

# PLOD ESSAY: HOLLINS SELECTIONS

Parish of Wonthaggi, County of Mornington 31, 32, 34, 35

*This essay was written by our now deceased valued member, Margaret Rixon (nee Hollins). It was given to then president Sam Gatto, to use "as he saw fit" shortly before she died in 2012. He read it and the other attached documents and, aware of their value, intended to use them in the future when writing about the pre-State Mine period of the Wonthaggi area. While writing up an essay on the origins of the name Wonthaggi and how Wonthaggi got its name for the September PLOD, he remembered the Rixon material he held in trust, took it out of his archives, and realised that there was a very interesting PLOD essay ready to be typed up. Irene and Fay agreed.*

The Wild Cattle Run, named after cattle left behind in 1828 by the abandoned Corinella Military Settlement, was subdivided in the 1860s into five smaller runs, one of these being called the Powlett South after the Commissioner for Westernport.

In the late 1860s this run was subdivided into Counties, which were divided again into Parishes which became part of the County of Mornington. One of these was called Wonthaggi.

In June 1885 John Hollins of Drysdale registered as an applicant to the District Surveyor at Geelong for a licence to graze land in the Parish of Wonthaggi. After the survey fees were paid, the application was granted, and the four eldest Hollins brothers, Wm., John, George, Harry and Charlie, travelled the 135 miles to the selections, the trip taking a month. Their possessions were loaded on a bullock dray with the stock walking and the poultry in crates. They had to lay corduroy tracks – saplings cut into lengths – to get across the Koo-Wee-Rup Swamp.

When they reached Grantville they were met by a guide with a compass to take them to their selections, cutting a trail which wound through dense bush and timber. When they arrived at their blocks they had to start clearing the land as required by the Selections Act. There were wallabies, kangaroos and koalas in the thick scrub. Tree clearing was done by a huge roller pulled by bullocks, large timber being cut into lengths and sawn into posts and palings for buildings and fences. Their houses were wattle and daub huts and were built near fresh water springs.

The final clearing was done by fire, then rye grass seeds planted when the rains came. They would have brought cuttings of fruit trees to start their orchards, and seeds for vegetable gardens.

The Selections Act required improvements such as housing for the settler and his stock be constructed, wells and dams dug, fencing done, as well as the rent paid. Two of the brothers would go to the Riverina District of N.S.W. shearing to earn money to pay for these until they were self-sufficient. The Policeman at Griffiths Point (San Remo) would inspect the selections to see if the settlers were complying with the conditions of their licences, as well as making valuations of the work done. He would then send a written report to the Department of Lands and Survey in Melbourne.

Farming was mostly cattle and sheep grazing, though there was some dairying with the milking done by hand. The first butter manufactured in the district was done by one of the

Hollins girls, Emma, who married neighbouring farmer Harry Hollole. She and another sister, Nell, who also married a local farmer, Michael Cock, would come down to look after the "boys". The butter was collected from Hollole's by the Melbourne Chilled Butter Company, which also picked up cheese, lard and bacon which was cured and smoked on the farms.

By 1890 there was a butchery at Archies Creek and meat, wrapped in calico, was delivered around the district in a covered wagon. Stock to be sold was droved to Dandenong which had the nearest market. It also had the closest railway station, until the Great Southern line to Leongatha was opened in 1900, and animals were then walked to Lang Lang.

Crops grown were mainly oats and maize with a steam-driven machine travelling from farm to farm to thresh the grain. A horse-drawn reaper and binder would cut grass for hay and chaff.

The brothers would ride to Grantville, San Remo and Inverloch for supplies though there was a small store at Kilcunda. Coastal steamers called into these townships and the boys would take such goods as animal skins on their packhorses to be sent to Melbourne for sale.

To cross the Powlett River they would swim a horse over with a wire rope which was tied to a tree, and they would help their stock across while holding onto the rope with both hands. Furniture, timber and crates had to be swung over on these ropes. Some years later a bridge was made over the Powlett Crossing, and a hotel built with a school, No. 2272, being opened nearby in 1885. A second one, No. 3404, opened in 1901 further inland because of the severe flooding on the river.

Mail came by horseback from Grantville, San Remo and Anderson's Inlet (Inverloch), but later the Wonthaggi Post Office began on Davies-Griffiths block with Harry Hollins' wife Lillian as postmistress. The nearest doctor was Dr. Joyce near Inverloch, then as Dalyston developed, Dr. Baird, assisted by Nurse Clements. When people died they were buried at San Remo, Anderson's Inlet and Grantville until the Kilcunda cemetery opened in 1907.

Ministers of religion travelled around the district, calling at "homesteads" on horseback, and later in a buggy and pair. Other itinerate visitors were hawkers, mostly "Indian" with a variety of goods for sale in covered wagons. They were welcomed by the women and children. The nearest shops were now at Archies Creek and Dalyston, which gradually over the next few years had hotels, halls, saddlers, churches, blacksmiths and bakeries. Dalyston also had saleyards, a bank and a solicitor. Archies Creek had a butter factory from 1903, operated by the Wonthaggi Dairy Produce Company.

The settlers worked from daylight to dark, coping with droughts, floods, bushfires and caterpillar plagues. However, there was time for relaxation. The Wonthaggi Cricket Club began in 1899, played at the Archies Creek ground. The football club also played on the other side of the Powlett River. There was plumpton (greyhound) racing at Archies Creek and horse racing at Dalyston.

The annual "show" was held at Grantville and farming families would exhibit stock and produce, and meet other settlers. Evening activities took place on nights with, or near, a full moon, with some riding horses – ladies with a change of clothes packed in a saddlebag. Families usually drove a pony and trap to these special occasions.

There were picnics at nearby beaches with the men fishing and the young ones paddling in the water with the women looking on. There were fish and eels in the river, and some popular spots for outings.

John Hollins died in 1899 and left his selection Block No. 31 to his son Wm. John, who had lived on it for 14 years. In 1900 he married Jean Hunter at Captain Henderson's house at Bass Landing, and built a more substantial house in the vicinity of the now Watt Street, with a garden, orchard, shearing shed and barn close by.

Their first daughter, Winifred Jean, was born there in 1901, delivered by Dr. Joyce with Jean's sister Mary assisting. The birth was registered at Inverloch. Their second child, Charles Frederick, was born at Dalyston in 1906, and the third, Clarice, also at Dalyston in 1909. Both of these were registered at Archies Creek.

In February 1910 their land was reserved by the State Government as a township and development site for the Mine which had opened at the Powlett Coalfields as a matter of urgency in November 1909, because of strikes at the Newcastle coalfields.

The new town was named Wonthaggi, the name the district was already known by, and was proclaimed a Borough.

With the money paid by the Crown for their selection and improvements, they were able to leave the Powlett Plains and join other members of the Hollins family who had moved to better quality land at Dalyston.

