

Extract from: Early Jottings on the Upper Page and Isis River Districts

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CHAPTER 3

Warlands Creek by Mick Greer

The confluence of Warland's Creek and the Page River occurs just about the southern boundary of Harben Vale and the Shire camping reserve. This reserve was acquired by Warrah Shire — "For the use of bona fide ratepayers travelling stock and teamsters horses." Originally part of Bickham, early photos of an inspection party indicate that Romeo Gillespie was Shire Engineer at the time — having attained the rank of Captain during the 1914-18 War. He did a lot to encourage younger men to continue their survey studies while awaiting demobilization and later was a strong driving force in having the profession of Surveyor accorded its proper status and professional recognition.

Other writers have no doubt traced the history of Harben Vale through the ownership of William Henry Warland, F. R. White and his descendants who sold to the family of John Morrissey — Irish by birth, he came to Australia as a school teacher, worked hard mentally and physically, with his sons Pat and Jack built up quite a pastoral Empire in which his sons Frank and Charley also took their place. Later the property passed to R. J. H. Linsley who jackarooed on "Timor," Muswellbrook in early life. He came back from 1914-18 War as a Captain with a Military Cross and Croix de Geurre, one can only imagine what he and his mates endured, not to mention having to be kissed on both cheeks as part of the conferral of the Croix de Geurre. (He really was not a kissy sort of chap). He took over country on Harben Vale on "Dancing Dick" Creek — moving to Harben Vale in 1936. He really loved Harben Vale — had good quality Hereford Cattle, grew wheat, oats and lucerne and kept the property in "Show Room" condition. He kept his employees for a long time, most stayed until the place was sold after his death. Joe Claire went there on leaving school, to assist his father in the garden, Joe's father Jim had spent some years in the garden for the White family.

With the exception of service with A. I. F., Joe spent his entire working life in that garden. He now lives in Blandford in a cottage earlier owned by Tom Clifford another long time employee on both "Harben Vale" and "Bickham".

The creek forms the boundary between Harben Vale, the property of the family of J. L. Norville, up to a point just north of the Anglican Church of St. Mark's the original creek crossing to Harben Vale.

On the east bank we see the remains of the driveway – Elms, Mock Orange etc. Mock Orange had an attractive colour grain, old timers would carve whip handles etc. from its timber, very often bringing them to a fine finish with a broken beer bottle. Nearby stood the home of Jim Oram, the village post master till the job was taken over by Clarrie Baker some years after his return from W. W. I. Jim Orman had a talent for “charming off” warts etc. O. K. the Medics need a laugh sometimes – but the warts came off after old Jim did his little act. The only visible sign of treatment being possibly a rub with a leaf off any tree which was handy. The creek used to sweep right alongside the New England Highway and then we come to the home of Mick Shanahan. Mick had worked on the Railway as maintenance man on the roads, he had several daughters and one son Joe who spent many years on my father's place at the head of the Creek. The next cottage on the Creek was Jack Stearn's cottage. Jack spent most of his life in the employ of the White family, driving bullock teams and later a horse team.

Close to Jack Stearn's house was a stand of cherry trees – rare in the district. Nearby was some open ground where gypsies used to camp when they travelled by horse caravan. As a kid I remember their habit of having a sing-song in the dusk of the evening. General orders for most householders would be to lock up the fowls and tie a dog or two near the hay sheds.

Jack married a stout lady also in the service of the White family. She kept a very neat home and always had Jack turned out well. By comparison with his bachelor brothers Elias and Jim you could say he was just about a dandy. The Stearns family were originally settled on the Hawkesbury River, came to Gundy and later to Blandford. Elias and Jim spent their entire life in ring-barking, suckering and “burning off”. They spent years on Harben Vale and Timor Station with periods of employment by members of the Watson family and other Isis settlers. They did a few years burning off on “Warrah” at Willow Tree. When Elias returned to their tiny hut and garden, Jim spent some years on Campbell's Creek doing timber treatment and blackberry control for Henry Norville.

So we find ourselves at the northern end of the village of Blandford, to borrow some words from the description by Metes and Bounds on the conveyance of the Plough Inn property c. 1854-55 from William Henry Warland to Thomas Greer – I quote – “Running from a stake on the east bank of the Pages River to a spot where the two high roads to Maitland meet.” Taken from Book 6 - Folio 16 at Registrar General's Office.

In modern language we are at the junction of the Timor Road and the New England Highway. Due north in the distance we see the Mullins Home, established by the parents of Dan Mullins who spent his life there and raised three daughters and four sons, apart from his farm he also did a lot of fencing and timber work on Barsham and other properties in the area. Sons Barney, Tom and Jack joined him in his labours. Younger son Vince became a Marist Teaching Brother. He became widely recognised as a top maths teacher. One of the few who could teach mathematics.

Close by we see the home of Henry Avard. He and sons Hector and Rowley were all good with a single furrow plough. They kept a stripper and winnower in action for many years usually drawn by three horses. The stripper did its last season drawn by Martin Norville with a McCormick Deering tractor. This really kept the boys turning the Winnower Handle busy – Tractors don't need "a breather". Then Martin almost hit the Jet Age – he bought a six foot (6 ft) McKay Harvester. It was customary in those days to combine forces and cater for the neighbouring farms.

It would be hard to say how many plots of lucerne would be cut by Stan Swanson for various neighbours. Usually cut when in flower, it provided good honey for Jack Fleming's bees. Jack was quite a character, though good mates with Stan, he would potter around his bees and rain down some spectacular and colourful curses on Stan, his mower and horses as they blithely cut the lucerne and thus cut off the supply of pollen.

Jack wrote some great letters to me whilst I was in the A. I. F. Solid earthy epistles, my mates would gather close on mail days in case another letter from Jack arrived. Of his own volition Jack packed and sent me a can of beautiful honey and a can of comb honey.

On the subject of good correspondents, not to be outdone by some bush telegraph, Harry Miller heard that Jack had sent me honey – he wrote post haste; the comments were juicy – one being "Better Jack Fleming's honey than – – – proposed tins of Golden Syrup. In a very patriotic speech the Mayor of a neighbouring town had said the boys over there should be sent some comforts "like a tin of Golden Syrup now and then". Needless to say my mates got as much pleasure from my "pen pals" as I did – dearest to my heart is that those two old cobbles wrote to me of their own kindness and concern.

Back to business.

The Common Lane ran between the Barsham homestead block and the Shearer's Creek paddock of Harben Vale. At the head of the lane began a lease which was allotted to Jack Shanahan as a soldier settler after the 1914-18 War.

Jack was a son of John Shanahan of "Homewood" Box Tree and like his four or five brothers was a top hand with sheep dogs, a neat horseman, with better than average ability to handle livestock.

The block was too small for an independent holding and later passed into the possession of Hector Avard who worked it in conjunction with other family acres.

The Permanent common ran from Harben Vale-Barsham corner across a fairly steep mountain to a frontage on Warlands Creek. During the tough times of the 1930's, relief money was used to form a bush road through the lease to where we join the main creek again.

This road was put through under the supervision of the then Shire Engineer W. S. (Bill) Arthur.

Upon the outbreak of war, Bill Arthur joined the R. A. A. F., survived the Japanese assault on Timor, as a sick man was evacuated by Submarine and lived to fight another day supervising construction of Air Fields in Papua New Guinea. Some hard-case local chaps worked on this job; Spider Adams, some of the Schumaker boys, the Blaydens, Bill Hartman and others.

Leaving the end of the Lease we could save a long and steep ride if we move out on to a rocky ridge on the country held by the Norville family for many years – to our right a flat along the creek backed by steep country selected in the name of Hannah Norville, the land upon which we stand was selected by George Norville – father of Henry, Jack and Jim of “Sarsfield” area at Wallabadah.

To our left in the foreground we see the selection of Peter Swanson, Swedish by birth, a hard worker, he helped to put the northern railway through to the Liverpool Range and later worked as one of the maintenance workers. A good farmer, he could always be counted upon to produce good corn, salad vegetables and pumpkins. Dearest to my heart he had a habit of giving a small rockmelon to very small boys when the mother had completed her purchases from his cart. His land later passed to son Stanley – hard worker, good citizen and a very loyal supporter of the local Church of England.

Stan later acquired Georgie Norville’s block when Georgie concentrated his efforts on the holding of his mother Hannah. Their place ran on to the Liverpool Range beyond Glenalvon. Georgie was a unique character, he was quite a sheep classer in his own way, with no technical training he could really keep their sheep uniform in size and wool quality and their small clip was always well prepared for sale.

Completely uneducated, he had his own method calculating numbers – money and material measurements.

Jack Fleming, a well known identity of the district in such matters as shed building, tank and windmill manufacturer and installation, told me that Georgie came to him to cut and thread 14 or 15 lengths of pipe – quoted the measurements to ½ inch, from memory.

When Jack later went to help him “hook up the water” every piece of pipe fitted exactly to Jack’s satisfaction.

We look a little further to our left and behold “Crowfoot Tops”, the selection of Tom Callinan, never in the history of man has poetic licence been more liberally employed to describe a portion of land.

Close below us we see the ruins of a sheep dip, possibly originally built by Dave Norville, constructed of split slabs and plugged with clay it “held like a bottle” and was used by Stan Swanson and Martin Norville at least until the 1939-45 era. Quite effective, sheer hard work – they carried water from the creek to prime and maintain the water level.

We come to the first creek crossing and soon to our right we see Dave Norville’s first selection and soon enter the land of Henry Avard.

Generally of lower ridges, it joined Stan Swanson’s lower paddocks. Fair amount of yellow box, a bit of white box and red gum with stringybark on “Avard’s Hill”.

By the time a road was pushed over this black soil hill the Shire had acquired a “Cletrac” crawler tractor with wheeled scoop and heavy grader.

Any ripping was done by Moulboard plough. Fred Alford on the tractor, Ernie Gardiner on the plough!!

Next we enter Barsham country proper – to our left we look towards Kerosine Mountain and overlook the first selection of William Greer and close by the short held selection of that famous character Jim McGivney. Who would not remember at least being told of that flea bitten grey “Pialla.” Pialla was by “Charge” a son of Carbine – another faithful steed by Charge was a yellow bay gelding ridden for years by Ernest Stewart.

Also Pialla’s Picaniny and old Mac’s various antics as he attended district race meetings – John Shreck would really think he found a thick rope – if he had handled old Mac.

To our right and ahead we look at the country held for many years by J. P. Carey. Hard right we would look at Bob Mullins selection. J. P. Carey pulled down Bob Mullen’s old hut and built a shearing shed. The old hut contained some of the finest pit sawn stringy bark slabs that I have seen.

Bob Mullens was possibly “the other fellow” mentioned when Jack Callinan would recount his trips with me (Jack), Peter ‘Ayddon, Ernie Stewart, Jimmy Bloomfield and another fellow.

Still inside Carey’s country we follow the Creek up-stream for say 1½ miles and come to Bill Hunt’s selection – with a stronger split slab hut built on the bank of the creek. We soon leave the main track and veer left to go to Frank Perkin’s block. Allotted to Frank after 1914-18 War, he called it “Gum Flat”.

Not much trouble to find some white Mountain Gum on the foothills of “Bother Jimmy” or more correctly and strictly for non locals – Mount Temi. Flats however were rather dependant on your point of view.

We cross Wheelihan’s Gully – I have no doubt that there is a selection owned for a short time by a person of that name – or perhaps he was a dummy or shepherd for J. L. Suckling.

Still on Barsham our next sign of early selection is a clump of white acacia trees and I think a fig or quince tree – held for a time by a selector named Clark – possibly a dummy for J. L. Suckling.

Nearby was a good flat left untilled for years. Under the management of Ian McDonald, it was ploughed by Geo. Daley. George had done a lot of ploughing with the bullocks on the upper reaches of the creek but due to the rough track down Dan Hunt’s cutting a single furrow plough and two horses did the job.

George Daley was a very experienced teamster, spent a lot of his early life in the employ of A. P. Parbury at “Satur” Scone and the Abbott family of Murulla.

We leave Barsham for a few miles and pass through Dan Hunt’s block. This block had a very rough frontage to Warland’s Creek. The track was a narrow rocky defile – not much trouble to get sheep to draw up such places but western bred wethers required a gentle approach to get them to draw down – one mistake and one could have a few on their back over a steep bank.

The country opened to better ridges over towards Haydon’s range paddocks. The block passed through various hands prior to Dan Hunt’s ownership. Dan Hunt was a quite, kindly man, a top hand with a sheep dog.

His son Mark built up a good shearing contract run, now in turn expanded by his son Brian.

Mark and Brian kept the team together in off seasons by contract fencing, yard building etc.

Mark had acquired a lot of local stock and property knowledge both from his own and his father's travels and was a good fireside companion when on a job in the bush.

We re-enter Barsham ram paddock. Later to our left we come to Big and Little Baker's once again the introduced trees indicate that obviously some long forgotten member of the Baker family had a selection there. A few miles along we come to the junction of the Scotts Creek Road and what was then the Warland's Creek Bridle Track.

Hard right we see a cleared ridge which is steep to have been ploughed. This was on a selection held for a little time by Claire, father of Jim and Bill (a top shearer) and grandfather of Joe. The Claire family later had a selection at Sandy Creek now probably held by Jack or Brian Hunt.

Ahead lies some excellent grazing land "Rock Dhu", owned for a long time by J. P. Carey, passed to Henry Norville — uncle of Martin, father of Jack and Lionel.

"Rock Dhu" is now in the hands of Lionel's son Peter, well known for his endurance records in a single engine plane.

To our left we see the Barsham North cottage — owned by the family of the late F. B. Haydon Jnr. (Jimmy to all).

We'll take the left fork, pass the old Barsham mens hut and dip, go for a few miles to the "Basin" originally selected by Dave Norville. He and his wife had a great home orchard, some fig trees etc would still survive. Dave must have been a most ingenious and versatile man.

Probably with a sapling A level or plumb he brought water from the upper reaches of White's Creek and could irrigate his home garden orchard by turning a few sods with a shovel.

He was a good hand with bullocks, one of the few in that district to drive them four abreast. An excellent timberman, he built a good small house for himself and a small four room hut for William Greer.

This hut was still there when the land was acquired by Lew Wright from W. E. Greer in the fifties. It was a haven for some characters who stayed a good while, Jimmy Bloomfield, Bill Wilde, Joe Shanahan, Fred Baker and we three Greer boys plus some very interesting chaps who blew along.

The country rose steeply from this hut. The selection was the second for Wm Greer, by arrangement with J. L. Suckling, he swapped his first smaller block for this lower and possibly steeper block.

Returning to Barsham North we take the right fork passing a small lucerne paddock on "Rock Dhu", set in a bend on Warlands Creek.

I have not met anybody who has seen a better natural lucerne stand.

Passing along we soon come to Barsham pasture paddocks where under the management of Ian McDonald, some of the early Phalaris, Cocksfort etc were established. Soon we come to Wallabadah Rocks — like giant eggs stood on end. It would be presumptuous of me to give any geological description of the Rocks. No doubt any interested person could find some of the writings on the subject prepared by Clarrie Ivin.

The rocks are said to about 3 miles in circumference around the base. Of Igneous formation, they would be geologically very old, the land around them gradually worn away to reveal their monolithic structure.

To our right we bear to the selections of the Hibbs family, held by Benjamin, Harry and Dick as individual settlers, they bred their own Merino sheep and some cattle.

Dick produced good maize and luscious water melons on a bend of the creek below the Rock. Warland's Creek proper rises on the land held by Dick and Harry Hobbs.

Prior to reaching the Rock if we bear to our left we proceed through Barsham till we come to a paddock called Avars. This was the original selection of the father of Harry Avar, and no doubt a deal was arranged with J. L. Suckling who took this country in exchange for the country adjoining the holdings of Peter Swanson and the Norville family. Avar Snr. must have had some mighty powerful bullocks. The remains of a log fence were possibly the last fence of its type in the district. Big logs — possibly Gum, they resisted all burning attempts for many years.

Soon we pass through the "Lagoon" paddock and come to Gilshenan's Hut. No more than 200 acres is on the eastern side of the Range. The balance on the western side joins Colly Creek and Wallabadah Station. Originally selected by Tom Gilshenan, he later sold to Wm. Greer, whose son W. E. (Bill) sold to Jim Haydon to add to his Barsham North property.

A note of encouragement to our gardening friends. At the selections of both Dave Norville and Gilshenan's Hut, jonquils flourished for at least half a century, completely untended and open to stock grazing. Gilshenans original hut was rebuilt for my father by the late Albert Cook and Fred Baker. Albert was a good hand with mortising, axe and adze. He spent many years in the employ of R. K. White of "Glen Dhu".