

19 – New Norfolk

From Hobart there are two ways of getting to New Norfolk - which refers to the township and the district north west of the capital through which the River Derwent flows: the road along the north bank of the Derwent (Boyer Road), or the one along the south (the Lyell Highway). Both allow glorious views of a wide river, much of the countryside unspoilt. It is worth it for the drive alone. In 1881, Marianne North (p252) went up the Derwent by steamer and wrote:

The river spread itself out like a series of lakes, with rocks closing it in where it narrowed, all arranged in horizontal strata like walls of gigantic masonry. It ran through a rich bit of country full of hops, and orchards loaded with fruit. The wheat harvest was going on much in the usual English way, with carts and stacks.

Once there, she was taken by carriage to visit someone and wrote: ‘Hedges of hawthorn loaded with red berries, sweet-briar, and blackberries – all was too English – it might have been a bit of Somersetshire, as I drove along the beautiful river-side for four miles.’

Jane Franklin, writing from the old Government House to her sister on 7 September 1840 about their plans to establish a new college in New Norfolk, wrote of the position for it and, thus, of the environs of the township itself:

New Norfolk about 22 miles from [here is] the sweetest spot imaginable, forming a high peninsula on the Derwent which washes its cliffs and flat garden ground on 2 sides, while the Lachlan a tributary trout stream flows under it on another. It has the loveliest views possible of the winding river its woods and rocks and hills, and opening vales in all directions.

The Lachlan was named after Elizabeth Macquarie’s son in 1821. She and her husband, Governor of New South Wales, and so of Tasmania, had also travelled to the area in 1811 and he named the place he thought suitable for a new habitation Elizabeth Town for her (pp49–50). This changed to New Norfolk after 1827, formalising the centre that was growing up to accommodate the families arriving from Norfolk Island between 1806 and 1808 (pp34, 38). In 1826, Governor Arthur had even determined to make Elizabeth Town the capital of Tasmania, rather than Hobart which was too far south and water-bound – yet its water was not palatable. This was not surprising since Catherine Kearney’s cows wallowed in the Hobart Rivulet, among other nasty Hobart habits. The merchants dependent on the port ensured that the project was unsuccessful.

The Bush Inn

If you arrive by Boyer Road, cross over the bridge and turn left, the first site you come to is the Bush Inn, but I suggest you go first to the Information Centre and get a map – information centres in Tasmanian townships always reveal themselves. This one is in the centre of the circular street slightly southeast of the bridge and the eastern end of the High Street. Then go back to the Bush Inn on Montagu Street, which might well be marked on the map, and in any case is well signboarded.

Fifty-four-year-old widow **Ann Bridger** (c1777–1857) arrived in Hobart in 1823 with two daughters, a son, £500 in cash and £200 in ‘various merchandise for investing in agricultural pursuits’. Whatever her previous life, after her arrival she stayed with Maria Lord just as the entrepreneur’s life was taking a nosedive (pp33, 80). Within a year, Ann was running the Black Snake Inn of previous low repute at Granton, on the river half-way between Hobart and Elizabeth Town; under her, it became a respectable staging post.

By 1825, she was the licensee of the Bush Inn, what may have been an unlicensed drinking place from 1815. To cross the river in the years that followed you used Mrs Bridger’s ferry, so much so that a rival took her to court over ferry provision. From 1825, everyone who was anyone stayed at the Bush Inn; indeed, it now claims to be the longest continuously licensed pub in Australia. A 1975 plaque outside commemorates 150 years.

Elizabeth Prinsep and her husband stayed there in January 1830 (p77). The book by him, which undoubtedly includes her experiences and possibly some of her writing (and at least one New Norfolk illustration by her, p303) reveals the place and the inn:

... the road ended at the church, not very inviting termination to hungry, cold, wet travellers ... I looked in vain for houses ... when a charitable man conducted us over the turf to the inn, which really looked very comfortable, and its accommodation within did not belie its external experience ...

The Inn window faced a splendid rock, clothed in every fissure with luxuriant verdure, which hung over the river. Still I could see nothing of a town, or even a village, and no wonder, for, upon enquiring, I found that besides the magistrate’s and the Governors Turriff Lodge which are at some distance, there are but two houses and a half, the third not being completed! Making seven in all, including the church and the inn. I forgot to mention the school house ... which is well attended by children who collect from miles around.

Elizabeth Fenton (p76) spent many months in Hobart waiting for her husband to build them a house at what became Fenton Forest well beyond the New Norfolk township in the area now known as Glenora. Eventually, in July 1831, she started her journey; she later discreetly lets slip that she was pregnant. She passed farms and was not impressed:

I must confess these habitations looked dreary and slovenly in the extreme, – no attempt at neatness, no tidy inclosure for office houses, no little gardens;- but piles of wood for burning, sheepskins, pigs, rude farming implements lay to the very threshold in unsightly mingling.

Approaching New Norfolk it began to snow. She was very glad to arrive at 'its single inn kept by a portly old lady, a female Boniface, who showed us every attention, and had a most excellent dinner on the table ...' The following morning, however, 'Mrs Bridger came up to me with an important face to caution me with respect to my nurse, whom she believed to be one of the worst women in the Colony.' (Why 'female Boniface'? Google refers you to George Farquhar's *The Beaux Stratagem* (1707) in which Boniface is the name of the innkeeper, thereafter used as a name for a host.)

On 25 January 1831, Nora Corbett and her husband Jorgen Jorgenson held their wedding feast at the inn and, true to form, became drunk and disorderly (pp61–2, 338). Jane Franklin's part in the history was also in character: in 1837 she planted a pear tree in the garden (p285). It was showing signs of aging in 1986 and was burnt down by vandals soon thereafter. In 1840, Ann Bridger sold the Bush Inn and then, or later, moved to Melbourne where she died aged 80.

One of my favourite Bush Inn scenes, which took place after Ann's time, comes from the pen of Caroline Denison (p161) and was what she saw from the window when she and the Governor were staying there (for reasons that are unclear) in May 1847:

We were amused this morning by seeing the departure from this inn, of a couple who had come down from Bothwell, or Hamilton, or some of those distant places, to our ball on Monday, and who slept here last night on their way home. This morning we saw them set out, both on horseback; the lady with a sort of bundle, containing, I suppose, her ball finery, hanging at the pommel of her saddle, the gentleman with a little knapsack, strapped in front of his. This is the way, I suppose, that everyone must travel in winter, to and from these out of the way places, as all, except the few great roads, are impassable in winter for carriages.

The most internationally famous Bush Inn guest was undoubtedly **Nellie Melba** (1861–1931) who went there for rest during her 1924 farewell visit to Tasmania (p242). There is a charming account contained in Kym Roberts' 'The Bush Inn' (nd) (which you can download from the internet), recorded by Joe Cowburn, son of the house and later a New Norfolk historian. He came home from school and there was the Diva sitting in his mother's chair, a glass of wine in her hand. Putting him at his ease, she invited him to her recital at the City Hall and, standing in the wings, he watched her pass him onto the stage and the handkerchiefs in the hands of the audience when she sang 'Home Sweet Home'.

He had told her that William Vincent Wallace composed the opera *Maritana* on the inn's verandah in 1838, and she resolved to sing 'Scenes that are Brightest' before she left. So on her last evening, she sang it for 40 guests sitting on the stairs to her private suite, and Joe watched her inscribe, 'with a somewhat shaky hand', the photograph she gave him as a memento of her stay. The dining room is named the Nellie Melba and a portrait of her hangs on the wall.

Turriff Lodge

A recommended route to Turriff Lodge is the walk from the Esplanade in front of the Bush Inn and along the cliff path. But if you are driving, follow Montagu Street north east from the Bush Inn until it becomes the Lyell Highway; then, on the left, is Turriff Lodge Road/Drive. Park where there is space and walk along the path, past the housing development Lady Franklin Court. Ahead of you is the Domain, a couple of old oasthouses, a well-kept garden and, down to the Derwent and up the other side, a stunning view, much as Caroline Denison described it in 1847 a few months before her Christmas party there for the Aborigines (p186):

The Government cottage stands on the most beautiful spot of all; cottage and farm occupying a sort of spit of land at the junction of the Derwent and a little river called the Lachlan; and the grounds of the cottage, and the banks of the river just opposite to it, comprising every beauty that a mixture of rock, wood, and water can give them ... One of the prettiest views is from the front of the cottage, though this is not quite so bold as the rest; it is a view up the river, with scattered houses on its banks, a bridge across it, and a range of wooded hills in the distance.

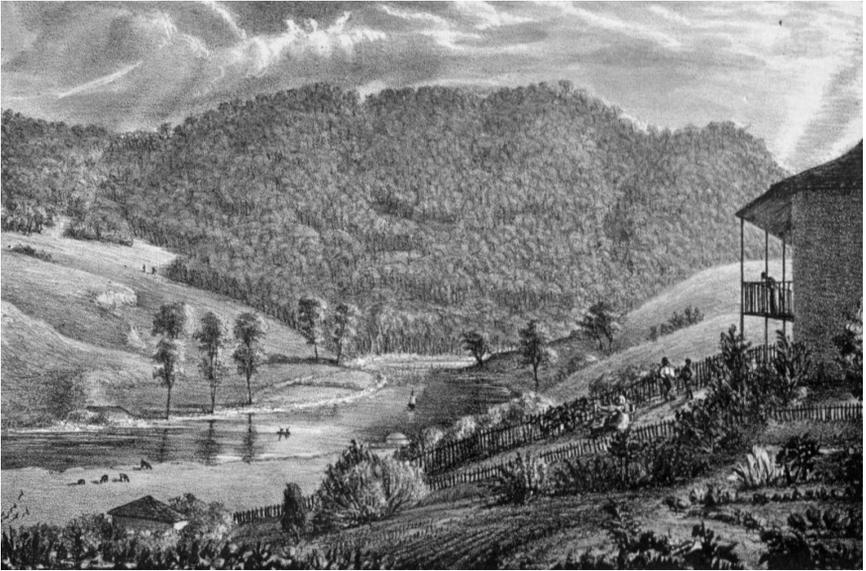
Elizabeth Prinsep's sketch, from which the illustration for 'their' book was made, gives a complimentary impression of the scene.

The Government Farm was already there when Elizabeth Macquarie visited what became the town named after her in 1811. The cottage was completed as a summer retreat by 1816 under Thomas Davey and the Macquarie family stayed there in 1821. The cottage, also known as Turriff Lodge, was later extended but demolished (or burnt down) in the 1950s.

Governor Sorell, Mrs Kent and their large family retreated to the cottage between 1817 and 1824 and, indeed, for a month before sailing when his successor turned up unexpectedly (pp53–4). Government House in Hobart was then in such a state of disrepair that Arthur decamped with his numerous children – and Eliza Arthur (p55) pregnant again – to the cottage in Elizabeth Town.

When the Franklins arrived in Tasmania in 1837, there was no higher education available, so they resolved to establish a college and New Norfolk was considered ideal; 82 acres were set aside at the Government Farm. Jane Franklin explained to her sister on 7 September 1840, that the 'tumble down

cottage will be pulled down, it is now scarcely habitable, which is one reason why we seldom go there'. Jane was ready, too, to donate a large sum of her own to the project.



38. New Norfolk, from a sketch by Elizabeth Prinsep, courtesy of the Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office

The Franklins consulted widely in England and brought out the Rugby and Cambridge clergyman John Gell for the purpose; (he was later to marry Jane Franklin's stepdaughter Eleanor). The foundation stone was laid on 7 November 1840 and a celebration held at Turriff Lodge. That night vandals tore up the stone and stole the coins and document beneath. It was only the start. That was as far as the scheme went in New Norfolk, for there were far too many vested political and religious interests to allow it.

Anna Maria Nixon (p148) described on 22 January 1844 how Franklin's successor, Eardley-Wilmot, 'Won't hear of a college and has filled up the foundation which was dug on the Domain at New Norfolk.' The foundation stone, with its Latin inscription, was hurled over the cliff into the Derwent. (Christ's College was eventually established at Bishopsbourne in the north of the State in 1847).

It was Eardley-Wilmot who introduced hops onto the Government Farm, which accounts for the oasthouses that remain. But Turriff Lodge was to come back to haunt the governor, for he is said to have spent a night there with Julia Sorell without a chaperone, an action which, though he tried to bluster his way out of the accusation, added to the list of the indiscretions that led to his recall (pp161, 240).

Round the Domain today is a 'Scenic Walk' which I surmise Jane Franklin would have much enjoyed. I recommend you to take it.

There is some evidence that on the opposite bank to the Domain was the house where Mary Ann McCarty was attacked by bushrangers in 1814 (p91). She and her husband Dennis – leading light from the beginning of New Norfolk and builder, in 1818, of the first, rather rough road to Hobart – had several properties in the area. The Macquaries stayed with them in 1811. McCarty was drowned in the Derwent under suspicious circumstances in 1820 and, four months later, Mary Ann married Thomas Lascelles who had harassed her late husband and who proceeded to run through her money. She ran a school in Hobart until the mid 1850s.

St Matthew's Church

Make your way now up Pioneer Avenue to Arthur Square. On the north east side is said to be the oldest church in Tasmania, given that the original St David's in Hobart (p244) was replaced and St John's in Launceston is four months less venerable (p376). It was begun in 1823 and opened for services in 1825. Mrs Bridger's younger daughter, also **Ann Bridger**, married George Woodward there on 12 February 1829, and she was to have seven children. Norah Corbett married Jorgen Jorgenson on 25 January 1831 before their over-merry wedding feast at the Bush Inn. On 4 February 1832, American Eliza Romney Fisher married editor Henry Melville (p131). On 6 November that year, playwright David Burn, son of Jacobina Burn (p74), and father of Jemima Irvine (p102), married for the second time, having gone home to Edinburgh to divorce Jemima's mother. His new bride was **Catherine Fenton**, Elizabeth Fenton's sister-in-law. Elizabeth's daughter Flora, a baby in her published diary, married there in 1848.

In the east of the Sanctuary is a stained-glass window of the manger scene. The child holding a Bible behind the angel at the crib is **Nancy Hope Shoobridge** (1890–98), who died at sea aged eight on her way to England to see her grandparents. In 1910, her parents (p306) donated a cottage hospital to the town in her memory and continued to contribute much to the social welfare of the community.

Stephen Street Cemetery

You will look in vain for this beside the church; instead, go clockwise round the square and down Stephen Street; there on the right is a gate through which you can see, plumb in the middle, the imposing Lord family vault. On one side is the plaque,

Sacred to the memory of Maria Lord, wife of E. Lord Esq of Lawrenny Hamilton who died at Bothwell the 22nd July 1859 in her 78th year. A friend to the needy.

So ended the life of one of Tasmania's earliest and most colourful characters (p33). Her eldest son, who drowned at Lawrenny, is also buried there. Her

estranged husband died in England two months after her. The Bothwell itinerary will introduce Maria's last home and trading place (p334).

Another grave of note is that of **Mary Mills** (née Collin, c1812–1836), murdered on the New Norfolk Road in October 1836, aged only 24. Joan Goodrick tells the story in more detail, based on the trial of her murderer – it is less accessible in *By George* (nd; produced privately for the family by Peter Mills). Mary's husband of only a few months, former convict and pioneer coach-owner George Mills, remarried in 1837. When he died in 1849, his wife, **Mahala Mills** (née Champion, 1819–1884), took over running the coach service and the licence of the Brunswick Wine Vault in Hobart, and even expanded, though she remarried, had three children with butcher John Maddock, to add to the four with Mills and, in 1854, gave the business up.

The cemetery was established in 1823 – which perhaps suggests there were services in St Matthew's from its very beginnings – and closed in 1875. I understand at one time it was rather untended, but not now.

Willow Court (New Norfolk Asylum; Royal Derwent Hospital)

Stephen Street turns right at the end and George Street leads into the Avenue. On the right there is Willow Court. Its status when you read this is difficult to predict. It could be transformed into a big new development, or a patchy development, or be mostly deserted and full of ghosts of the past, as when I last saw it. Something of the past will by law be retained, whatever its future.

It is known as Willow Court because Jane Franklin planted at least one of her St Helena willow twigs there (p285). The tree that grew was cut down in 1961 but there is now a well-established tree in the main courtyard that at least has the shape of a willow and so gives an impression of Jane's touching environmental gesture.

Some of the buildings date from 1827 when it was a convict depot for invalids guarded by the military with barracks that still stand. When Port Arthur was established in 1830 (p280), the New Norfolk establishment was expanded and became a mental asylum for the free as well as convicts. By 1848, it was exclusively so, though those with learning difficulties mingled indiscriminately with the mentally ill. It was divided into female and male sections. Susan Piddock's *A Space of Their Own: The Archaeology of Nineteenth Century Lunatic Asylums in Britain, South Australia and Tasmania* (2007) provides a detailed, scholarly history. The Royal Derwent Hospital, its last manifestation, was closed in 2001.

Different sources deal with particular aspects. Alison Alexander's unpublished thesis, for example, gives an impression of what it was like for the women staff – at first convict nurses – in this isolated spot. It was 'dark and overcrowded, patients were often rough and dirty, and nurses slept in the ward, so were on duty almost 24 hours a day'. One surgeon admitted in his diary to striking a nurse. At first they were not even paid.

The upper echelons, head nurses, sub-matrons and matrons, had higher status and were paid. Matrons were managers, until the 1840s married to the

Superintendent. Widowed **Jane Fosbrook**, who had taken the job of matron to provide for her children and was considered 'respectable', resigned because of the inmates' obscene language and violent conduct. **Gertrude Kenny**, former matron of the Girls' Industrial School, appointed in 1877, was kicked by a patient, resulting in a tumour. Treated by the Superintendent, she charged him with indecent assault. **Martha Leland**, having worked in six asylums in Britain, was appointed in 1879 but was dismissed, according to a Commissioner, because 'She dared to have an opinion of her own.'

Her place was taken by **Selina Alexander** (bc1855), a qualified nurse with a reference from Florence Nightingale. She was responsible for raising the pay and conditions of her staff. In 1890, aged 35, Selina married, as his second wife, Robert Shoobridge of apple-producing Valleyfield who was a government visitor of the asylum. They were to become parents of Nancy Hope, the girl in the St Matthew's stained-glass window (p304).

Jane Power, promoted from head nurse in 1895, would not be dictated to by any man, and ran the place smoothly.

Kay Daniels gives a glimpse of one convict inmate in her chapter on prostitution (p37). An 1850 letter from **Elizabeth** (surname illegible) to the Quaker humanitarian George Washington Walker survives. She started as a prostitute, or a woman who had been seduced and abandoned, and came to the notice of the Society for the Suppression of Vice and admitted to the Van Diemen's Land Asylum for Unfortunate Women (which may have also been known as the Magdalen) set up under the patronage of Caroline Denison (p198), but ended up in New Norfolk. Her main concern was her son: 'Sir, if you will be kind enough to inform me how my dear litel boy is and wether he is at school or what school he is sent to for I left him at the Magdalen. I am truly sorry for my conduct whilst there.' She longed more than anything to see her son.

But it was by no means only an asylum for convicts. Margaret Lovell Kearney of Carrington (p277) had a mental breakdown following her husband's death and was sent to New Norfolk where her religious mania deepened. Eventually her doctors were prepared to discharge her. But, 'As regards returning to Richmond,' she wrote in September 1861, 'I would not go back there voluntarily if you were to proffer me a mine of gold.' Those from the upper echelons of society were not housed with the lower, and separate accommodation in the grounds was much discussed over the years; in 1868, 'Ladies' Cottages' were constructed for fee-paying patients.

Madge Edwards' mother, Amy Sorell Archer (p268) was in indifferent health for some years but in 1905 was desperately ill. Although she recovered physically, she was mentally affected and, aged 36, was admitted to the asylum. Rosemary Brown prints her first hospital report, ending: 'She neglects herself in almost every way.' Finally, Amy was diagnosed with dementia.

The stigma attached to having a relative in New Norfolk is hinted at in Tasma's *Not Counting the Cost* (p256). Eila's husband has been admitted and 'At the first word of admiration that her appearance excited, a hundred informants were ready to whisper "She has a husband in the asylum, and they

are *such* a peculiar family.” Tasma also introduces the asylum into ‘What an Artist Discovered in Tasmania’ (p284):

... on a knoll girt in by native trees, interspersed with alien elms and willows, stood a building that would have given a Turk the horrors. From its clean, bare corridor and windows, the oldest of old women, in every stage of decrepit, pathetic, grotesque old age, look forth. They appear to mouth at a world that is perpetually renewed, while they cannot make good the loss of a tooth, or a failing sense. Such as have any sensation left are snappish. The oldest of all are the merriest, mumbling with idiotic satisfaction, when they warm themselves like vegetables in the sunshine.

Ghosts, indeed, stalk the extensive buildings and grounds.

Magra (Back River)

Go back over the bridge and now follow the signs north for Magra, what used to be called Back River. After the turnoff to the golf club, turn left along Lawitta Road to the Back River Methodist Chapel, built in 1837. In the graveyard is the burial place of Betty King who lived with the claim of the first white woman to arrive in Australia (p9). The headstone later erected attests to that.

Also, there are 29 Triffitt family graves. One of them is that of **Charlotte Triffitt** (née Young, b1844), born, brought up and married, in 1876, in Back River. In 1935, aged 91, she reminisced to a *Mercury* journalist about the funeral of Betty King in 1856. That’s quite some hands across history!

Charlotte, the eldest daughter of a family of eleven, also remembered having to look after her siblings while her mother worked on their small farm. When she was a girl, ‘The main water supply for residents of New Norfolk ran down the main street in an open drain and at each house it was stored in wooden casks built into the ground.’

Two Shone headstones lead to the second site in Magra.

Stanton

Less than a mile from the chapel, at 504 Back River Road, is Stanton Bed and Breakfast, run since 2003 by Helen and Mark McDiarmid. The two-storeyed Georgian house, built by Thomas Shone in 1817, was not always the peaceful haven it is today. This is where in 1843 the Shone family was attacked by the bushranger Martin Cash and his crew (p96).

Thomas’ wife Susannah had been born on Norfolk Island, the free-born daughter – one of seven children – of convicts. Like most of the Norfolk Islanders, the family, by then free settlers, were transferred to Tasmania in 1808 and, aged 21, Susannah married Thomas in Hobart in 1820. Life at Back River then would not have been easy, and they lost much of material

value that night; the family was threatened afterwards by Cash and had their assigned servants removed for giving in to him.

When I contacted Helen McDiarmid, she wrote back to me not only about the Shones but also about Betty King:

When we first moved here and I heard her story, I wondered whether anyone remembered her passing, so jumped in my car late one afternoon with paper and pen to record the date of her death. There, in that atmospheric graveyard, I read that she had died on my birthday!! Well, since that's easy to remember, I visit her grave every year on my birthday and leave some flowers from Stanton, since she would have been familiar with the people who built the house. It's a small universe!

When I wanted Helen's permission to quote from her email, I received no response, which surprised me because we had become good email friends in 2008. Eventually, I rang and discovered from Mark that Helen died on 30 December 2009. He plans to continue the venture they shared at Stanton – www.stantonbandb.com.

Bushy Park and Hawthorn Lodge

Leave New Norfolk township westward via Glenora Road; indeed, Glenora, some miles further north west, is the furthest port of call in this itinerary. Pass Plenty; it's more relevant to stop there on the way back.

Bushy Park, twelve miles from New Norfolk, was originally the property of Adolarius Humphrey who arrived with David Collins in 1804 and, although he and Edward Lord built the house known as the first in Hobart (from the pen and ink drawing that survives), he did not settle, roaming first in Tasmania as a mineralogist and then on the mainland. He met Harriett Sutton, daughter of a convict storekeeper, in Sydney and took her to Tasmania. Macquarie insisted that he return her to her father (for reasons that sources do not spell out), but Humphrey demurred and they were married in Hobart in 1812.

It was about this time that Humphrey was granted the acres in the Derwent Valley, what came to be known as Humphreyville. By 1814, he had been appointed a magistrate, and later Superintendent of police. This left him little time to manage his land so, as the Land Commissioners described in 1826, it was Harriett who did so, impeccably (p72).

When Humphrey died in 1829, Harriett inherited the property. To save her financial embarrassment, the government bought grain from her. In 1831, she married John Kerr. Other sources say that Humphrey's nephew inherited his property and leased it to John Kerr.

Beatrice Kitty Blyth (1849–1948) aged 92 and living in Melbourne recorded her memories of Bushy Park in 1941; they were drawn upon by KR von Stieglitz. Beatrice's mother, **Elizabeth Crowther Blyth** (1815–1897), arrived in Tasmania with her parents in 1825 and was educated at Ellinthorp Hall (pp138, 336). At that time she amassed a folio of sketches, watercolours and

poems by herself and friends; her six Crowther sisters were also artistic. She married William Blyth in 1835, six weeks after their first meeting following his arrival in Tasmania with a letter of introduction to her father, and between 1837 and 1849 they had 14 children, eight daughters and six sons whom Eliza educated herself, but had no more time for her artistic endeavours. The Blyths moved into Humphreyville in 1850, changing its name to Bushy Park and, when they had built another house next door in 1859, their son, Beatrice's brother, lived at Bushy Park.

Ebenezer Shoobridge bought the property in 1867, moving there from Valleyfield, and introduced to the area the hops which his father had brought over from Kent in 1822. Bushy Park was to become the largest hop-producer in Australia. Among the texts, mostly biblical, inscribed on the blocks of the hop kiln, known locally as the Text Kiln, is one that reads: 'Erected by Ebenezer Shoobridge in 1867 assisted by his wife and three sons and five daughters, union is strength. God is love.' Ebenezer's wife was **Charlotte Giblin Shoobridge** (1813–1870) who had married him in 1841; one of the sons was Robert, eventually of Valleyfield (p306). The Shoobridge family were to farm Bushy Park for the next seven decades, 65 of those years continuously growing hops, until the bottom fell out of the hop market.

In the early days, many pickers were women who tended to work in family groups, and it was one job where pay was equal because it depended on the quantity picked during the twelve-hour day, 6am to 6pm. Conditions for pickers were seen as less favourable in the early twentieth century. The annual Bushy Park show and Strawberry Feast was held in the lee of the hop kiln.

Matilda Swynys visited Tasmania from the mainland in the late 1860s and wrote of a trip up the Derwent on a steamer 'decorated with lilies and yellow broom and filled with holiday makers enlivened by a good German band'. In 'A Lady's Trip to Tasmania' (preserved in the family's archives and available on the internet), she added: 'A gentleman at New Norfolk gave a strawberry feast to five hundred visitors.' The hop kiln is still there, but on private property; you can glimpse it from the road.

But my objective in travelling to the area was to visit Hawthorn Lodge, easily found on the corner as you leave Bushy Park and before you turn left to take the road to Glenora. It was Hawthorn Lodge – originally built in 1869 for Robert Shoobridge – and the surrounds that inspired *Wild Orchard*, the best-regarded novel of **Isabel Dick** (1881–1959) (p97). Isabel, or Daisy, was the daughter of **Kate Shoobridge** (b1850), one of Charlotte Shoobridge's hard-working daughters, and Quaker accountant Charles Atkins. In 1887, when Daisy Atkins was six, several died during a typhoid epidemic in Hobart; Daisy caught it from her father and was, for a time, deaf, blind and speechless; her life was despaired of. She recovered, but wore thick-lensed glasses thereafter. To convalesce, she was invited to stay at Hawthorn Lodge which her uncle William Shoobridge and his wife **Ann Benson Mather Shoobridge** (1845–1920, m1869) had taken over from her uncle Robert in 1878.

In *Wild Orchard*, the 1840 property Parklands which Harriat (Harry) and Jan Halifax develop from a burnt-out cottage he had inherited is quite

obviously set around here, with New Norfolk their nearest town. Arriving at the property on bullock carts of possessions, they discover the skeleton of the house they were hoping to live in. Harry takes it in her stride:

‘What does it matter? We can surely sleep in tents until another house is built. This is where we must have the house, Jan, on this bank where we can watch the sunset across the river. Look, just here, not back there with it hidden among the trees.’

‘Why, Harry, you’re right. This is the spot; and down there, acre after acre, my hop fields shall stand, easily irrigated from the river; the orchards shall be planted farther up where they have good drainage on the slopes ...

One of the properties in Isabel Dick’s turn of the twentieth-century novel *Country Heart* (1947) is Parklands, in the grounds of which grew ‘an immense chestnut, planted by Great-grandfather and Granny Halifax’. The typhoid epidemic is also made use of. But this is not such an engaging novel, though the love of the Tasmanian countryside still shines through.

When we visited it, Hawthorn Lodge was a guest house which remained much as it was for Isabel Dick, though framed by a 100-year-old magnolia and a huge cherry tree. But I understand that it has recently been sold, so that its status as I write is unknown.

Fenton Forest

Turn left outside the gate of Hawthorn Lodge and almost immediately left again. A few yards on, on the left, is a petrol station which might prove useful; it also sells take-away fried food. If you have come from Hobart and were expecting a nice little café round here, you will be disappointed; bring a picnic. Not far from there, on the right, by an old railway crossing, is a turning marked ‘Fenton Forest’.

You are not really intruding to drive up a poplar avenue, at least to where it asks for cherrypickers, where a herd of cows may block your way, and where an avenue of oak leads up to today’s house owned by the Shoobridge family who bought the property in 1878. Elizabeth Fenton’s original house was burnt down in 1848, and its successor demolished. So what you are looking at are the surroundings in which she lived for 45 years: hilly, serene in summer, splashes of dark green from fruit trees and eucalypts, and the glory of the Derwent all along the 20 kilometres from New Norfolk which she travelled when she first arrived and no doubt many times in the years that followed.

When Elizabeth left the Bush Inn in the winter of 1831 (p301), she was wearing black satin boots. ‘I had to sit down to ease the pain of my bruised feet,’ she wrote, ‘for the boots were in fragments with the rough ground I had to walk through.’ And the first view of her new home was not auspicious:

It was a long, shapeless, naked brick cottage outside, but oh! within, there was confusion worse confounded. Every article of baggage that had been sent up, furniture, packing cases, had all been piled up, promiscuously, as



39. Old Fenton Forest House, by Elizabeth Fenton, from von Stieglitz, *A History of New Norfolk and the Derwent Valley*

they presented themselves. The vile servants we had sent out had profited by the opportunity to pillage everything they could abstract. All the farm servants had collected in the house, and the nurse – my right-hand woman, as I took her to be – had opened a keg of rum for their refreshment; rum, tobacco, noise and dirt assailed every sense with horror and dismay.

And she had baby Flora in her arms, as well as being pregnant! Elizabeth's sketch of the house dates from 1832 and perhaps shows some improvement. The published volume of her diary is abridged and ends in December that year. Tasmanian historian Margaret Mason-Cox has transcribed the unpublished diaries (1857–67) in preparation for a biographical study of Elizabeth. In the meantime, there are glimpses of the family elsewhere. It is known that Michael's two cousins – like him, army captains – and their families joined them in New Norfolk, and that he brought over 18 Irish families to work and live on the estate; by the time of his death they had grown to nearly 30. He was nominated to the Legislative Council in 1855, made Speaker and, in 1856, elected to the new House of Assembly of which he was, in due course, also appointed Speaker. It is not surprising, therefore, that Beatrice Blyth should write of Elizabeth's arrival at church:

Captain Michael Fenton's wife was the great lady of the district and more often than not was late for the service. But on arrival she would proceed

to the pulpit, bow, and apologise for being late. Then the Rector, not to be outdone, would bow too, and begin the service again.

One of Elizabeth's friends was **Loetitia Casey** (née Gardiner, 1819–1863), sketcher and pianist. Her sketch of Fenton Forest in 1838, showing the house from a distance, in its grounds, makes it look nothing short of gracious. Loetitia's widowed father emigrated to Tasmania with his children in 1835 and settled in New Norfolk; there, in 1839, she married surgeon Cornelius Casey. Many of her drawings date from, and reflect, their life there and then. Loetitia's sepia wash and drawing of Jane Franklin's *Ancanthe* (p271) resulted from their friendship, perhaps forged at New Norfolk.

St John's Church (Plenty)

Retrace your steps towards New Norfolk and stop half-way between there and Bushy Park, at St John's Church, Plenty, now on the left. The reason you should leave this until last is that Elizabeth Fenton died in 1876, two years after her husband, and both are buried in the graveyard. St John's was consecrated in 1852 and replaced a schoolroom between Fenton Forest and Bushy Park, or the drawing room of the latter. It was attended by the Fentons and the Blyths. Beatrice Blyth noted:

There being no church nearer than St John's at Plenty, the whole Blyth family used to be driven the five miles to attend services in a large two-horse wagonette, especially built by the farm wheel-wright, and fitted out with crimson cushions. The roads were rough, and it took an hour or more each way. Captain Fenton, when driving to Hobart to attend Parliament, used bullocks in the winter to draw his carriage as far as Plenty; the journey to Hobart taking the whole day.

During Michael's absences there was probably an overseer to carry out his instructions; later their son did so. But Elizabeth certainly ran the house and garden, and Margaret Mason-Cox has found evidence that she designed and oversaw the implementation of a small domestic irrigation scheme which watered the home garden.