



Know your suburb ...

BURSWOOD

by Dr Geoff Gallop, Member for Victoria Park

BEELOO COUNTRY

IN ABORIGINAL Australia the Canning River provided the boundary that divided Beeloo Country from Beelias country. The land to the west belonged to the Beelias tribe, headed by Midgegooroo and his son Yagan.

To the east, stretching from the Swan River to the Darling Ranges, and including modern-day Victoria Park, was Beeloo country. Writing in the Perth Gazette in 1833 Robert Lyon described Beeloo in the following terms:

"Beeloo, the district of Munday is bounded by the Canning on the south, by Melville water on the west, by the

Swan and Ellen's Brook on the north, the eastern boundary of this district I cannot accurately define. Several of the mountains are numbered in Munday's territories, and his headquarters are at Wurerup."

A name census taken by Francis Armstrong in 1837 recorded 32 individuals as part of the Beeloo tribe — 27 adults and five children.

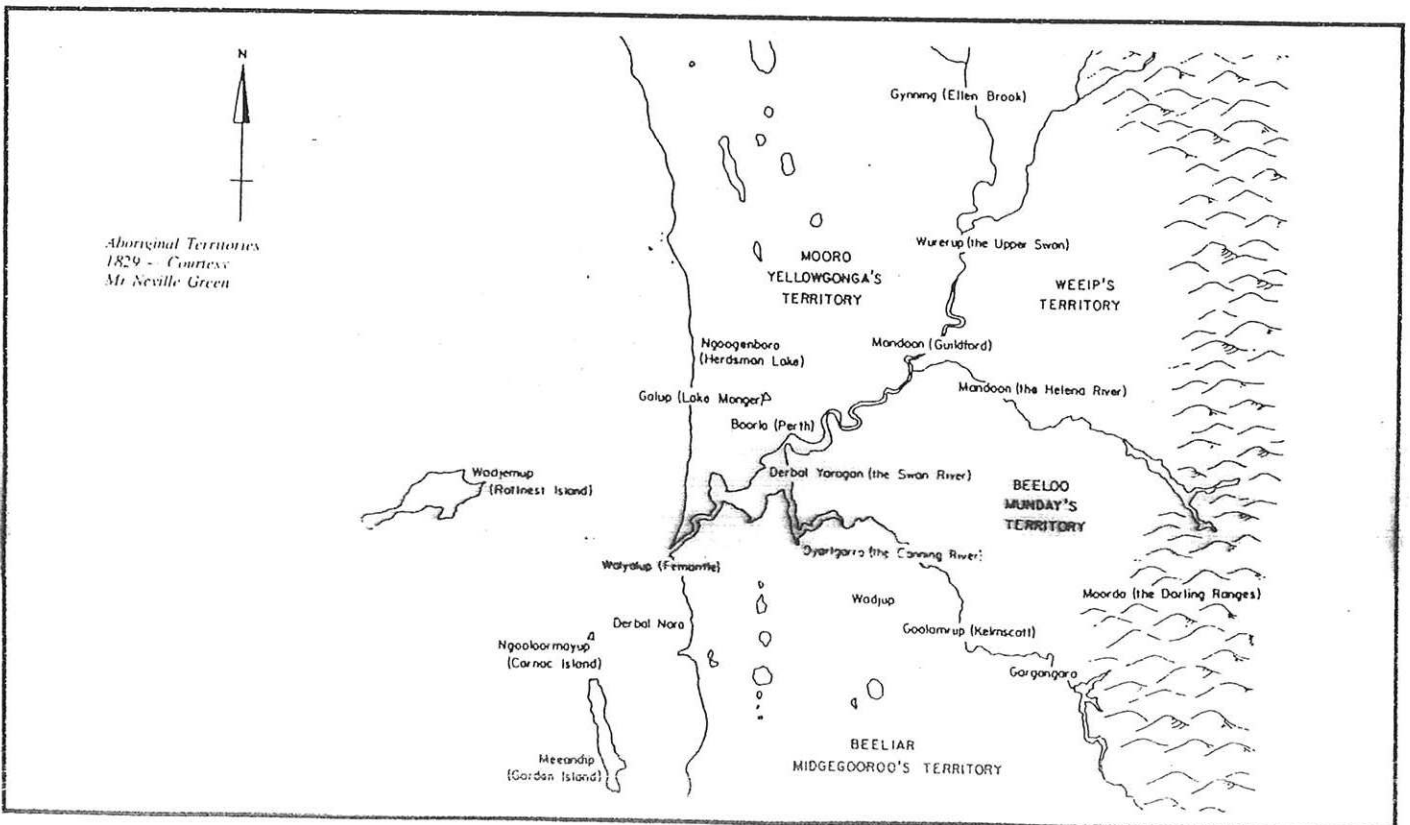
Munday was the acknowledged leader of the Beeloo in the early days of the Swan River Colony.

Conflict between the original inhabitants and the new settlers frequently occurred along the Canning River as the natural game on which the former depended became depleted. From 1831 to 1838 four settlers were fatally speared and six wounded in the Canning district.

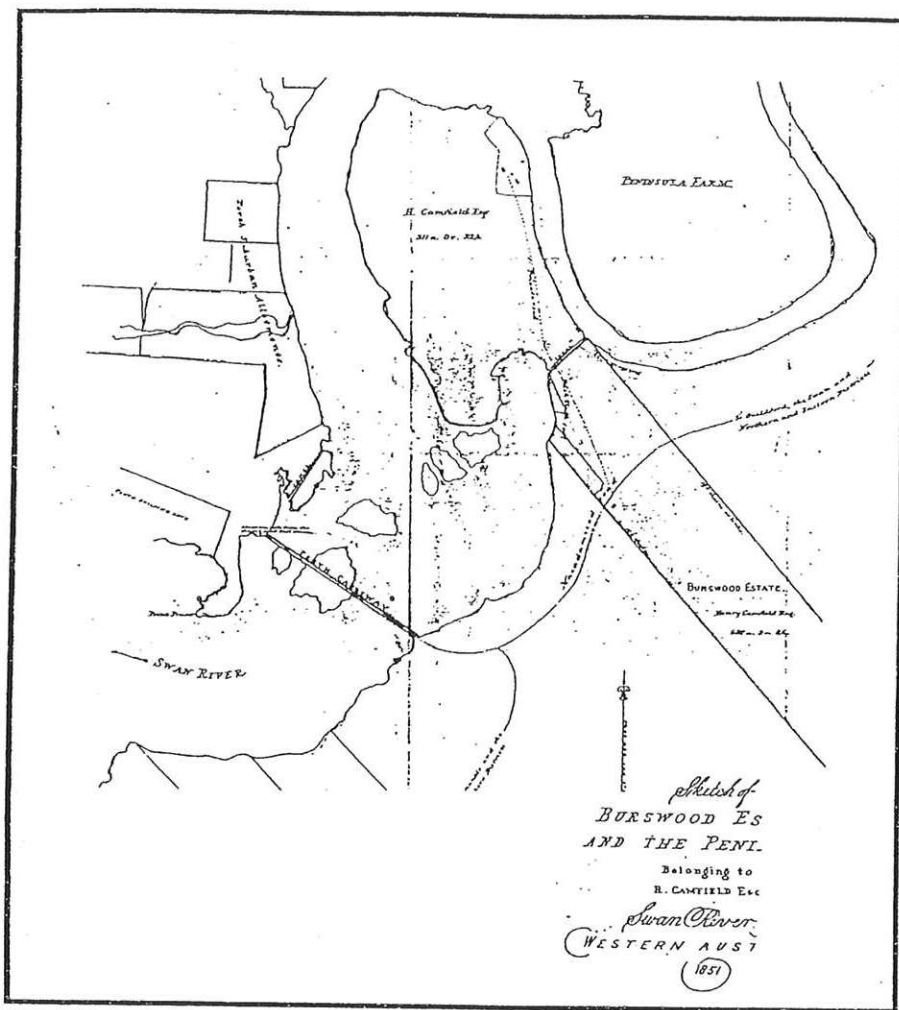
Along with Yagan and Midgegooroo, Munday was proclaimed an outlaw in 1833, wanted for the killing of Thomas and John Velvick near Bulls Creek. Midgegooroo was captured and put to death after being tried and convicted. Yagan was shot dead soon after but Munday survived. Indeed in 1841, his name appeared in a list of Aboriginal constables published in the Inquirer.

During the nineteenth-century there is occasional reference to an Aboriginal camp at the Victoria end of the Causeway from which forays were made into the South Perth district.

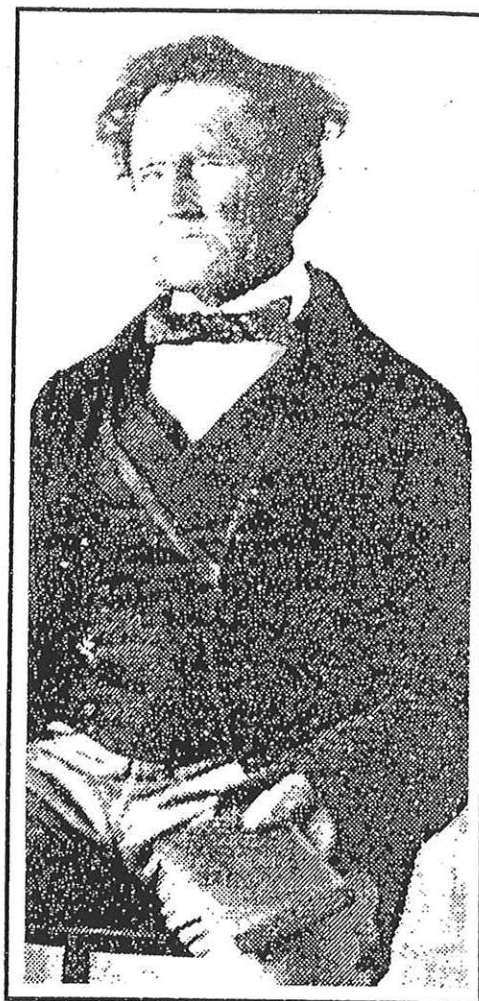
The first owner of Burswood, Henry Camfield, also makes reference to encounters with Aborigines on his property in the north-eastern corner of Burswood.



EARLY DAYS



Map of Burswood Island 1851. Courtesy of Battye Library.



Henry Camfield Esq. A pioneer settler of Burswood Island. Courtesy of Battye Library

AMONGST the new arrivals at the Swan River Colony in 1829 was the thirty-year old Henry Camfield from “Burrswood” Estate in Kent. With him were two indentured servants and their families — Richard Smith, a carpenter, and Frederick Friend, a labourer.

Henry had been born and raised at Burrswood. Of his early life Johanna Ernest writes:

“He loved dearly the title modern farmhouse, which was his home, set among hop gardens, orchards, and fields, beside the stream, a tributary to the river Medway”.

Camfield’s 1000 acre (405ha) land grant included the Burswood peninsula and parts of contemporary Rivervale, Lathlain and Carlisle. He name it “Burrswood” but by the 1840s it was being spelt “Burswood”. The area has been described by Michael Nind in the following way:

“The peninsula was mostly low-lying, but at its isthmus led back to a ridge and then up a large, steep sandy hill to scrubland beyond”.

Richard Smith constructed wattle-and-daub houses in the north-eastern corner of the peninsula for both the Camfield and the Friends. Crops of cabbage, wheat, Indian corn, swede and potato all failed in the first three years of the colony. From 1833 to 1839 Camfield visited the eastern colonies leaving Burswood in the care of Richard Barnden, who married Frances Friend after her husband Frederick drowned in 1831 while

sailing from Fremantle to Burswood with Camfield.

When the road to Guildford was built across Camfield’s property, an inn was established there in 1830. Camfield himself set up an inn, “The Brewer’s Arms”, with Barnden as publican. It was situated below a hill that became known as Barnden’s Hill (sometimes spelt Brandon’s Hill). The area itself occasionally took this name until Rivervale was chosen, firstly for the railway station, and then for the district to the north and east of the railway line, Great Eastern Highway and Orrong Road.

The rest of contemporary Burswood, including the casino, resort and golfcourse is now part of the suburb of Victoria Park.

THE BURSWOOD CANAL

FROM the western edge of the Burswood Peninsula to the lower Heirisson Island were extensive mudflats. These were a major obstacle to successful navigation of the Swan, even for flat-bottomed boats which had to be manually dragged across the flats. The peninsula itself also added time to the journey.

The construction of a canal in 1831 converted Burswood into an island. Michael Nind describes the project:

“Tenders were called in February 1831 for the 275-yard cut. It was to be 12 feet wide and range in depth from five to eight feet. By April substantial progress had been made but in June the contractors, John Crane and Co, went on strike. Through their miscalculation of the distance of the cut they found themselves liable to cut an ‘extra’ bend. The Lieutenant-Governor refused their request for

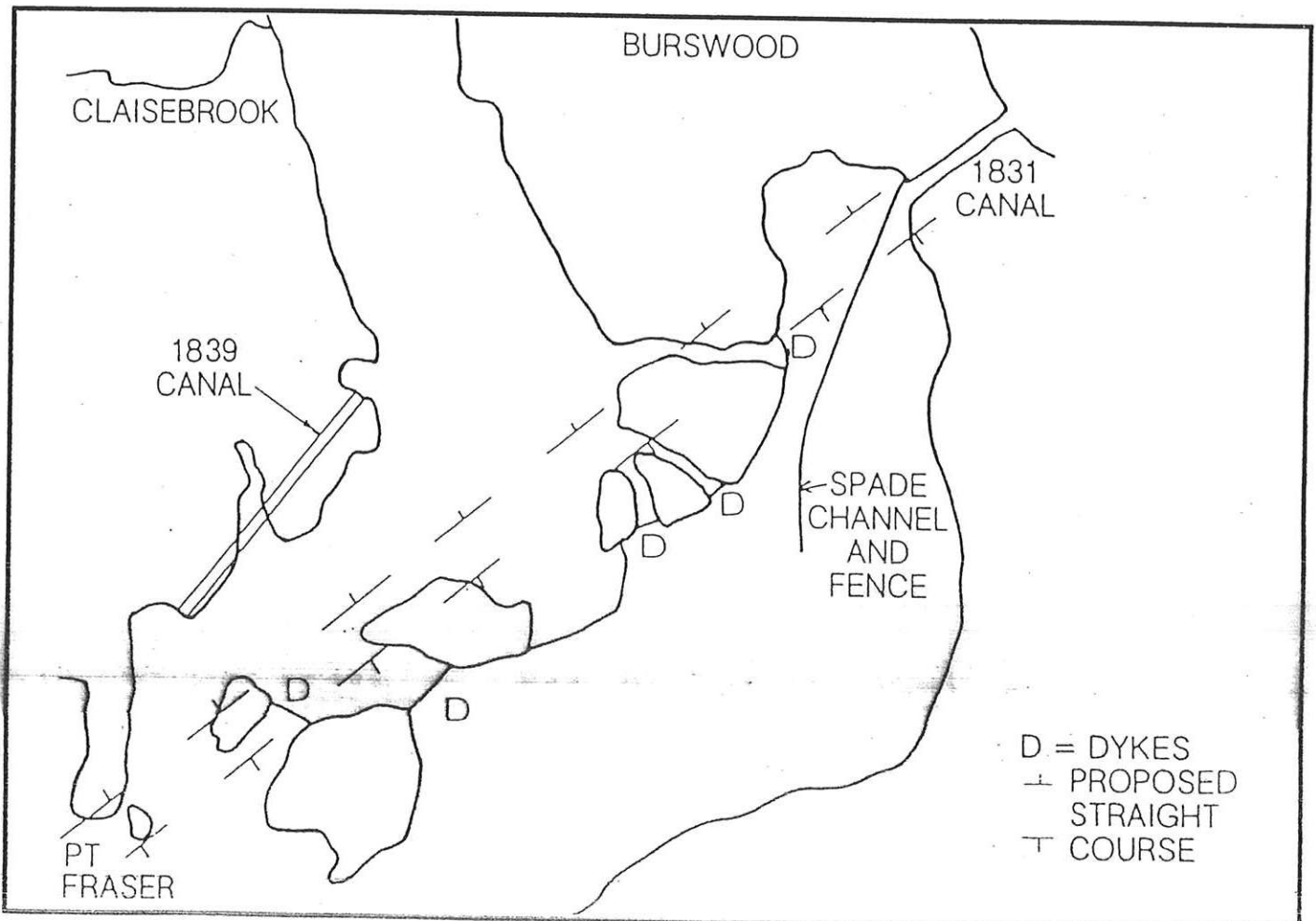
compensation and they returned to work, completing the project by August 1831”.

In the next few years, work was conducted on the flats with two parallel dykes run from the Burswood Canal to Point Fraser. This idea had been devised by the Civil Engineer, Henry Reverley. It was hoped to make a natural channel through the mudflats. There was some improvement but by 1839 it was decided that a new, deeper canal would be built on the opposite side of the river, where Trinity College stands

today. Of this work Michael Nind concludes:

“All the efforts of ten years to give boatmen more navigable river came to nought, leaving them to return to their original course; while the expensive dyke and canal works were to be incorporated in the first causeway, a structure that would from the 1850s lead to a completion of land routes to supplement the river trade”.

Still, maps in the 1950s still included the Burswood Canal and showed Burswood as an island. Residents remember the “Little Bunbury Bridge” which took the railway line across the canal. One resident was so skeptical of the bridge’s strength and stability that she used to walk to and from Goodwood Station (now Belmont Park) rather than catch the train at Rivervale where she lived.



Proposed Burswood Canal and Dykes. Source M. Nind, "Sails and Oars".

BURSWOOD AND AGRICULTURE

BY THE 1840s land in Burswood was earning income and Camfield let it to tenants until he sold some of it to his main tenant, American born engineer and inventor Solomon Cook, in 1871.

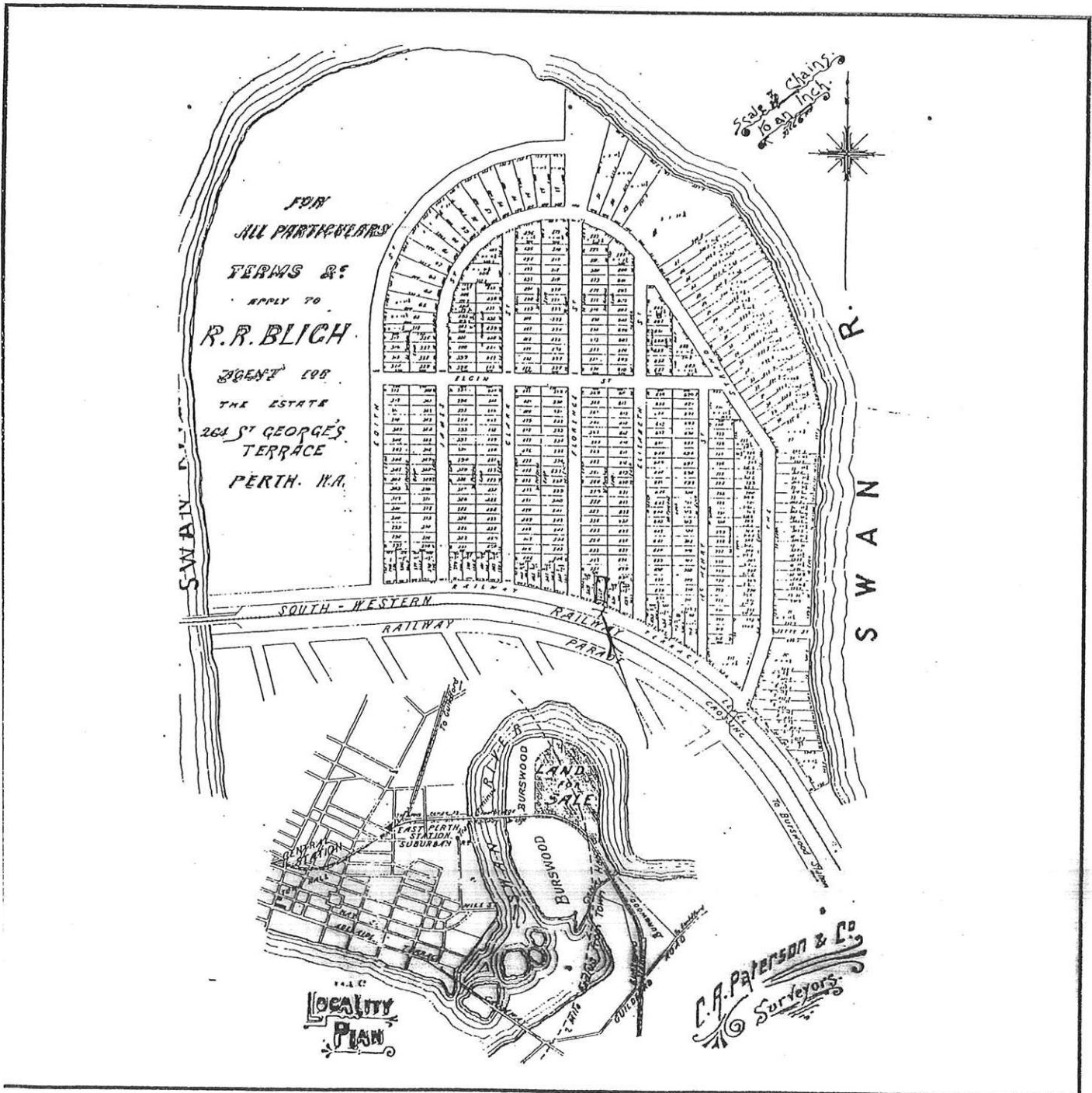
From 1840 Camfield himself did not live at Burswood. He died in 1872, having held the government positions of Collector of Revenue, Postmaster-General and Resident Magistrate at Albany.

Cook had developed a large market garden between the canal and Barnden's Hill. In 1867 he sub-let some of his lease to a Spaniard John Bancells who was allowed to keep

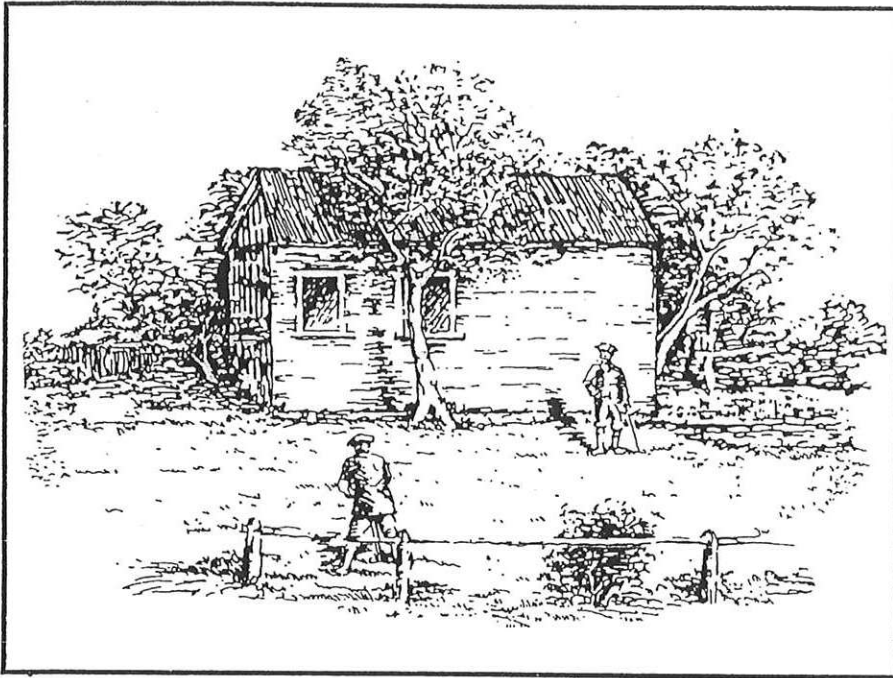
stock and cut timber and rushes as well as work the land, which he did until 1875.

When Cook bought this land from Camfield in 1871 he sold it the very next day to Dr John Ferguson who owned the adjoining Swan Location 34 and Heirison Island. A dairy was developed by Ferguson's first tenant, Frank Johnston. The dairy functioned throughout the rest of the 19th century and into the new century, near the present-day Rivervale Station.

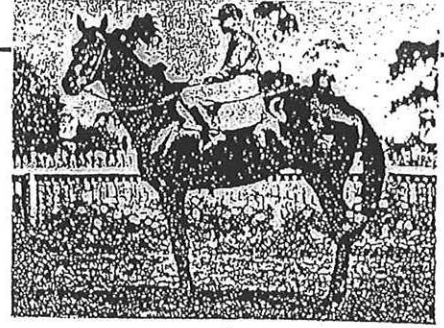
The railway line through the district was completed in 1893.



Proposed Sub-division Burswood, 1890's. Courtesy of The Uniting Church.



The site of Perth's newest golf course was also the home of the Colony's first golf club. The Perth Golf Club was located in the north-east corner of Burswood Island from 1895-1900. Courtesy Battye Library.



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BURSWOOD ISLAND: GOLF AND RACING

BURSWOOD Island itself was owned by Edmund Birch from 1871 to 1875 and by Francis Louis Van Bibra from 1875 to 1885. He ran a dairy herd there until selling to developers.

Efforts to develop Burswood Island as a residential suburb failed but in the 1890s the island became famous for two activities — golf and horse racing. In 1895 Western Australia's first golf course was opened on Burswood Island. When a race course was opened four years later golfers had to pause to allow the horses to gallop past. In 1908 the course was relocated to South Perth to become, by Royal Charter, the Royal Perth Golf Club in 1937.

Golfing at Burswood was difficult. As one player put it in 1896:

"(Playing was) marred by 'wire grass', by deep drains full of water and containing a miscellaneous

collection of rusting pots and pans, by swamps, and by the river bordering some holes".

The Burswood Turf club began as the proprietary club of Albert Edmund Cockram who eventually took up residence in the area and set up a stud farm for thoroughbreds and prize dairy stock.

The first meeting was held on 9 December 1899. There were six races and 500 people attended, many of whom came via a railway station later to be called Goodwood. The main event was the Burswood Cup, won by Pluto (ridden by F. O'BCasey).

Cockram established a second track between the existing course (known as Belmont Park after 1902) and the old canal with locomotive cinders used as the base. It was known as Goodwood and held its first meeting in 1912 under the management of Alex Clydesdale who had introduced racing to Kensington.

The Western Australian Turf Club

bought both tracks in 1943 and sold Goodwood, along with all other proprietary courses (except Belmont) to the State Government in 1950.

One jockey to race on both Belmont Park and Goodwood was John Corry. Born in Kalgoorlie in 1907 he was apprenticed as a jockey to Tom Tighe of Belmont in 1921. He completed his apprenticeship in 1925 and moved to Victoria Park in 1930. Corry rode many winners throughout Western Australia and interstate and overseas until retiring in 1968. He remembers Goodwood as a particularly good winter track, the cinders providing for excellent drainage:

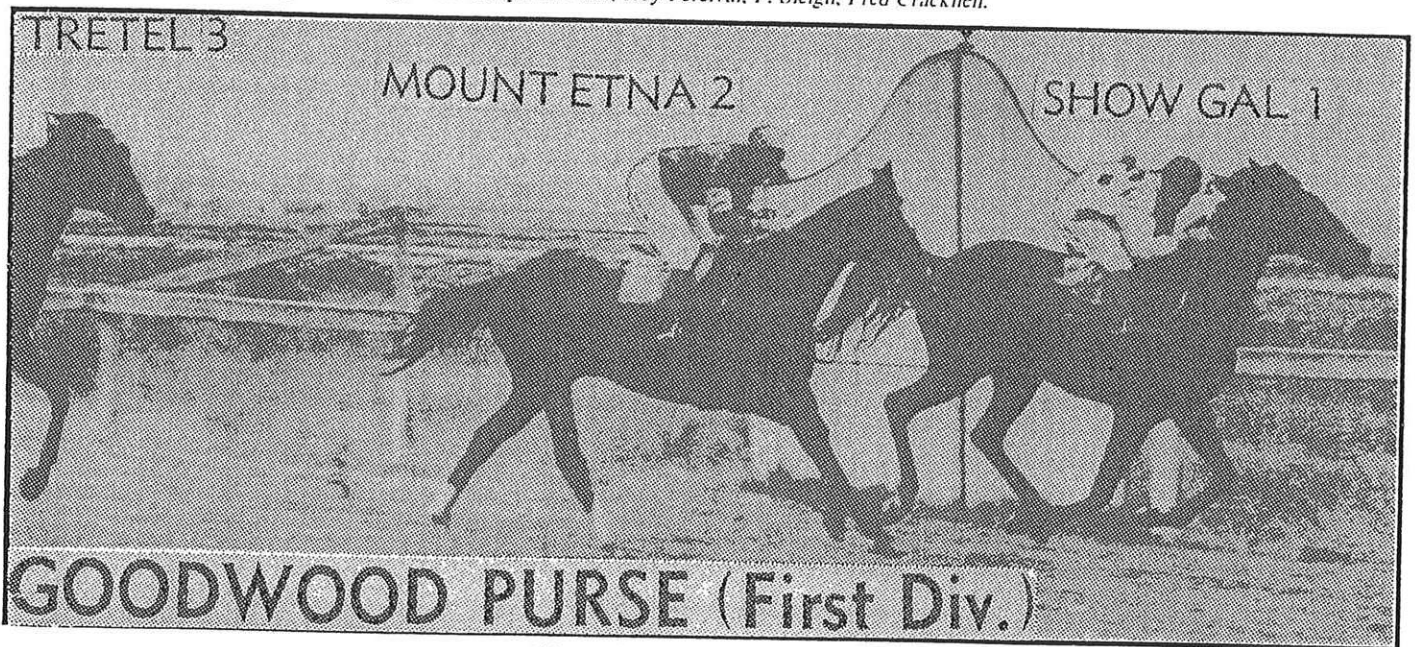
"Even when the centre of the course was waterlogged the track itself left little mud on the riders".

Although Belmont Park replaced Goodwood as the name for the railway station there is still a Goodwood Parade in the district, the last reminder of the old track.



Jockeys at Belmont Park Racecourse 1922. Courtesy John Corry.

Back: Steve Chipper (Starter), "Snub" Bollard, Les Marribale, Alby Sibbrelt, Cyril Roberts, Bert McKenna, Neville Percival (standing), Jimmy Carran, George Morley, Sammy Bowler, Arthur Cooper.
 Front: Bill Dillon, Eric Ardagh, Jim Tully, John Corry, Alf Finn, Roy Percival, F. Sleigh, Fred Cracknell.



(Above) On the finishing line at Goodwood Race Course. Courtesy John Corry.

(Left) John Corry (right) comes to Perth as apprenticed jockey 1921. He and Bert Pike (left) both came from Kalgoorlie. Courtesy John Corry.

(Below) John Corry returning to winning circle aboard "Alabama" 9-8; 1952.



SEWAGE AND RUBBISH

BETWEEN 1906 and 1912 22 acres of Burswood were resumed from Albert Cockram to establish filtration beds for sewage syphoned from Claisebrook under the Swan River.

After many years of complaint and argument about the pollution the beds were finally closed in 1934.

The odium attached to Burswood from the sewerage system so offended the locals that they demanded a name change. "Riversdale" had been used by developers offering land for sale in earlier years, but "Rivervale" was chosen to replace Burswood as the name for the railway station in 1921.

After the Second World War the area became famous for

the rubbish dump which took refuse after 1946. Domestic fill ceased in 1972 but other fill continued to be dumped until the early 1980s. Car bodies, building rubble, household garbage, cinders, clay, bitumen, curbing and used reinforced steel all found its way to Burswood.

Thus began the long process of reclamation of the mudflats which had proved so awkward for the early settlers. To complement this the banks of the Swan River were properly walled in from the western edge of Burswood Island to the new Causeway in the 1950s.

The citizen of the year Lake remains as a reminder of earlier times and earlier geography. Its shape emerged in the 1960s when the new Great Eastern Highway was constructed.

INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE

LIGHT industry came to the area early in the twentieth century with the furniture trade and a brewery.

The Redcastle Brewery was opened in 1912, specialising in a heavy stout. In 1952 it was swallowed up by the Swan Brewery and had its name changed to the Stirling Brewery. It was eventually closed.

The cement works (originally the Western Australian Cement Company, now Swan Portland Cement) were opened in 1921.

Raw materials and fuel were originally obtained from Lake Clifton, Burswood itself, Yellowdine and Collie. The lime marl from Lake Clifton was soon found to be too expensive and not very suitable for cement making.

Eventually decayed shell from the floor of the Swan River was used.

From 1927 a familiar sight in Perth was that of large barges filled with oyster shell being towed along the Swan to the cement works. Swan Portland's own history describes the way shell was dredged from where the Raffles and South Perth Yacht Club

now stand, Como, Nedlands, Melville Waters and opposite Ascot and Belmont racecourses:

"The shell was retrieved by mechanical drag at an average rate of 200 tons a day and it is interesting to recall that over three million tons of shell was extracted from the river bed between 1927 and 1956".

For many years cement dust from the factory proved to be an enormous nuisance for residents and primary-based industries in the district.

On 30 December 1985, exactly 40 years after the rubbish dump was originally established, the Burswood Casino was officially opened, followed by the resort two years later. Set in 100 hectares the \$350 million resort includes a casino, a five-star hotel,

convention centre and showroom as well as the Superdome sporting and exhibition centre. Today there are over 3000 people employed at Burswood.

Development of the complex began in 1985 when the Western Australian Government granted a casino licence to a joint venture comprising Perth entrepreneur Dallas Dempster and the Malaysian Genting Group.

The casino took nine months to build and in 1987 the other parts of the resort became operational.

Surrounding the resort and casino is the Burswood Park and public golf course, administered by the Burswood Park Public Board. Efforts are being made to identify the 1829 environment and to incorporate where it is possible native species in the revegetation of the area.



Burswood before the Resort. Courtesy: Burswood Park Board.

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