# Henry Blackford of Lemon Tree Passage - His Life and Times

**Researched by Lorraine Penhall & Roberta Jones**

**Compiled and Edited by W.L. Howard**

# Preface and Acknowledgements

Henry Blackford was the first settler on the Tilligerry Peninsula which forms part of the southern shoreline of Port Stephens. In the broarder picture he was part of the influx of immigrants who came by choice to Australia, which began about 1800 and continues to this day.

The Blackford family migrated as a result of Henry, a butcher by trade, signing a contract to work for the Australian Agricultural Company which had been given an entitlement to 1,000, 000 acres of land. They arrived in Sydney in 1825 but soon after moved to the north side of Port Stephens which the Company had chosen as the location of its land.

Having received an early release from his contract, Henry successfully applied for a land grant and received an entitlement to 320 acres. He chose the site of his grant to be on the tip of the Tilligerry Peninsula in an area now known as Lemon Tree Passage. He was subsequently granted a further 320 acres.

Henry's attempts to grow wheat and raise cattle were unsuccessful.

As a result he applied to exchange his original grant for better land elsewhere and chose West Bargo as the location of his new grant.

For some years Henry successfully raised cattle but when a severe drought created an economic recession and a drop in cattle prices, Henry and his family moved to Sydney in 1842.

In Sydney, Henry opened a butcher's shop in Redfern, which at the time was being developed as a suburb of Sydney. Here Henry prospered, and when he died in 1848 he owned several Redfern properties.

The details of Henry's life came to light as a result of research into their family history by two of his great great great granddaughters, Lorraine Penhall and Roberta Jones who are sisters. The Penhall family Bible had been passed down through the generations to their father. In it was an early entry re Susannah Blackford born 1831 at Port Stephens. Oral family history had it that Lorraine and Roberta were descendants of Susannah and that she had some connection with Stroud.

Lorraine took the opportunity provided by a visit to Stroud to make contact with the Stroud Historical Society with a view to finding out more about Susannah.

A member of the society greeted Lorraine's phone enquiry with enthusiastic interest. She not only made resources available but actively joined in the search for details about Susannah's life. Subsequent visits by Lorraine and Roberta to Port Stephens Family History Society and the Picton and Districts Historical and Family History Society resulted in a similar response from their members.

At Stroud it was discovered that Susannah was the daughter of Henry Blackford who had come to Australia as an employee of the Australian Agricultural Company and that this Company at one time owned 1,000,000 acres on the north side of Port Stephens and amongst other things had established the township of Stroud which for a time was the Company's administrative headquarters.

It was suggested at Stroud that the book "Pure Merinos and Others" by Penelope Pemberton which is a history of the early years of the Company would make for interesting reading and that a visit to the Noel Butlin Archives Centre at the Australian National University in Canberra where the Company's early records had been placed as archival material would yield additional information about Henry.

This proved to be the case. The author of the above book is the archivist of this material and Dr Pemberton gave freely of her time in locating relevant documents and also contributed her own exhaustive knowledge of the Company to supplement information obtained from written records.

Her book proved to be a valuable resource, providing background information to the events in Henry's life during his early years in the colony.

Dr Pemberton was also kind enough to read an earlier draught of part of this present work and took the time to make several suggestions for its improvement.

Visits were also made to the Newcastle Public Library, The Newcastle University Library, The State and Mitchell Libraries, State Records N.S.W at The Rocks and Kingswood, The Lands Department, City of Sydney Archives and The Society of Australian Genealogists. In each case the staff reacted to enquiries and requests for assistance with unfailing courtesy and patience.

Apart from the initial visit to Stroud, none of the visits were made in the above order. All the information came in snippets and as these were sorted out into a chronological sequence in terms of Henry's life story, numerous repeat visits were made to fill in the gaps. Information was also requested from the relevant records offices in the England.

In addition, as a final step, newspaper advertisements were placed seeking information from other descendants of Henry Blackford. This resulted in a rounding out of the formal details of Henry's life.

It is obvious from the above that the present work resulted from the contributions of many people and to all these we gratefully acknowledge the great indebtedness owed to them.

As editor, I also gratefully acknowledge the tenacity and enthusiasm brought to the project by Lorraine and Roberta. Without their dedication to the self imposed task of searching for the details of Henry's life, there would be no story to write.

Despite all their efforts, gaps remain in the detail of Henry's life. As far as is known, he left no diaries or personal papers which would shed light on these. Consequently, what was usual practice at the time has been used to fill in these gaps. In particular two books proved useful for this purpose. They were "An Account of Agriculture in NSW" by James Aitkinson, first published in 1826 as a guide for intending immigrants and "A Documentary History of Australia" Volumes 1 and 2 compiled by Frank Crowley, published in 1980.

Except in the sense of local or family history, Henry Blackford was not a historical figure, but he and others like him are the most important people in our history. They came to Australia, not only with their hopes and aspirations but with their standards and values. The convicts are an important facet of our national history but in terms of numbers of people who migrated to Australia by choice, represent only a small part of our national origins. It was the Henry Blackfords of this world which gave us the national characteristics that we value as people,

This is his legacy to us.

## EARLY YEARS

Henry Blackford was born in the town of Swindon in the County of Wiltshire, England. There is no record of his birth date, but there is of his christening which took place on 5th February 1796. This would suggest he was born in December-January of 1795-6 or perhaps a little earlier.

His father was G.R. Blackford who was known by his middle name of Robert. Robert was the son of William and Dorothy of Lydiard Millicent (about 5 miles west of Swindon) and baptized on 11th September 1757. On 13th December 1777 he married Rebecca Wayt of Swindon. She was the daughter of John and Elizabeth Wayt of Swindon and baptized at Swindon on 14th March 1757. Robert and Rebecca were to have eleven children of which Henry was the third youngest with five brothers and five sisters.

Robert was a butcher by trade but was also a famous sporting champion. In those days there were recognisable forerunners of modern day cricket and football but most sports were violent, brutal and bloody. Bull baiting by dogs was popular as was dog fighting and cock fighting. There was also backswording. In this, two opponents, each armed with a cudgel (a short wooden club) tried to be the first to inflict a wound on the head of the other such that blood flowed. The other arm of each contestant was secured to his body so that it could not be used to fend off intended blows. Success in a contest depended as much on agility in avoiding blows as the ability to inflict them.

The name of the sport derived from a type of sword at one time popular in warfare. A backsword was a large, two handed sword with only one side of its blade sharpened. When swung one way, it could cut or hack in the same way as a conventional sword. When swung the other way it had the same effect as a club. In this case it was usually swung overhead with the intention of hitting the opponents skull. This had the effect of driving the head down on to the spine and the spine penetrated the brain causing death.

Robert Blackford at one time was the backswording champion of the southern counties of England. At one contest he defeated ten opponents in succession. There was prize money to be won at such contests which would imply that the Blackford family were financially better off than the families of other butchers at the time.

The recorded history of Swindon can be traced back to Saxon times and over the years it developed into an important regional town. Its economical prosperity in Henry's time rested on the buying and selling of farm produce and livestock, and the distribution of these items to places further afield. Sometime in its history it overtook the county's administrative centre of Salisbury in population and today is the largest town in the county. All this means that Henry grew up in an urban rather than a rural environment.

During his time in Australia Henry wrote several letters to the colonial administration which have survived. These show him to be literate, not only in a technical sense of being able to spell and use correct grammar but also to be able to express himself clearly. This would suggest he had some formal schooling during his childhood.

In those days attendance at school was not compulsory and there was no system of public education such as exists today, but there were several avenues by which formal schooling could be obtained.

At one extreme of cost were what are called private schools in Australia but public schools in the United Kingdom. Typically these were established by an endowment from a wealthy person, and charged high fees. An example is Eton in Buckinghamshire which was established in 1443 by Henry VI. These were dotted throughout the country. If one existed in Swindon it was too costly for Henry to have attended it.

At the other extreme were Sunday Schools conducted by parish churches which not only taught Bible stories but reading and sometimes writing. The emphasis on reading was so people could read The Bible. These were fairly low level in their aspirations and it is clear that Henry was better educated than those who attended only these schools.

Between these two extremes were two other opportunities for learning and it was more likely that Henry attended one of these.

There were church-affiliated charitable organizations whose efforts were directed to educating those who were too poor to attend a private school. Such schools were government subsidized and charged low fees. They were the closest thing, at the time, to the present day system of primary school education.

Swindon also had a school of a type which was rare if not unique. It had been established long before Henry's time by an endowment but unlike other schools established in this way, the conditions of the endowment were that part of the money should be reserved for the costs of running the school, and so education at this school was free, but enrolments were limited to 100 boys and entry was very competitive.

Overall, Swindon provided opportunities for Henry to have received a school-based education. Enquires to the relevant authorities have, however, not been successful in determining which, if any of these schools, Henry attended.

In his adult life, Henry was a butcher. At the time there was no formal course of training to enter this trade. Henry would have started at the age of 12 or earlier by performing menial tasks in his father's shop, then, through on the job instruction, progressively gained the skills necessary to serve customers without supervision.

The trade of butcher differed from what it is today. It started with the slaughter of the animal and the dressing of it to reduce it to a carcass which was then cut up into pieces of meat suitable for roasting or boiling rather than into the steaks and chops which are popular today. Very little of the animal was wasted and the making of sausages and other small goods out of scraps and offal was part of the trade.

There was also the need in those pre-refrigeration days to preserve meat which was not sold almost immediately after slaughter, in an edible state. One way of doing this was by soaking the meat in brine and corning it. Another was by salting the meat, packing it into barrels, then making the whole airtight by pouring a layer of fat over the top of the meat. A third alternative was to smoke the meat.

Overall a butcher's tasks in Henry's day were more varied than they are today.

At some time, Henry served in the Royal Navy. After migrating to Australia, he applied for a land grant. In his application he stated he had served in the Royal Navy for "about four years" on board HM Sloop "Victor" and had been discharged under the "peace time establishment". Enquiries made to the relevant records office in England have failed to yield any further details about Henry's naval service.

Britain was at war with France from 1793 until 1815 when Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo by the Duke of Wellington. During this time there was a massive expansion of the Royal Navy, so much so that there were insufficient volunteers to crew the ships. A system of conscription was introduced by which each county was required to select a quota of men to make up the shortfall in numbers.

Henry was almost certainly one of these quota men. Wiltshire is an inland county and unlike say Devon has no tradition of seafaring. Further, in later life, Henry showed no affinity for the sea.

With the coming of peace, much of the Royal Navy was taken out of active service. Ships were laid up, crews were discharged, and officers transferred from the active to the reserve list and put on half pay. This was the "peace-time establishment" referred to by Henry. His "about four years of service" places the time of his service in the years 1812-15 or thereabouts.

Until the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, Britain had feared a French invasion but with Nelson's victory at Trafalgar, when most of the French fleet was sunk, this threat was removed and the Royal Navy was no longer stationed around the British Isles but was free to adopt a more aggressive role. During the time of Henry's service the Royal Navy was engaged in three main activities.

A blockade of French or French controlled ports was established. This was designed to prevent France receiving food and other imports it needed to maintain its war effort. The blockade extended around the European coast from Norway to Italy and at times ships of the Royal Navy were engaged in action against other ships seeking to defy the blockade.

In particular, America, which was neutral during the war, objected to its ships being searched for contraband goods, and in 1812 declared war on Britain. The Royal Navy imposed a blockade of the east coast of America and in one sided actions against the fledging US Navy, sunk ships seeking to make for the open sea. Ships of the Royal Navy were also engaged, on the Great Lakes, in frustrating an abortive attempt by the Americans to invade Canada.

The third major activity of the Royal Navy during Henry's time of service was the suppression of piracy. During the time when the Royal Navy was mainly concerned with protecting the British Isles from a French invasion, pirates were able to attack British merchant ships almost at will.

Pirates based on the Arabian and African coasts attacked shipping in the Indian Ocean and those from Tunisia and Algeria attacked shipping in the Mediterranean. After Trafalgar, Royal Navy ships were free to patrol these waters and protect merchant shipping.

A ship such as HM Sloop "Victor" on which Henry served could have been engaged in any one of the above activities. A sloop was the smallest ship (as distinct from a boat) in the Royal Navy. Sloops were fast, highly manoeuverable and had a shallow draft. As a result they could enter bays and rivers which larger vessels could not. Typically a sloop had a crew of 100 men and carried between 16 and 20 guns on a single deck.

Henry almost certainly served as a butcher on the "Victor" and as a qualified tradesman would have had the rank of able bodied rather than ordinary seaman.

Sailing ships enjoyed an advantage over modern ships in that it was not necessary for then to call into a port in order to refuel. Consequently they could remain at sea for much longer times. This resulted in the staple diet on board a Royal Navy ship at sea being salt meat and hard tack ( a form of biscuit) because these kept in an edible state for a long time.

To relieve the monotony of such a diet it was usual for a ship to leave port with as many live animals as the ship had room to carry. These were progressively slaughtered during the voyage. Consequently Royal Navy ships had a butcher as part of their complement.

Henry had a certificate showing he had been granted the Freedom of the City of London which he stated in one of his letters to the colonial administration after arriving in Australia was as a result of his services in the Royal Navy. The Freedom of the City or Town is the highest honor a municipal authority can award. Its origins date back to medieval times when towns had defensive walls

around them. Non-residents such as traveling merchants were only allowed into the town at designated times and then only under guard.

When a non-resident rendered some outstanding service to the town an award of Freedom of the Town was made which meant the person could come and go as he pleased. As an able bodied seaman on a small ship it is extremely doubtful that a city the size of London would see anything Henry had done as worthy of such an award. It is more likely that the City had a civic welcome for servicemen as a mark of appreciation for what they had done in defeating the French and each received the Freedom of the City.

A similar event happened in Sydney in 2004 when our athletes who had performed so well in the Para-Olympics, paraded through the streets, were given a civic reception and each received the Freedom of the City of Sydney irrespective of their individual achievements.

Today, and even in Henry's time the award carried no tangible benefit but it remains a mark of honour.

Henry was discharged at Portsmouth and presumably went back to Swindon but the next that is known about him is that he was living in Chelsea.

Chelsea was originally a village further up the Thames than London. By Henry's time it was becoming part of the urban sprawl of London. Here, Henry married Elizabeth Baines at the Church of St Luke on 7th October 1821. Both were described as residents of the Parish.

Little is known about Elizabeth except she was born in 1800 and was of Scottish origin.

The Blackfords were soon to have two children, Henry Jnr born in 1822 and William (known as Alexander) born in 1823.

Henry was apparently restless. On 12th May 1825 he signed a contract with the newly formed Australian Agricultural Company to work for the Company for seven years in the colony of NSW.

In return, he and his family were to be conveyed to the colony at the Company's expense, receive free accommodation and food and Henry was to be paid an annual wage of 30 pounds.

In the language of the day, Henry, by entering into the contract became an "indented servant" of the Company.

From a financial point of view this was an attractive arrangement for Henry. At the time a journeyman butcher in England could expect an annual wage of around 70 pounds. The cost of a passage from England was 40 pounds for adults and a negotiated rate for children. By signing the contract, Henry had saved himself over a year's wages in fares, and in addition, having covered the basic costs of feeding and housing his family, have around 40% of his normal gross income to spend as he wished.

# THE VOYAGE OUT

The Australian Agricultural Company was very much the brainchild of John Macarthur.

When in late 1809 news of Governor Macquarie's impending arrival reached NSW, John Macarthur fled to self imposed exile in England, fearing prosecution for his part in removing Governor Bligh from office nearly two years earlier.

During his eight years in exile, Macarthur actively promoted his view that the future development of the colony depended on the investment of British capital and that those providing this capital could expect a high return on their investment. After his return to Australia, his eldest son John Jnr continued to promote his father's views and eventually an act of parliament in 1824 established the company as a legal entity and gave it an entitlement to 1,000,000 acres of land. The Company's envisaged capital of 1,000,000 pounds was soon fully subscribed.

Unlike today, in 1824 a public company with shareholders and with a Board of Directors managing the company on their behalf was new. A specific act was necessary to spell out exactly what the company could and could not do. For example that it could own land and have legal title to it.

The act stated that the Company was to have a three tiered management structure. An England based Board of Directors (called a "Court" in the act) determined policy. An Australian based Management Committee provided advice on how best to implement these policies, and a Chief Agent (a Chief Executive Officer in today's terms) acting on this advice, implemented these policies.

The Macarthur family dominated the initial (and as it turned out only) Management Committee. On it were James, Macarthur's son, James Bowman, Macarthur's son-in-law, Hannibal, Macarthur's nephew, Phillip Parker King, son of the former governor and married to Hannibal's sister, and Archdeacon Scott.

John Macarthur was nominated but Scott and King advised against his appointment on the grounds of his increasingly ill health. King was a serving officer in the Royal Navy and not always based in Australia. Even when he was, he was frequently absent from the colony because of his naval duties. Scott was advised by the Colonial Office that membership of the committee would be "inappropriate" for a clergyman.

The first Chief Agent was Robert Dawson who was an experienced estate manager, and the reference from his employer, Lord Barrington highly recommended him for this position. Having attended the same school as John Macarthur Jnr (although not at the same time) was also a point in his favour.

Initially, the Company's general intention was to enter into a variety of rural activities, but early in the piece this was changed to placing an emphasis on wool production.

Before leaving England, Dawson put together all the things he might need for such a large scale enterprise. He purchased tools and other implements, a variety of plants and seeds and also a variety of stud livestock which he intended to breed with locally purchased livestock when he arrived in the colony.

The Company was to be assigned a large number of convicts (typically around 500 at any one time) but convicts were by-and-large unskilled and suitable only for manual labour. Consequently Dawson recruited a nucleus of 26 men who possessed the skills he thought were necessary for the Company's success.

In an overall sense Dawson sought as far as possible to be in a position where he did not have to rely on things that he needed being available in the colony.

This was the general background to Henry being employed by the Company.

Dawson charted two ships, “York” and “Brothers” to convey to the colony all that he had acquired. On 24 June 1825 with the Blackfords aboard “Brothers” the ships left England.

The five months long voyage out was no pleasure cruise. At the time there were no purpose built passenger ships and both ships were designed to carry cargo rather than passengers. Senior Company officials such as Dawson had cabin space but this was achieved by the ships’ officers vacating their cabins and doubling up with others.

Indented servants and their families were not of sufficiently high status to have such accommodation.

At the rear of the sailing ships, below deck was the steerage area. This was the space through which the steerage mechanism of ropes and chains and pulleys linking the helm on the upper deck to the rudder at the rear of the ship, passed. It was essential that this area was accessible at all times because if anything untoward happened with the mechanism the ship could not be steered and was at the mercy of the sea and the weather. Consequently it was kept free of cargo. People, however, could be moved out of the area very quickly. It was in this area that the Blackfords and others were accommodated.

Steerage passengers had no privacy other than what they created themselves by hanging blankets or something similar on lines strung across the ship and endured a semi-communal life style while at sea. There was the inevitable sea sickness and for Henry and Elizabeth, continual concerns over the safety of their two small children. In addition, Elizabeth was in an advanced state of pregnancy when she embarked and gave birth to her third child Jane during the voyage on 15th October 1825. In those pre-anaesthetic days giving birth to a child was a harrowing experience at the best of times. To do so on a pitching, heaving ship would have added greatly to Elizabeth’s discomfort.

All the passengers, and Elizabeth in particular would have been greatly relieved when the ship arrived at Port Jackson.

At the time, the colony was experiencing a period of rapid expansion due to the arrival of an increasing number of migrants. Up to 1820 some 600,000 acres of land was in private ownership; by 1830 this had increased to 3,000,000 acres.

The colony was self-sufficient in staple foods such as meat, grain and vegetables. The days were long gone when the failure of a single supply ship could bring the colony to the brink of starvation as had happened in Phillip’s time as governor.

The growing well-being of the colony was reflected in the appearance of Sydney which now presented as a thriving prosperous town. About one-third of the 1600 houses were made of brick as were the warehouses around the foreshores. Most public buildings were built of stone and this gave the town a look of permanence. Governor Macquarie had done much to improve the roads. He had straightened and widened the main thoroughfares and it was now possible for two vehicles to pass on these without one pulling over to the side. He had also eliminated soft patches and it was now rare to see a bogged or overturned vehicle.

Numerous wharves had been built on the waterfront. It was now possible to load and unload a ship without first conveying the goods by rowing boat.

Social historians commonly remark on how slow urban dwellers in the colony were to develop a style of dress differing from that worn in urban areas of England. The Blackfords could have walked around the streets of Sydney wearing the clothes they bought with them and not felt out of place.

A visitor to Sydney, Christiana Brooks wrote in a diary entry for 10th July 1828 “so perfectly is everything English you could almost feel yourself within 100 miles of London”.

Obviously there were differences – the presence of convict work gangs for example, but these differences made Sydney an interesting and novel place rather than an alien one. It must have been reassuring to the Blackfords and other new arrivals that they had committed themselves to spend the next seven years in a place that in so many ways resembled the world they had left behind.

## FIRST WEEKS IN THE COLONY

The Company had leased a property at Bringelly which is south west of Liverpool and about 55km from Sydney. The property was then called "The Retreat" or "Retreat Farm" but is now known as "Kelvin" and is part of the National Estate. The purpose of leasing a property was to provide a staging point for people and livestock before moving them to the site of the Company's land which at the time was yet to be decided. Workmen had been sent to "Kelvin" in advance to erect accommodation for the new arrivals.

The ships arrived at Sydney in mid November 1825. The livestock were unloaded soon after and Governor Brisbane gave permission for the animals to graze on the Government Domain – the land around Government House reserved for the governor's use. The passengers remained living on board ship for a few more days.

The disembarkation of the passengers and the unloading of the ships on the 27th November 1825 attracted a great deal of attention. For some, this was to see the spectacle of a wharf and nearby streets full of goods, livestock and wagons. For women, it was more a matter of seeing what style of dresses, bonnets and ribbons was the current fashion in London.

The new arrivals responded to this interest appropriately and disembarked in their Sunday best. The Sydney Gazette in reporting on the event described it as "a novel scene" and the appearance of the children as "quite exhilarating".

Unfortunately the Blackfords were still to undergo discomfort. The Company's agents had only contracted with the carters to convey goods to "Kelvin" and they had provided only unsprung wagons. A compromise was reached and the woman and children travelled in some of the wagons while the men walked. Bullock teams travelled slowly and a 55km journey was usually broken by an overnight stopover. The need to provide accommodation for this had also been overlooked, so the journey continued overnight. Furthermore it rained throughout the entire journey. The men trudged on through the mud and the women and children were jolted around for something like ten hours. The motivation to reach their destination and get in out of the rain overrode their need to take prolonged rest breaks.

Dawson was not involved in any of this. He had left things to be supervised by others and had gone off on Company business. Advising government officials of his arrival and introducing himself to members of the Management Committee would have been among his priorities. The next day, having acquired a horse he came to "Kelvin" and found a large number of people asleep on the ground in a state of exhaustion and still in their sodden clothes.

Having seen to things at "Kelvin", Dawson returned to Sydney and made contact with John Oxley, the Surveyor General. All land grants had to be surveyed before all the legalities regarding title were finalised and Oxley's office had records of land which was already in private hands. Also too were records regarding land for which survey was pending. It was the logical place to visit to determine areas which were still available and from which the Company's settlement of 1,000,000 acres could be selected. In addition Oxley had personally explored a large area of north east NSW.

In 1818, Oxley led an expedition to track the course of the Macquarie River. Having reached the Macquarie Marshes, which he found to be impassible, he turned east, discovered the fertile Liverpool Plains, the Castlereagh and Peel Rivers and eventually the Hastings River which he followed to the sea, naming the mouth Port Macquarie. He then turned south and discovered the Manning River, eventually reaching Port Stephens. Here he encountered convict cedar cutting gangs and sent word ahead by one of the ships taking the cedar logs to Sydney for another vessel to come to collect him and his party.

Port Stephens had been identified by Cook on his voyage along the east coast of Australian in 1770. It had come to be known as providing a safe haven for ships encountering storms at sea.

Oxley suggested the Liverpool Plains, the Manning Valley and Port Stephens as suitable areas for Dawson to select. Dawson then conferred with the Management Committee and Port Stephens was selected as a first choice. For a company which intended to import all that it needed and export all that it produced, having a suitable port was a major consideration in deciding on where its land should be located.

Dawson came up to Port Stephens to have a brief exploration which was mainly of the Karuah River Valley. He kept a journal of his activities, which under the circumstances make for strange reading. Its full of descriptions of beautiful scenery and how skilful his aboriginal guides were in hunting animals but lacking completely in any reference as to the suitability of the land for agricultural or pastoral activities.

Despite this, Dawson's visit resulted in Port Stephens as being the location of the Company's grant. This was determined as lying between the Manning River on the north, Port Stephens on the south, the coast on the east and the general run of the Karuah River Valley on the west. Even before the grant was formally made, work began on what was called the Company's "establishment" at Carrington, a little to the east of the mouth of the Karuah River. In January 1826 an advance party of employees from "Kelvin" and workmen recruited from Newcastle (which by then had ceased to be a penal settlement) erected bark huts and other buildings in preparation for the move of employees and livestock from "Kelvin" to Port Stephens.

In the meantime those remaining at "Kelvin" had little to do. Henry possibly supplied fresh meat to the families located there but from future events it seems likely he had sufficient time to satisfy his curiosity about the surrounding area and made trips to nearby places of interest.

The Company charted the brig "Lord Rodney" which sailed from Sydney Cove on 21st February 1826. Aboard were the remaining families, including the Blackfords, from "Kelvin", together with provisions and extra livestock. It anchored in Port Stephens at 12 o'clock on 23rd February 1826.

## PORT STEPHENS

Carrington grew in size to be a substantial settlement. Once a brick pit and kilns were established brick buildings replaced the temporary huts. Eventually Carrington had several warehouses, a carpenter's shop (big enough for Dawson to use for Sunday church services) two blacksmiths shops, a hospital, a school, houses for the employees, barracks for the convicts and also for the soldiers who guarded them, and facilities for Henry to practice his trade. Today, nothing remains standing. (The now deconsecrated church was built later)

Dawson also had a residence built for himself a little to the west of the main settlement at Tahlee. This is till standing but there is some question over how much of the existing house is original. Over the years various owners have made alterations and additions, and the house was severely damaged by fire in the 1860's.

Once Carrington was functioning, Dawson began developing outstations which eventually numbered 23. Most of these were devoted to sheep (By 1828 the Company owned 17,000 sheep). All these outstations were linked by a network of roads and bridges across streams when no suitable ford existed.

Henry's task was to ensure an adequate supply of meat for the Company's workforce and their families. As all those working for the company, both convict and free, received food supplied by the Company, Henry was not engaged in the selling of meat, but delivered all he produced to the Company's store for subsequent distribution. Since this involved the outstations most of the meat was preserved in some way to ensure it arrived in an edible state.

As the Company's workforce increased, so too did Henry's workload. A Company return of April 1827 showed him as having an assistant. There was also a tanner with an assistant making leather out of the skins of the animals Henry slaughtered.

The progress being made at Port Stephens was regularly reported by the Management Committee to the Board of Directors and until December 1827 these painted a glowing picture. In October 1827 the Sydney Gazette published a leading article comparing the Company's future with what had been achieved by the East India Company which was paying a high return to its shareholders.

Then in December 1827, James Macarthur visited Port Stephens and found fault with everything. Dawson, among other things, was accused of mismanagement and wasteful expenditure. Subsequently he was suspended by the committee. James Macarthur went to England and through his brother John Jnr gained the ear of the Board of Directors. When Dawson arrived to defend himself against the charges which had been laid against him the Board changed his suspension to dismissal.

Subsequently Dawson claimed that the Macarthurs had abused their position. As individuals, they bought aged and debilitated sheep at a low price. Then as a committee, acting on behalf of the Company, purchased these sheep at a high price. The sheep Dawson was supplied with were too old to breed and too sickly to produce wool suitable for sale.

Whoever was right, it was obvious that something had to be done. The Company had paid no dividends to its shareholders and had spent 400,000 pounds of its capital. It could not continue to function as it had done. The Board of Directors dismissed the Management Committee and Dawson's replacement was to have the title of Commissioner rather than Chief Agent, and to be directly answerable to the Board.

Meanwhile back in Australia, following Dawson's suspension John Macarthur assumed control of the Company's affairs. Macarthur had no official position in the Company but there were few

people brave enough to question his actions, least of all his family. Macarthur came to Port Stephens for the two months of July and August 1828 and introduced cost cutting measures in order to preserve the Company's capital. All development work was put on hold and contracted employees were invited to apply for early release from their contract.

Henry Blackford was one of those who applied for an early release. James Ebsworth, the Company's Chief Clerk, wrote comments against each applicant's name. Against Henry's he wrote "a very proper man to be discharged". This statement is not as clear as it might be as to what Ebsworth intended.

Today the term "proper man" is not used, but sometimes a person is referred to as a "proper gentleman" which implies the person has more of the characteristics that make a person a gentleman than other gentlemen possess. If Ebsworth's intentions were along these lines the comment is complimentary to Henry.

Some have taken "proper" to refer more to the discharge than the man - that it was proper or right to discharge Henry.

Of the two, the second seems to be the least likely. There is nothing in Henry's later life to suggest he was anything other than a hard working family man and, as will be seen later, his relations with the Company after leaving its employ, remained amicable suggesting he did not leave the Company under some sort of cloud.

Whatever the case, Henry was discharged from the Company's employ and he and his family left Port Stephens for Sydney aboard the Company's cutter on 14th October 1828. With them was a new son, Robert, born a month earlier.

## SYDNEY

The 1828 census taken in November shows the Blackfords as living in Kent Street, Sydney.

Henry rented premises on the corner of Clarence and Market Streets where he opened a butcher's shop. At the time the area was mainly residential with a few commercial premises dotted throughout it. The business did not prosper and in April 1829 Henry wrote to Governor Darling requesting a grant of land.

In this letter he mentioned some of the things that have been discussed in detail earlier. He described how he had come to be in the colony and that he had been discharged "by mutual consent, and not from any misconduct". He went on to say that he has served in the Royal Navy on board the "Victor" and had been discharged under "the peacetime establishment" and finally about his butcher's shop and that because "it does not answer" and has rent to pay, that he "now wishes to enter into agricultural pursuits" and already owned six head of cattle and two horses.

The application was accompanied by a letter of recommendation from John Dunmore Lang.

Lang was the colony's first Presbyterian minister who had arrived in 1823. Lang immediately set about establishing a church organization. He obtained government support for the building of the first Presbyterian Church (in Jamison Street) and he arranged with the church authorities in Scotland to send out other ministers to provide for the needs of the Presbyterians in other areas of the colony, most notably along the Hawkesbury River and later in Moreton Bay (Brisbane) when it ceased to be a penal settlement. Lang was also active in the field of education and was instrumental in establishing the colony's first secondary school, then called Sydney College but now Sydney Grammar School.

Like Macarthur he had a vision for the future development of the colony, but unlike Macarthur he saw it as being based on the Scottish virtues of hardwork and thrift by small- scale farmers. To this end he established charitable organizations in Scotland which assisted intending migrants in paying for their passage out from Scotland.

For many years he was a member of the Legislative Council both when it was an appointed advisory body and when it became an elected body.

In short, Lang was a leading public figure in the colony and not the sort of person who would give a reference to someone who had left a former employer under some sort of cloud.

Somewhere along the line the Blackfords had become known to Lang. This was perhaps during their time at "Kelvin", but if not, certainly during their time in Sydney.

Lang described the Blackfords as people whose "chief desire it is to bring up their children in the fear of God". Lang also described Elizabeth as being a "Scotchwoman" which in the light of his views on the future direction the colony should take, was in itself enough to warrant a grant.

Unfortunately for Henry his application was not successful because he had failed to supply all the information necessary to determine his eligibility for a grant.

When the colony was first established in 1788 everything had to be imported, the result was an enormous expense to the British government, so much so, that it was debated in the British Parliament whether to close it down or not. In order to solve the problem it was decided to encourage people to bring the land into production by making it freely available i.e. granted.

Some migrants arrived in the colony with a letter issued under the authority of the King stating they had an entitlement to a grant of a certain size. These were called "Crown Grants" (The

Australian Agricultural Company's grant was a Crown Grant). Most grants were made to people already in the colony by the governor acting under delegated authority.

In the very early days, a few such grants were made to convicts still under sentence, but most were made to officers in the NSW Corps. In the course of time, most grants were made to convicts who had completed their sentences and were "free under servitude".

This had an unanticipated outcome. Most of these former convicts prospered. Some even became wealthy. That is, the dishonest poor of Britain could, if sent to the colony, become wealthy. The honest poor who remained in Britain remained poor. Consequently the criteria of receiving a grant from the governor was changed.

From 1821-31 land was granted in proportion to the amount of capital brought into the colony. There was a single exception to this. A formula was devised for ex-officers of the Royal Navy and British Army, which by combining rank and years of service yielded an entitlement to a grant of a certain size.

The effect of this change was that former convicts became ineligible for a grant.

As Henry had not stated how much he had in assets he had not satisfied the criteria for a grant and so his application was rejected.

On 30th July 1829, Henry made a second application. This time on a form designed for this purpose. He stated that he had 250 pounds immediately available, three horses, six head of cattle and four pigs making in all, assets of 382 pounds. He reminded the Colonial Secretary that Captain Lawes of HMS "Satellite" had previously forwarded a statement of attesting to all this. Lawes also attested to Henry having received the Freedom of the City of London.

As with his initial application John Dunmore Lang provided Henry with a character reference.

The source of Henry's assets is unknown but there are some possibilities which exist.

Navy pay was notoriously low and had led to two mutinies during the Napoleonic War. Henry would have had little opportunity to have saved anything during his four years of navy service.

He may have saved something during his civilian life but for four years of this he had supported a family so this saving could not have accounted for assets of 382 pounds.

He may have inherited money from his father but enquiries made in England have not yielded any information regard Robert Blackford's will.

The most likely source would appear to be prize money. When an enemy ship was captured and brought to a British controlled port, the value of the ship and its cargo was divided in a predetermined way according to rank, among the crew. Again, no record of this being the case for the crew of the "Victor" have come to light.

Henry's application was accepted positively and he was notified that he was entitled to a grant of 320 acres on 27th September 1829. Henry replied that he had selected the site of this grant at what is now know as Lemon Tree Passage, Port Stephens, and this was agreed to on 1st October 1829.

It would seem that Henry's long term intentions had always been to return to Port Stephens, perhaps not as soon as he did, but at sometime along the way. He had not needed time to visit anywhere to make a selection of a site for his grant but had been able to immediately nominate Lemon Tree Passage as the site. Furthermore since the records of the Australian Agricultural

Company show that he had departed from Carrington for Sydney in the Company's cutter, an open boat, he had left his livestock at Carrington. This also indicates that following the termination of Henry's contract with the Company,  his relations with the Company remained amicable

The Blackfords arrived at Lemon Tree Passage on 1st January 1830 making them the first settlers on the Tilligerry Peninsula.

# LEMON TREE PASSAGE

Lemon Tree Passage is on the eastern end of the Tilligerry Peninsula. The axis of the peninsula is roughly east-west and parallels the general line of Port Stephens. The peninsula is bounded on the north by Port Stephens and on the south by Tilligerry Creek. Just before joining Port Stephens, the creek takes an abrupt turn to the north thus creating a peninsula. "Lemon Tree Passage" is used for both this section of the creek and the land nearby. It was this land that Henry Blackford chose as the site of this grant.

Today the use of the work "creek" is something of a misnomer because for the first 15km or so of its length it averages almost 1km in width, and "creek" implies something smaller. In earlier times, however, "river" was used only for a body of water that flowed directly into the sea.

The peninsula tends to be flat and low lying, with its soils being little more than sand covered with a veneer of humus. Here and there are hills which are former sand dunes and now heavily forested. There are also hills formed out of decayed lava flows and these too are heavily forested. Although there are alluvial soils along Tilligerry Creek suitable for agriculture, these are small in area and the most common use of the land by early settlers was to raise cattle which foraged on the native vegetation.

Henry probably saw the proximity of Carrington to his grant as a big advantage. Carrington provided a convenient means of purchasing or ordering things that he required and also a convenient means of getting what he intended to produce to market.

Lemon Tree Passage had advantages over other sites on the peninsula. Apart from rocky outcrops formed by the lava flows mentioned earlier, the northern shoreline of the peninsula consists of shallow sandy bays. The southern shoreline is lined with tidal mangrove swamps. Neither of these shorelines provide a suitable site for the loading or unloading of a boat. At Lemon Tree Passage deep water is to be found close to the shoreline. At the cost of building a small jetty, goods could be easily transferred between a boat and dry land.

A supply of fresh water was essential for any settler. In living memory a fresh water spring existed at the foot of the first hill in Koala Park at Lemon Tree Passage. It, however, disappeared when recent subdivisions required the installation of storm water drainage and the patten of natural drainage was disturbed.

If the spring did not exist in Henry's time fresh water could easily be obtained by digging a shallow pit and lining it with logs to keep the sand out. This type of soak was used to replenish the fresh water supplies of visiting ships in early times and more recently by graziers to provide a source of fresh water for their cattle.

All in all, Lemon Tree Passage as a site on which to settle had important advantages for Henry.

The terms of Henry's grant included that a second grant of 320 acres could be made providing certain conditions had been met. On 20th March 1830 while in Sydney, Henry applied for an additional grant. In his application he stated that he had constructed "a comfortable dwelling house" and that he had cleared six acres of land with the intention of clearing another acre and planting seven acres with wheat in the "coming season" i.e. August/September 1830 and that the additional land would enable him "to procure pasture for my cattle".

Sir Edward Parry and Lt Donelan confirmed that Henry had built the house and cleared the land.

Admiral Sir Edward Parry was Dawson's replacement but, under the Company's revised management structure, had the title of Commissioner rather than Chief Agent. He had arrived at Carrington on 9th January 1830, just after the Blackfords had settled at Lemon Tree Passage.

Although invariably referred to as “Admiral” he was not promoted to the rank of Rear- Admiral until 1852 long after his time at Carrington.

Lt Donelan of the 57th (West Middlesex) Regiment was the officer in charge of the detachment of soldiers based at Carrington. He was promoted to Captain in 1831.

Both Parry and Donelan were magistrates and enjoyed a status within the Colonial Administration over and above any status enjoyed because of their positions at Carrington.

Nothing more is known about Henry’s achievements at Lemon Tree Passage but it is possible to surmise what was involved on the basis of what was usual at the time.

On arrival at a new grant, a settler usually constructed a bark hut. These were quick and easy to erect and although ramshackle in appearance served their purpose of providing shelter.

“A comfortable dwelling house” was something more than this with the walls made out of slabs of timbers and the roof of shingles or bark. The slabs were obtained from local timber by splitting logs. These were then dressed, to remove any irregularities, using an adze. Logs with grooves in them were placed on the ground to define the perimeter of the house and the slabs erected in these grooves. The top of the slabs were secured using another grooved log. The internal walls were similarly constructed. Henry probably used shingles rather than bark for the roof of his house since swamp oaks (casuarinas glauica) grow in profusion along the banks of Tilligerry Creek and these were prized as a source of shingles because their timber splits so easily.

Land clearing was usually done progressively. The first clearing consisted of removing small trees and shrubs and grubbing out their roots using an axe and a mattock. Larger trees were left to be removed later during the time between harvesting one crop and planting the next. Although ploughs were available, a hoe was still commonly used to till the soil. The hoe was also used to cover the seed after it had been broadcast over the cleared area.

Henry had cattle and these had to be kept out of the sown area and also out of the household vegetable garden. The first fencing was usually made by piling the trees and shrubs which had been removed during the clearing of the land. More permanent post and rail fencing was erected subsequently. The whole of the activities involved in clearing land were initially underwritten by the need to sow a crop and make the land productive as soon as possible.

As far as can be ascertained Henry had only one convict assigned to him at the time and it was impossible for two men to achieve all that had been achieved at Lemon Tree Passage in the three months between the Blackfords’ arrival and Henry’s application for a second grant. It would appear that Henry was able to borrow some convicts from the Australian Agricultural Company.

Convict labour was cheap but not free. There were government regulations regarding the feeding housing and clothing of assigned convicts and the cost of these was borne by the settler. Local magistrates certified that a settler was complying with the regulations, and in the absence of such certificate the convicts were withdrawn and assigned elsewhere.

In the records of the Australian Agricultural Company is a memo dated 11th March 1831 stating that the certificates for Henry’s convicts could not be signed because in Lt Donelan’s view Henry had not supplied his convicts with “proper food”. Normally, a settler’s convicts were of no interest to another settler. The fact that the memo is part of the Company’s records would suggest that the Company still retained an interest in Henry’s convicts. That is, because of Henry’s default, the convicts would no longer be assigned to the Company.

Irrespective of how he had done it, the bottom line was that Henry had shown he was genuine in his attempts to make his land productive, a major condition for receiving a second grant. There

was however a second major condition, that he had to reside on his first grant for a period of seven years, and Henry had not done this.

His application was only partially successful. He was given the second grant provided he lived on the first grant for seven years. In the meantime he could use the land as if it was owned by him, and the land would not be granted to anyone else so long as he remained in residence on his first grant. To all intents and purposes these conditions meant Henry had received a second grant. The only real restriction was that he could not sell the land because he didn't own it.

Neither grant was ever surveyed but it is possible to approximate their extent by scaling off a map. Henry's first grant extended along the peninsula to the present day Bowling Club and his second grant extended from there to the present day Waste Transfer Station. Henry either owned or had control of not quite all the land within the defined boundaries of the locality of Lemon Tree Passage.

In the midst of all this a new daughter Susannah was born in 1831. Susannah was christened by Archdeacon Broughton at Carrington on 19th June 1831, this being one of the earliest to be celebrated there.

## THE NEIGHBOURS

The Blackfords were the first settlers on the Tilligerry Peninsula but not the first people to live on the south side of Port Stephens.

Newcastle was established as a hard labour penal settlement in 1804. At that time there was a widespread belief among convicts that China was only a short distance to the north and absconding convicts almost invariably headed north hoping to reach China. This meant crossing Port Stephens.

Soldiers Point almost divides Port Stephens in two, there being a gap of only 1km between the northern tip of the point and the northern shoreline of Port Stephens.

This was a logical place for absconding convicts to cross Port Stephens and consequently a detachment of soldiers was stationed there. The original name for Soldiers Point was “The Soldiers Hut” because of this.

Over the years 1821-3 the penal settlement at Newcastle was progressively closed down and the convicts moved to Port Macquarie. By then the belief about the proximity of China was no longer widespread and convicts absconding from Port Macquarie tended to head south, hoping to be lost in the anonymity which Sydney provided, and a detachment of soldiers continued to remain at Soldiers Point.

Dawson, on his initial visit to Port Stephens camped overnight with these soldiers.

A little to the south of these soldiers but still on Soldiers Point was the Cromarty family.

William Cromarty was both master and captain of the “Fame”. He had come to Australia with a speculative cargo in 1822, decided to stay and sent for his family to join him from the Orkney Islands.

In the same year, he received a grant on the Karuah River and for a time the Cromartys lived there. When the Australian Agricultural Company received its grant, Cromarty’s grant would have been an enclave surrounded by the Company’s land so Cromarty agreed to exchange his land for “300 acres more or less” on Soldiers Point and settled there.

While he ran cattle on this land he does not appear to have shown much interest in developing it. He used his ship to carry cargoes to the various settlements dotted along the coast, at one time he worked for the Australian Agricultural Company as an overseer,at another as surveyor. For some years he was a relief pilot for ships entering the Hunter River.

The Blackfords were not, then, in isolation when they settled at Lemon Tree Passage. They had the settlement at Carrington and the soldiers and the Cromartys in close proximity to them.

A little after the Blackfords arrival, the Caswells settled on a grant of 50 acres at Tanilba Bay on the Tilligerry Peninsula, about 4km to the west of Lemon Tree Passage.

William Caswell had been a Lieutenant in the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic War and as such (as described earlier) had an entitlement to a land grant if he migrated to NSW. He arrived believing he had an entitlement to 1280 acres (4 squares miles) but when the colonial authorities applied the relevant formula they concluded he was only entitled to 960 acres (3 square miles) which he chose to be on the Williams River near Seaham.

Caswell continued to pursue his case and Governor Darling, using his discretionary powers as governor gave him a special entitlement to a grant of 50 acres at Tanilba Bay. Caswell was to

eventually build Tanilba House on this land which is still standing today and is on the National Heritage Register.

There is some doubt as to when the Caswells actually settled on this land. The usual date given is 1831, when Caswell was given permission to occupy the land but there is evidence to suggest they were there earlier.

Susan Caswell (William's wife) wrote numerous letters to friends and relatives in England, some of which have survived. In one of these, she wrote concerning Tanilba, "William… has sent off men to get a hut up and will follow in a month". Norah Paddle in her book "Tanilba House A Place of White Flowers" assigns p8 a date of 18th July 1930 to this letter. The same book gives the birth of the Caswell's third child, George, as being in 1830 at Tanilba. J. Caswell-Benson wrote a history of her forebears including William Caswell and also quotes the same letter but on p26 gives it a date of 14th December 1839 and on p27 14th December 1830. Subsequent events in the Caswell's life indicate the "1839" is an error and should read 1829 or 1830. * See End Note.

Whatever the actual date of the Caswells arrival, it was after 1st January 1830 when the Blackfords arrived.

There was probably little contact of a purely social nature among the three families. The nature of William Cromarty's various employments took him frequently away from his home and William Caswell spent most working days supervising the work by his convicts at his main grant on the Williams River. On these days he left Tanilba before dawn and arrived back after dark.

The three wives were fully occupied with homemaking tasks and had little time left for the "calls" which were part of the social life of colonial women in urban areas. They had to carry out or supervise all the tasks of a homemaker of today but without today's labour-saving devices.

In addition they had to make many things which are purchased by today's homemakers. Milking the house cow was a daily task, as was separating the milk and cream. Then came the making of butter and cheese. There was also the making of bread, jams and preserves.

Read-to-wear clothing was not commonly available. What little there was, was referred to as "slops" made out of cheap cotton and worn as work clothes. The families probably had their Sunday best clothes made by a tailor or dressmaker but everyday clothing for both men and women was made by the homemaker.

While contact between the families was only made when there was a special need to do so, the fact that it could be made was undoubtedly a source of comfort to each of the families.

End Note.

The originals of Susan Caswell's letters are held in the Mitchell Library. At the time of writing they have been misplaced and are not in the box containing other Caswell papers. The library staff are confident the letters will be found in the course of routine checking of other boxes but the library lacks the resources to make a special search to locate the missing letters.

For this reason it has not been possible to determine which of the dates (if any) given for the letter in question is correct.

## Departure from Lemon Tree Passage

The seven acres of wheat which Henry had planted, sprouted then withered and died in the hot summer sun of 1830-31. The generally sandy soils of the Lemon Tree Passage area do not readily retain moisture during the summer period and Henry had no means of rectifying this.

Henry however had another string to his bow. In his application for a second grant he stated that if successful he would "be able to procure pasture for his cattle". Originally he had only six head of cattle and 320 acres of even the poorest quality soils could provide enough pasturage for this number of cattle. The implication is that he needed more land because he had purchased additional cattle.

Then his cattle died from eating what Henry called "Tarrow Root" which can be taken to be Taro Root. Taro grows extensively through the Pacific Islands but not in Australia. There is a similar plant called the Spoon Lily or Cunjevoi which is found throughout the warmer (but not hot) areas of the eastern coast of Australia. While its distribution is extensive in area it is not common because it is vulnerable to both the cold of winter and the heat of summer and is only found in pockets in isolated sheltered valleys.

This plant is similar in appearance to Taro and both are similar in appearance to the ornamental Elephant's Ear grown in suburban gardens. Both plants have a tuberous root which is toxic in its natural state but can be made edible by crushing it into a pulp and washing out the toxins. Both the people of the Pacific Islands and the Australian aborigines had discovered this and both, once the toxins had been removed, cooked the pulp to make a sort of bread.

Cattle are not able to grub out roots from the ground but will eat some varieties if they are presented to them. At one time, for example, diary farmers commonly grew turnips to provide winter feed for their herds.

A possible scenario for all of this is that while Henry was at Carrington he had seen aboriginal women collecting Spoon Lily roots and had been told by someone who had visited one of the Pacific Islands that they were collecting "Tarrow Roots", but he had not seen the subsequent treatment of the roots and assumed they were edible in their natural state.

Later, when he was clearing land of small shrubs and trees to encourage the growth of native grasses for his cattle to eat, Henry came across a patch of Spoon Lily and grubbed them out. Not realizing their toxicity he left them lying round and his cattle had gained access to the roots and died.

Whatever actually happened, as far as Henry was concerned he had no way of supporting a family on his land and on 28th September 1831, Henry wrote to Governor Darling requesting an exchange of his existing grant for better land elsewhere. In his letter he outlined his circumstances and stated that he had expended all his money in purchasing cattle and farming implements.

This aspect of his financial affairs may be an explanation of why he had not fed his convicts with "proper food". That is, he had over committed himself in purchasing more cattle and because he was short of money sought to cut corners in what he fed to his convicts, by, for example feeding them on kangaroo meat rather than salt beef.

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Henry asked both Parry and Caswell to confirm that the land he owned could not support a family. In a letter dated January 21st 1832, Caswell wrote that the land "was unfit for cattle in consequence of a poisonous weed growing on it" and the land was so poor that it was "not likely

to pay for the labour performed in the clearing of it". Parry stated that he believed Caswell's view was "quite correct" and described the land as "being incapable of supporting a family".

There was no response to Henry's request and on 21st March 1832 he again wrote a request for the exchange from Sydney. John Dunmore Lang supported Henry's request with a character reference along the same lines as the references he had given Henry when he applied for his first grant.

In this letter Henry gave his address as "at the Rev'd Dr Lang's". This was only a mailing address rather than indicating that the Blackfords were living in Lang's home. His application also contained a character reference from his landlord.

In part, the delay in responding to Henry's request was due to his requesting an exchange of his conditional grant of a second 320 acres as well as the 320 acres of his first grant. Questions arose regarding the status of the second grant in the exchange. Finally on 21st April 1832 the Governor decided that "the second portion was given on a condition which his removal from the first annuls" and Henry could only exchange his original 320 acres.

Following this decision on 4th August 1832 Henry received a grant of 320 acres at West Bargo in exchange for his land at Lemon Tree Passage.

The locality of West Bargo was centred on the Old Hume Highway north west of Bargo. It was quite extensive and included land to the east of the highway. Henry's new grant lay to the north-east of Bargo, about 4km away. Its eastern boundary was Eliza Creek, a tributary of the Nepean River. He gave his new holding the name of "Swindon Farm" to commemorate his birth place.

## Later Years

Initially, at “Swindon Farm” the Blackford's probably lived in a bark hut until a more substantial home could be built. Their subsequent home was built out of quarried stone blocks which gave it a look of permanence. Photographs of it taken in 1936 before it was destroyed by fire show it had a simple rectangular floor plan and a single gable roof. The roof was steeply pitched and created an upstairs attic area which was used for bedrooms. The house was surrounded by a verandah. A separate nearby building was probably used as a kitchen.

In more recent times the stone walls which were still standing after the fire were demolished in 1948 and used in the foundations of “Fairmont” in Arina Rd a house built about 100m south west of the site of the Blackford’s home.

Henry successfully raised cattle for some years until a combination of events caused a major recession in the colony’s economy. A severe drought occurred in the years 1839-41, and, in 1841 the price of wool at the London sales dropped dramatically. Many of those who had borrowed money to purchase land and livestock found they could not meet their loan repayments and became bankrupt. When the banks and other lenders foreclosed on assets used as security for the loans they had made, there were few people prepared to purchase these assets and the banks could not recoup the money they had lent. As a result, banks were increasingly unwilling to lend money, and when they did it was at high interest rates. This worsened the situation in that those who needed to borrow money to hand feed their livestock through the drought, could not afford to do so and also became bankrupt.

The effects of all this ramified throughout the colony. Merchants and storekeepers found their accounts were unpaid and some had to close their doors. Employees were laid off and so on. The Sydney Morning Herald described the commercial situation of the colony in 1842 as “fearfully dismal”.

In particular the price of cattle dropped and Henry found he could no longer make a living from raising them. In 1843 he sold “Swindon Farm” and his cattle to Thomas Brown.

Henry and his family then moved to Sydney.

By then there were seven Blackford children. Three more had been born at “Swindon Farm”, John (1833 d1834) Richard (1835) and David (1837).

Henry resumed his trade of butcher by building a shop and residence in Redfern which at the time was being developed as a suburb of Sydney. The shop and residence were on the corner of Botany Street (now Regent Street) and Cleveland Street on land which Henry purchased for 70 pounds. This intersection disappeared when Central Railway Station was constructed (1906) and there was a resumption of land and a realignment and renaming of some streets due to the new railway lines. In today’s terms, Henry’s shop was on the railway lines near St Paul’s Place where Cleveland Street crosses the railway lines.

Here he prospered. When he died in 1848 he owned several Redfern properties. After his death Elizabeth, probably with the aid of one or more of her sons, continued to run the business. In the Sydney Commercial Directory of 1851 she is shown still at the same address.

Henry was buried in the Presbyterian section of the Devonshire Street Cemetery. When Central Railway Station was constructed on the site, his remains and those of Elizabeth (who died in 1873) were re-interred in the Presbyterian section of the Rookwood Necropolis.

## Epilogue

In the course of time there were few people, if any, who had personal memories that the Blackfords had once lived on the Tilligerry Peninsula.

When the Blackfords left, there was only the Caswell family remaining, and they moved to their grant near Seaham in 1844. Tanilba House remained unoccupied until 1860 when the Linz family leased it.

No other settler took up land on the peninsula until after 1861 when the Robertson Land Acts made it possible for people to acquire land by paying a deposit on occupancy and paying the balance by installments.

William Cromarty and his eldest son drowned in 1838 when attempting to rescued the crew of a ship which was foundering at Anna Bay.

Sir Edward Parry returned to England in 1834 and Lt Donelan left the colony when his regiment was posted to India.

Before leaving, Parry made major changes to the Australian Agricultural Company's operations. He arranged to exchange half of the Company's Port Stephens land for better land on the Liverpool Plains and he changed the Company's administrative headquarters from Carrington to Stroud.

While Carrington continued to be the Company's port, its population declined as a result of its employees being moved to Stroud and the Liverpool Plains.

All this means that there was only Cecelia Cromarty (her second child was only six when the Blackfords left) and perhaps one or two people at Carrington who could possibly recall that Henry had once tried to grow wheat and raise cattle at Lemon Tree Passage.

Henry's association with his original grant also disappeared from official publications.From time to time there were official publications of landholders but these gave information current at the time of publication, not of the history of ownership of a site. Once Henry exchanged his original grant, it reverted to being crown land and Henry's past association with the land did not appear. The only record of this association was to be found in the original documents which provided the substance of much of the information contained in this present work.

In the course of time all physical evidence of Henry's occupancy of the land at Lemon Tree Passage disappeared and there was nothing to spark the curiosity of those who came later about who had lived there before.

Forests NSW (the former Forestry Commission) has estimated that, particularly if the larger trees had been left, the natural forest would regenerate over any cleared land at Lemon Tree Passage to the extent that in 20-25 years such land would be indistinguishable from land which had not been cleared. By the time later settlers came to Lemon Tree Passage all evidence of Henry's attempt to grow wheat had disappeared.

So too would any evidence of Henry's "comfortable dwelling house". A slab house such as Henry had built was vulnerable to the bushfires which periodically swept over the Tilligerry Peninsula and would continued to do so today except for the dedicated efforts of the Rural Fire Service. If the house was not completely destroyed by fire, the white ants which seem to be particularly voracious in the area would have destroyed any evidence that the house had once existed.

There is nothing remaining at Lemon Tree Passage to suggest that someone lived there as early as 1830.

Nothing, except perhaps for one thing.

No one knows with absolute certainty the origin of the name “Lemon Tree Passage”. It is widely believed, and it would seem logical to do so, that the name derived from a distinctive lemon tree which once grew there. It is also widely believed that this tree was one planted by the Blanche family who settled in the area in the 1870’s and had an orchard, but this rests on the assumption that they were the first to do so.

It is equally plausible to suggest that the tree was planted by Henry Blackford, and that while nothing else remains to suggest he once settled there, he inadvertently gave the name of Lemon Tree Passage to the land he once owned.