Todds Hall, a building which still stands today.

Many of the towns 290 inhabitants were of either German or Irish descent. On arrival these people separated into their different racial groups and formed their own towns; German Town and Irish Town.

Today, the town of St.Marys has a population of eight hundred people. After comparing photos of early and current St.Marys, one is left with a definite impression that not much has changed visually.
CHAPTER TWO
RURAL LIFE

FARMING

Among the first settlers (Germans mainly) many grants of land were made. As the number of grants increased the settlers moved up the Break O'Day river. Most of the prime land i.e., the river flats became large farms, like Cullenswood, Killymoon and Frodsley, leaving smaller blocks in the less fertile areas. Farming was varied - oats, wheat and potatoes were grown and the area proved ideal for dairying. Once there were 50 local dairy farms supplying 2 cheese factories which then distributed to Hobart and Launceston. Unfortunately none remain today, all the land has been converted into wool and meat production.

THE CHEESE FACTORY

The Fingal Valley situated on the east coast of Tasmania was at one time a thriving dairy farming community. The farms supplied milk to the St.Marys Cheese Factory. The factory was built in the early 1930's by Murdoch's. The farmers then formed a co-operative known as St.Marys' Co-operative Society. The cheese factory is situated in Gardners Creek road near the St.Marys Hospital. In St.Marys alone there were about 18 dairy farms. Gray road, German Town and Harefield were main suppliers. Today it is a big grey building, though a few broken windows and some cracked walls it is still standing well for its age. Now it is used as a little hobby shop for its owners. There are no dairy farms remaining in the Valley today all being converted into beef, mainly Pollshorthorn and Angus production.
On the 12th August 1827, Robert Vincent Legge arrived in Tasmania at Hobart Town on the ship "midway" after a five month trip. After getting a land grant in 1826 he moved after 2 years to his new land at Cullenswood, near St.Marys.

Times were very hard, his first home was a hollow tree until he could erect a small dwelling house. It was also very difficult to collect materials. One which they used was timber, which they cut themselves. Materials were mainly transported from Falmouth by horse and cart through the St.Marys pass, which was built by convict labour. Also there were no roads but only bushtracks. The farm was finally settled in the mid 1830's.

The property, named "Cullenswood" which was named after the family home in Ireland, soon became the centre of a thriving farming community. Later a church was built in 1840, on land donated by Robert Vincent Legge. The burial ground in the churchyard has the graves and headstones of many of the settlers since that time. Both the Cullenswood homestead and the church are on the classified list of buildings that must be preserved.

A son of Robert Vincent, William Vincent who was born at Cullenswood in 1841, became an ornithologist (study of birds) of world fame. Among his bird writings he wrote on the landforms of Ben Lomond, Great Lake and the South Esk Valley. When he died in 1918 he was buried in the Cullenswood churchyard along with other members of his family. William Vincent also discovered some years ago that Ben Lomond, near Fingal, said to be 14 miles long, and having a lake on top, is the highest mountain in Tasmania, being some 100 feet higher than Cradle Mountain on the West Coast.
Cullenswood is located on the Break O'day river. This however caused a problem as it was subject to major flooding. This meant that the Cullenswood homestead was usually cut off from the main road, so a packhorse bridge was built over the river. This type of bridge was rare in Tasmania. This bridge may still be in existence. Cullenswood was the earliest settlement in the valley and is still running successfully. Breeding Polishortons and Merinos, the farm is a beef cattle and sheep property. Cullenswood has remained in the family and is now owned by Robert Legge.
Located eight kilometres from Fingal, across the Esk River, Killymoon today is truly a part of Australia's heritage; a place which has been maintained in its original condition. To enter the front door is to step into the early days of Tasmania.

Karl Rawdon Von Steiglitz, an Irishman of Bavarian descent, acquired the tract of land (which included the present farms of Kooringa and Milbrook) under the land grant schemes of the mid 1800’s and began the construction of Killymoon in 1840. Most of the basic building materials came from the surrounding countryside and bricks were made on site. However, cedar for the large shuttered windows came from N.S.W. and the huge iron gates came from Scotland by ship to be off-loaded at Falmouth and carted by bullock teams to the farm itself. The three-storied building was not completed until 1848.

The Steiglitz family (Karl and his wife, formerly Mrs Ransome, and her two sons) occupied the upper two stories of the house, while the basement was used for the servants’ quarters and convict room. (At one time Martin Cash worked on the farm). The family was able to summon the servants with a bell system located in various rooms in the upper two storeys. Each bell had a different tone which enabled the servants to know where they were required.
When Karl decided to return to Germany, he sold Killymoon to his stepson, Thomas Ransome, and the farm remained in the family for 110 years.

The present owners, Mr and Mrs Cowley are in fact, related to the Ransome family.
HAREFIELD

Located a few kilometres out of St Marys, Harefield is one of the most historic properties in the area. One of earliest owners of the property was James Foster the father of Francis Groom who was later to run the property for him.

Francis arrived on the brig "Henry" on the 13th May 1832 at the age of 14. He was to live with friends of his family, the Butlers and be reunited with his elder brother, James Charles Groom, who had migrated five years earlier.

When Francis' brother married in the year 1835 he went to live with him near the village of Carrick. It was here that Francis met Matilda Minnitt who he married on the 4th of November 1839 at St Johns Church Launceston. After their marriage the Grooms took over the lease on a farm owned by Gamaliel Butler at Black Brush. This farm was known as "Arlington". In 1843 they moved to a property called "Harefield" which Francis' Father had purchased at Break O Day Plains. This farm was approximately 2560 acres. Francis grazed sheep and cattle and was involved in the buying and selling of land. Mr Groom was a highly respected member of the community and his ability to judge the values of stock and property made his opinions much sought after.

Francis Groom was father to eleven children:

1. Francis Charles Groom. He was born at "Arlington", Blackbrush on the first of September 1840.

2. James Henry Groom (Harry). He also was born at "Arlington" Blackbrush, on the sixteenth of October 1841.
3. Mary Matilda Groom. She again was born at "Arlington" Blackbrush, on the seventeenth of March 1844.
4. Fredrick Fletcher Groom. He was born at Harefield on the ninth of June.
5. France Matilda Groom. She was born at Harefield as the rest of the children were from here on. She was born on the third of November 1845.
6. Warner Otley Groom. He was born on the twenty sixth of April 1847.
7. Elizabeth McLeod Groom. She was born on the sixteenth of November 1848.
8. Mary Pauline Groom. She was born on the fourteenth of January 1850.
9. Emily Clarkson Groom. She was born on the thirteenth of June 1851.
10. Arthur Champion Groom. He was born on the twenty-sixth of November 1852.
11. Florence Aubrey Groom. She was born on the twenty-first of November 1855.

In 1847, Francis was appointed as a justice of the peace, and in 1846 he was defeated as a member of the first council of the municipality. Throughout his career, Groom was a member of several organisations, including the Fingal Schools Council and he was president of the Road Trust for Cornwall and Glamorgan.

Francis was also well known for his marvellous hospitality, and it was not unusual for him to receive visits from the governor.

In the year 1875 Groom retired from life in the public eye. He died on the 6 of March 1890, after suffering from "dropsy" throughout his last years.

After Francis' death, his children took over the ownership of Harefield, they obtained a counter order to sell the estate with the intention of distributing the proceeds. Matilda Emma moved to Burnie to live with her daughter Emily Harrison. She then died on the fifth of February 1894.
DONALD ALLAN IBBOTT

Donald Allan Ibbott was born in Hobart on January 27th 1899, the son of Henric. Thomas Ibbott (born 10th February 1867) and Minnie Alice Ibbott (born 20th December 1868) who were married on the 28th November 1894. Donald was the second eldest of six children: Audrey Gracelord Ibbott - born 7th July 1874
Donald Allan Ibbott - born 27th Jan. 1899
Mavis Lord Ibbott - born 14th May 1901
Charles Heneric Ibbott - born 23rd Sept. 1905
Herbert Lord Ibbott - born 5th Dec. 1908
Arthur Cecil Ibbott - born 19th July 1911.

The Ibbott family lived in Bothwell and Campagnia before purchasing the two thousand acre property known as Harefield and moving to the St Marys district between the years 1949 - 50. The Ibbott’s travelled all night and half a day to bring 900 sheep from Campagnia to stock Harefield.

When Mr. Ibbott’s parents passed away he, being the eldest son, inherited the property.

In 1960, Donald’s son took over the reigns running Harefield for five years before selling it to Mr. James Napier, the present owner. Mr. Donald Ibbott, who has now been in the district for 40 years, still lives in the main house in Harefield, (circa - 1856).
MILLBROOK and SUNNY BANKS

In 1890 Fredrick Napier arrived in St. Marys and operated a small retailing business. In 1910 the family moved to Sunny Banks which was rented from the Cameron Estate.

When Frederick died in 1922, his wife and family continued to reside at Sunny Banks. In 1931, Garth (Frederick's son) leased the property before purchasing it in 1936 from the Cameron Estate.

The Napier property holding increased in 1945 with the purchase of 1000 acres at Cornwall Road. Garth and his son James then purchased the adjoining Millbrook farm from the Ransome family in 1956. This became the site for James' house in 1960.

The Napier landholding increased in 1966 with the acquisition of Harefield and in 1986 with the purchase of a further 1000 acres from Frodsley.
CHAPTER THREE
SCHOOLS

As the population of St. Marys increased the need for a school became apparent. The first school that was opened to cater for children was located at Gray. It was built approximately one hundred and fifty years ago and was a one room school house. After about fifty years it was forced to close down because the school was physically too small to cater for the number of children wishing to attend. Because of this another school was built at the top of Elephant Pass - at Gray.

The school house had an open fire which heated the classroom during the winter. The wood for the fire was collected by the boys every Friday afternoon, while the girls were taught sewing and knitting. Approximately twenty children attended the school and all grades were taught by a teacher in one room. School commenced at nine thirty in the morning and concluded at three thirty in the afternoon. The main subjects taught were Math, Spelling, History and Geography. During the time the school was opened a lot of teachers taught at the school. A few of the teachers were Mr. Dickson, Elsie Rice and Mr. Johnson.

The now restored school house at Gray

Children started school at the age of seven and finished at the age of fourteen. The students had to walk to school every day and some of them had to walk six miles to attend. When the children first started school they worked on slates and then when they were old enough and could write well they would start writing in exercise books. Homework was given most nights; this homework was mostly mathematics and history.
At the completion of each year every student took an exam on the year's work. If a student did not pass their exam, an inspector who came at the end of each year to give the exam would blame the teacher and not the student for the failure. Very few children went onto High School as it was too expensive and the only High Schools were either in Hobart or Launceston. One family whose children were able to attend High School were the Wardlaws. After completing their school years the children went to work. The boys usually worked from about four in the morning to nine at night at farms around the district. While the girls stayed at home to help their mothers.

The school closed down sixty two to sixty three years ago. This happened because the school became too small for the amount of children attending, the shortage of teachers and it was costing too much to run.
Another school was built this time in St. Marys to replace the old school. This new school was situated in the middle of the town. In 1946 there were still trenches around the school. After the war they filled them up with rubbish from the school. When it was replaced by the new school it became a community hall.

Part of the old school was moved to the new High School to become the Home Arts block. The Cornwall school was brought to St Marys to become the woodwork block.

About five years before the school was built, Mr. Swift the headmaster, took grade 7 and 8 boys over to the new school site and began to clear it up. Children planted a tree every Arbor Day for quite a few years. When the school opened in 1949, secondary students came from Mathinna, Fingal and Cornwall.
HOSPITAL

THE HOSPITAL FROM 1921-1928:

The hospital was first proposed by a public meeting in 1921. The committee first met in a church on Saturday the 28th of May 1921. Those present were: Rev. R.C. Ivory, Dr. Webster, R.W. Legge, A. Creswell, C.F. Salter, A.E. Manning, J. Brough, S. Trinder, W. Reece, V. Haas and G. Bolton.

The original name for the hospital was to be “St.Marys Children’s and Maternity Hospital.” It was in 1927, six years after the meeting the name was cut to “The St.Marys District Hospital.” A giant public response followed in the form of a donation of one thousand, four hundred and ninety four pounds towards the foundation laying. Many other fund raising events followed such as fancy dress football matches, raffles and barn dances.

The public support for the project encouraged the committee to draw plans for the site. It was estimated to cost three thousand pounds. In November 1921 a representative of the hospital committee met the premier, Sir Walter Lee, to seek a pound for pound government grant to aid in construction. The representative reported that the grant had been cleared. The amount proposed was to be two thousand pounds. The original site was a gift from Colonel R.V. Legge but was found unsuitable until 1923 when the present site was found. A public meeting was held in July 1923. The site chosen was Gardeners Creek Road which is its present location. The land was cleared and fenced and although the first and second sets of the plans were not approved by the director of public health, the third set of plans were. On the 4th of September 1927 Mr R.W. Legge participated in the opening ceremony of the laying of the foundation stone which marked the opening of the hospital.
On the 8th of December a meeting was held to elect a board of management. Those elected were: R.W. Legge, C.F. Salter, L.J. Steel, H. Holter, B.J. Jackson, W. Graham, E.L. Ransom, H.R. Warren, C.S. Hood and J.E. McKenzie. At the same meeting they elected Mr R.W. Legge as Chairman. The Board scouted for staff and the first Matron began duty. Her name was Sister H. Morgan. The first patient was admitted on the 26th of February 1928.

ST. MARYS DISTRICT HOSPITAL TODAY

In this modern era the St. Marys District Hospital is an asset to the people in St. Marys and the Fingal Valley. The hospital is averaging eighteen patients a day. The number of staff enlisted with the hospital is forty with twenty five being full time and the remainder, part time. The staff is under the leadership of Matron Alison Smith. The hospital is being managed by a regional board of directors.

In 1973 the Napier Wing was constructed as part of the hospital and was operational by December in the same year. The Napier Wing is being used for acute nursing, medical nursing and long term care.

Another service involving the hospital is meals-on-wheels, which has been operating between fifteen and twenty years. The service is supplying the elderly and disadvantage in St. Marys, Fingal, Cornwall and Mathinna. Meals-on-wheels is servicing 25 people on a daily basis.

Today the St. Marys District Hospital has come under scrutiny of the Tasmanian Government and is facing closure or being turned into an elderly home.
The first church to be erected in St. Marys was the Catholic Church at Cullenswood. In 1840 Robert Vincent Legge allocated sixteen acres of land for the Christ Church. This land was valued at $25 yearly rental. He funded the church and on March 16, 1846 the foundation stone was laid by Robert Vincent Legge and his wife, Elizabeth.

Orders were made at this same time for a parsonage and a Sunday School to be built. These were also to be paid by Robert Vincent Legge. Finally, on March 21, 1852 the Christ Church was consecrated. It is said that this took so long due to unforeseen circumstances of the Probation system. Bishop Nixon, from Hobart, performed the early morning ceremony. The Fingal Cemetery was also consecrated that same day by Bishop Nixon. However, the Christ Church had already held many services before the consecration. Mr. Legge had taken these services, although, occasionally the Rev. W. Richardson travelled from Avoca to take services. However, this was mainly only for Holy Communion.

Rev. Dr. Parsons, Robert Vincent Legge's nephew, who lived in Ireland, came to the Fingal Valley at his uncle's request. He became the new rector of the Fingal and Cullenswood when he arrived in late December, 1850. It wasn't until the late months of 1854 that Rev. Dr. Parsons relinquished his duties to the Rev. Augustus Barkway.
During Parsons' time as a rector, Falmouth had been included in the parish. It was in 1852 that it had been organised that a church be built in Falmouth. The response for the proposal of a church in Falmouth was so great that the money was immediately raised. However, for no given reason a church was never built.

In 1858 Rev. Augustus Barkway moved to the St. Paul's Cathedral in Launceston. Mr. Legge took the services for two years; although a Clergyman from Avoca came to take Holy Communion. In 1860 Rev. John Chambers came to Cullenswood. For 15 years he stayed in the Fingal Valley and became extremely popular with the congregation. When he left they presented him with 50 sovereigns and an illuminated address. Rev. J. Evans came in 1876 and remained for three years. It was about this time that the parish boundaries changed. Cullenswood, Avoca and Fingal all joined, whilst Gould's Country, St. Marys, St. Bay, Thomas Plains all came together. This meant that a large parish was made. It was a huge job for one man to do, with only a horse transportation, along with dreadful roads.

It was Rev. J. W. H. L'Oste who was appointed to this large post. This was in the year 1880. Rev. C. S. L'Oste, Rev. J. W. H. L'Oste's brother, helped out with the post and its massive work load. Vernon Wright also worked as a lay preacher in Georges Bay.
To the memory of
ROBERT VINCENT LECCE, Esq.
Second Son of MICHAEL LECCE, Esq.
of Carraroe, Ireland.
Died at Cullenswood, 11th June, 1891.
Aged 69 years.
He left his Earth a gentleman and a lover
And ELIZABETH GRAVES,
The beloved Wife of the above,
And Daughter of Capt. John de Laperriere,
The bearer to England,
of the Travailers dispatched.
Died at Cullenswood, 11th Sep. 1893.
Aged 75 years.
Well done thou good and faithful servant.
Enter thou into the joy of Thy Lord.
CHAPTER FIVE
MINING

The St Marys' region holds many items of historic interest but the one industry which is inseparable from the area's past and is largely responsible for its settlement is without doubt the coal mining.

From as early as 1843, black coal was known to exist in the Fingal Valley, but well organised mining operations did not commence until the 1880's. Completion of the Government owned St Marys - Conara rail link provided the means of moving sufficient coal to market to justify development of coal mines at two discovery sites on the southern side of the Mount Nicholas Range.

An early anecdote describes how these two sites were discovered. "In 1879 Mr George Crisp of 'Lewis Hill' was hunting on the Mt Nicholas Range when, so the story goes, his dog chased a wombat into its burrow. The dog's vigorous scratchings produced not soil but black gravel-coal." This mundane event became the forerunner to the foundations in 1886 of the first coal mine in the valley, instigated by the Cornwall Coal Company, and the birth of the town of Cornwall, several kms west of St Marys. This anecdote appears to be fairly close to the truth as Mr George Crisp, Edward Gaunt and their Father-in-law, Mr Frederick Ransome, past owner of 'Killymoon', were the three gentlemen who took out the required leases of land for the planned mine at Cornwall. These leases were referred to in the Prospectus as "Ransome, Crisp and Gaunts Coal Sections" and dealt with the site taken over by the Cornwall Coal Company. This left the second site discovered, vacant, which later developed into the Mt Nicholas mine. However, there is much contradictory evidence concerning the opening and operating dates of the Mt Nicholas mine so it can only be

A COAL TRAIN LEAVING THE CULLENSWOOD LOADING YARD, 1904.
presumed that the Mt Nicholas company established the second sight around much the same time as Cornwall Coal.

Soon after operations at the Cornwall plant began, the manager was instructed to “knock off all hands” except “three necessary to continue the main drive” in an attempt to conserve funds while the essential tramway was being constructed. Nevertheless, the mines were still a stimulation for men to come into the area, and the coal mining coupled with the expanding farms can be given credit for settlement of the area. A further indication of the way that mining affected the area can be seen by the development and expansion of Cullenswood, the settlement where the coal was loaded onto the railway for transportation out of the valley.

CORNWALL

The Cornwall Coal Mine is still going strong after a century of mining. This mine was responsible for the rapid growth of St Marys, which along with the townships of Cornall and Mount Nicholas had a joint population of 3000 during the mining boom. It appears that preliminary operations did occur before 1886 but it was not until 5th March 1886 that the initial move to make Cornwall Coal a public Company was made. The proposal was for the company to mine three seams already exposed on the Mt Nicholas Range. The Cornwall Colliery commenced regular operations on the 1st of May 1886 with the formal incorporation of the Company on the 26th of June 1886.

After a dicey first couple of years due to fluctuating markets the total output of coal in 1888 was 26,741 tons with sales to local railways, industry and shipping and exports to Melbourne. The Company made its first profit, of 365 pounds in the half year ended March 1890. Cornwall continued to prosper despite rivalry from the Mt. Nicholas Company. Discussions of merging the two companies did occur over a period of 50 years or so but it was not until 1940 that Cornwall Coal actually took over the Mt Nicholas Company.

To begin with, coal was mined by hand in the flickering light of tallow lamps. It was then loaded into wooden skips and drawn to the minehead by pit ponies. As time went by methods of recovery were updated but the mine still remained rather labour intensive. Several years later machinery began to be used but it was not until 1950 that modern mechanisation really arrived, when Cornwall purchased one of the first continuous miners to come to Australia at a cost of around 50,000 pounds. Mechanical cutters, loaders and underground coal transport were established at Cornwall and Mt Nicholas Collieries by 1955.

However competition from a further source, cheap oil, coupled with high freight costs forced the closure in 1957 of the Mt Nicholas Colliery thus allowing the Cornwall mine to expanded. Annual production peaked at 180,000 tonnes in 1956 and 1960. However due to a declining market the original Cornwall shaft was closed on the tenth of April 1964 leaving the Duncan Colliery, at Fingal, to supply the necessary demand.

Earlier on as the mining industry was just beginning and the future of coal was appearing promising preparations had been made and additional leases taken out for a new mine on the Mt Nicholas Range when the existing seams were to run out. In 1979 a further colliery, Blackwood, was started. This was only a short distance away from the 1964 workings of the Cornwall Mine. The first coal was mined from Blackwood in 1980 but full production level was not reached until early 1981. The original Cornwall Mine had now switched completely to Blackwood.
The town of Cornwall, which sprung up around the original Cornwall shaft, was not unlike other towns in the area which expanded to meet the needs of the mine employees. However, in many cases in Cornwall, the miners’ houses were not under the control of the company but leased from the Crown by their occupants. The assessment role of the Municipality of Fingal in 1890 gives us some idea of the type of settlement and the number of men employed in the Cornwall Mine in 1890, four years after the mine was established. On the fifth of February 1890 there were a total of twenty households around Cornwall Mine with their working-age males presumably employed as miners. Their houses varied between a “hut and land” to a “house and garden” and “house and office”. To supply the needs of these households, there was one store. The township continued to grow but then in 1898 suffered a minor setback when major bushfires occurred, destroying the Manager’s Cottage and office.

This is how the township, which was later to be involved in a mining boom, grew up.

One hundred years later, after seeing many changes, the township is basically the same as when it was first established, twenty houses and one shop.

Of the present mining workforce of the Cornwall Coal Company, of which the Blackwood Mine is a part, approximately two-thirds bear family names dating back to the very early days of coal mining in the Fingal Valley. The success and longevity of Cornwall is in no small way due to the accumulating mining skills and knowledge passed down from one generation to another, both in coal and hard rock mining.

MT. NICHOLAS

The Mt Nicholas Colliery was the second major mine to open in the St Marys area. Operations began in 1881 with the mine being controlled by the Mt Nicholas Coal Company. It was a mine of reasonable size, employing 70 men in the early 1900s. With
seventy men working there the need for a township increase and the town of Mt Nicholas grew up. It was home to a small store which supplied the miners families with the everyday necessities and at one stage there was even a small school, catering from children from grade one to grade six. This was the town around which the miners families wove their lives.

To begin with Mt Nicholas was like the Cornwall Mine, rather labour intensive, with the coal being mined entirely by hand. The picks used had handles four feet long and a deliberately square blade so that it could bite into the coal. Once a week they were sent to the mines blacksmith to be reshaped.

Once mined, the coal, which due to a high ash content was not of exceptional quality, was loaded into wooden skips which were pulled to the mine entrance by pit ponies supervised by their “wheelers.” One wheeler and his ponies were in charge of the skips of four to five men. These pit ponies would have measured about ten hands in height (a little over a metre) and were stabled about three to four hundred metres from the mine.

A rather ingenious method of transporting the coal from the mine to the railway yards had been devised and operated like this; Once outside the mine the wheeler took the full skips and attached them to a rope running above a set of rails. The skips were then released and ran down to the bottom of the decline where they were emptied into a weigh box and then sorted to free them from unwanted rocks. They were then tipped into a string of twelve to fourteen railwasy trucks and the brakes of the trucks were released. The trucks would then run down a further stretch of rails, through the present day “Milbrook” property and to the railway yards where they awaited collection. The empty trucks were pulled back to the mine by two horses.

Mt Nicholas mine also had a further intriguing method for transporting the timber needed for the mine supports from the bush to the mine. A chute had been erected which ran down the part of the mountain on which the timber was cut. Two men were employed on contract for the cutting. They would place the logs in this chute and send them to the bottom of the hill where they would be loaded onto a trolleys and pulled by ponies to the mine. However the men loading the logs at the bottom were placed in considerable danger by not knowing when the logs would be coming down the chute so to overcome this a signal was erected at the top of the hill. When the arm on this signal was pulled down the men at the bottom knew to stand clear. These two inventions were things which made life just a little easier for the men and helped the mine to function more efficiently.

The Mt Nicholas mine consisted of two levels each measuring around four feet six inches in height. In some cases this was reduced even further to around three and a half feet and the men were forced to work on their hands and knees, pulling the laden skips themselves as even the ponies would not fit. These are the type of conditions the men had to work in for eight hours every day.

In the early days the men worked by the flickering light of lamps. To begin with the design was rather primitive, being basically a candle mounted upon a crude framework. The next lamp was a container filled with tallow with a wick which was lit by a flint located in the container, and could be attached to the miners helmet. The third step was a carbide lamp, more reliable than the previous lights and also able to be hooked to the helmet. Whether this was the last design in the history of the Mt Nicholas mine is uncertain.

Unlike Jubilee, the employees of Mt Nicholas received only one weeks holiday a year and were payed by the tonnage instead of a set rate. Therefore if they “slacked off” it was their loss, not the Companies.
As mentioned before, in 1940 the Cornwall Coal Company and the Mount Nicholas Coal Company merged and the Mt Nicholas mine was taken over by Cornwall. Whether because of this or because of the increasing industrial times the next step on Mt Nicholas’s calendar was the introduction of machinery to the mine. In 1955 the first machines arrived being in the form of steam driven locomotives and conveyor belts. While this made life easier for the men in many cases it signalled the end for many of the ponies which had served the mine so faithfully.

In 1957, only two years after the machinery had been installed, the Mt Nicholas mine was forced to close. This was partly due to competition from cheap oil and also because Mt Nicholas’s coal was not of such high quality as the mainland supplies. Thus the mainland mines took over what little demand there was left.

However, unlike several other mines which only went into temporary recession the Mt Nicholas mine was destined to remain closed, with the Cornwall mine taking over all its newly gained machinery. So it was that after almost seventy years of operation the Mt Nicholas mine closed for good, rendering desolate with it the once bustling township which had grown up to serve the miners’ needs.

**DALMAIN**

The Dalmain coal mine was the smallest of the four mines in the St Marys area. It produced good quality coal being part of an extensive coal being part of an extensive coalfield. Like the other small mine in the area, Jubilee, Dalmain was mainly run by manual labour and had only one pit pony.

The history of the exploration for coal in the Gray area, 11 kms south east of St Marys, appears to have been a pastime which was begun around 1860. At this time a section of shaley coal was discovered in the upper part of Picanniny Creek, but due to dense vegetation nothing further was done until 1887 when the first mining leases in the area were taken out. However, although many leases were forthcoming it was not until the early 1900’s that the Dalmain seams were seriously investigated. Then in 1914 after the explorations, ”The Dalmain Collieries Company was floated, in a bid to open up some of the Dalmain seams.” By 1915 the main tunnel had been driven 120 metres and plans were underway for the erection of an aerial ropeway running from the mine to Picanniny Point as a means of transporting the coal. There is a trivial anecdote concerning the ropeway which runs to the point. Once a miner snuck into the ropeway bucket for a smoke and forty winks, unbeknown to his mates. Knock off time came and the bucket was run half way down the cable to be out of harms way for the night. However, the miner was still inside and as a result spent a rather uncomfortable night.

On August the 24th 1917, after operating unofficially for several years, the Dalmain mine was officially opened. The aerial ropeway had a haulage capacity of fifty tonnes an hour, and once at Picanniny Point the coal was loaded onto the waiting boats from the 180 metre long jetty.

However these promising operations were destined to failure as, with advent of the first world war finding suitable boats to transport the coal to the mainland was almost impossible. This, coupled with serious damage done to the jetty in a period of stormy weather was as much as the company could take and in 1918 the mine was forced to close.

However, operations commenced again in 1938 with the coal being wheeled to the surface by hand and transported to St Marys by road and thence by rail to it’s destination.
Development to the south of the mine was started and in 1950 a second drive began. This was finished in 1952 and replaced the old main heading which had become unfit for use. For reasons which remain unexplained, the year after these new developments, 1953, the mine was suddenly forced to close down once again. It has remained closed since then although evidence suggests that deposits of coal may still remain.

Unlike the two larger mines, Cornwall and Mt. Nicholas, Dalmain was similar to the Jubilee Mine in that the miners did not live on site, thus making it easier for the mine to fade from people’s memories once the men had left.

ENTERING THE CORNWALL COAL MINE IN ELECTRIC TRAM, 1907.

JUBILEE MINE
There is much contradictory evidence as to the opening and operating dates of the Jubilee Mine. It is assumed that Jubilee opened after the Cornwall and Mt Nicholas mines but this is not certain. However, it is known that the mine closed down around 1960.
The most men ever employed in the mine at one time was 25. They worked an eight hour day beginning at half past seven and "knocking off" at half past three. They worked five days a week with maintenance work on the occasional Saturday and received roughly three weeks holiday a year. During these three weeks they received no pay so money at these times was scarce. Things were hardly better during working times with the average wage for a miner being around one pound (two dollars) a day.
The structure of the Jubilee mine was fairly simple with one main tunnel running for about half a mile and being five to six feet in height. The mine possessed only one cutting machine so it may be assumed that the majority of the coal was mined by hand. Originally there was a furnace to circulate the air throughout the mine but this was found to be inefficient so several fans were installed which resulted in far better air supply.
Underground the coal was transported in skips pulled by either the men or the mines single pit pony and was considered to be of a good household quality. It is thought that originally Jubilee’s coal was taken down to the St Marys Railway Station by a horse and dray and a two horse wagon. This supposedly continued until around 1924, when it is assumed that a tramway was built past the present day hospital enabling the coal to be sent down in trucks to the station.

Jubilee has been closed for a number of years now and the mine itself is almost hidden by the rampant undergrowth, only the sleepers of the once busy tramway remain.

This sad finale holds true to many mines and their supportive townships world wide, as, like in so many cases, man only wants what he can get from the land and when this has been exploited he’ll go, content to leave behind him the mess he has created. This is how three of the four once blooming mines in the area have finished, desolate and deserted and it is now only Cornwall’s mine, Blackwood which is left of the once busy industry which made the Fingal Valley what it is today.
Mr Jack Smith was born in St. Helens in 1904. His mother, being a Trellogen, was taken there for his birth and then she and her new son returned home to St. Marys where he has lived for his whole life - 86 years. Living in St. Marys,

Mr Smith attended the school which was situated where the town hall now stands. There were two rooms, a large one and the other small. In those days the school moved a great deal. Before the town hall, the school was at Grey, before that at Mt Nicholas and German Town. About 150 boys and girls attended. Mr Smith attended school until he was fourteen years old and when he left he went to learn a trade, as a shoemaker.

His family which included his parents, an older sister and younger brother, lived where the St. Marys shoe shop is now located. In those days it was also a shoe shop owned by Jack Smith's father who was a shoemaker. Jack was able to fill his father's shoes and continued to practise his trade for about fifty years until selling the shop in 1978.
Mr Smith had a house built for himself and his new bride in 1930. Unfortunately they didn’t have a family of their own as she was sick for most of her life. Never-the-less, it was a very happy marriage. According to Jack, houses in those days would cost about 120-130 pounds, or the equivalent of 240-250 dollars. Some of the early houses still stand and among the oldest houses would be the late Mr Quinn’s, George Oliver’s and Mrs Maney’s, which is next door to the bakery.

Mr Smith played a fair amount of sport, including football, which used to be played where the district high school is now located. He also drove the local ambulance and transported the local children to and from school. He continues to hold a current driver’s licence today!

Transport in those days was difficult according to Jack. The coach provided the main means but naturally this was slow and they had to stop to change horses at Killymoon. Many people grew their own produce and would use the coach to sell their goods at different places.

Naturally, with 86 years to his credit, Jack can tell quite a few entertaining stories such as the ghost of St. Marys Pass and mysterious deaths in the area.

HAROLD THOMAS

Harold Thomas - Blacksmith. Mr Harold Thomas lived the full 82 years of his life at St Marys. One of eleven children, Mr Thomas began blacksmithing at the age of thirteen, and continued with this work for about sixty years. He was taught by his father, Alfred Charles Thomas, at his family’s blacksmith shop in St Marys, which was situated where the present day Shell Service Station stands.

Alfred Thomas was born at Ross, he learned blacksmithing from a Mr Jack Oliver and Mr Sam Ridgers, (both residents of Fingal), when he was twelve years of age. When he started work as a blacksmith, Alfred was too small to reach the handles of the bellows, so he had to stand on a box.

During his working life, Alfred had jobs on a farm at Fingal, a sheep-farm at Longford, and the Jubilee Mine, before marrying one of the Lohrey girls from Germantown and settling down to his blacksmiths forge in St Marys. In those times, there was quite a large demand for shoeing, and blacksmiths shod all horses from ponies to pacers.

Mr Thomas first began working, (an eight hour day), at the Jubilee Mine in 1924, wheeling out with the ponies and cutting coal. He was also the blacksmith at this mine. Of a morning, he’d sharpen the picks, and he would often shoe the ponies, although they only needed shoeing every few weeks. Mr Thomas made shoes for the ponies at night and on weekends. He worked at Jubilee for thirty-five and a half years until the mine closed in 1960.
While working, Mr Thomas would probably shoe two or three horses on a Saturday, the occasional one on a Sunday, and sometimes one or two a night after work. During the Summer months, Mr Thomas would work up to nine o'clock at night shoeing horses.

After leaving the Jubilee Mine, Harold took up a position at the Cornwall Mine, then, when that closed, he was leading hand with the Forestry Commission for a while. After this he worked at the Duncan Mine until he retired at sixty years of age. Blacksmithing then became his full-time profession.

Harold who died in 1991 was one the last remnants of a generation of skilled craftsmen, who, in this day and age, are a rapidly diminishing breed.