

Rouse Hill & Aberdoon House

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The following article was extracted from a booklet on Aberdoon house written for the occasion of its official opening. The complete booklet is available at the Riverstone Museum.

During 2002/2003 *Aberdoon House* has been restored to its appearance in the 1890s when this area of Rouse Hill was a very busy village, half way between Parramatta and Windsor. Within a few short years, the popularity of the new Railway and the building of the Meat Works in Riverstone saw a decline in Rouse Hill as a village centre. It took almost another 100 years for Rouse Hill to become a vibrant community once again, with *Aberdoon House* and the new *Rouse Hill Community Centre* playing an important part in that activity.

The land on which *Aberdoon House* stands is now only 3.9 acres, (1.54 hectares) a fraction of the original 50 acres granted to Thomas Clower an emancipist, in January 1818. The adjoining property of 35 acres was granted also on that date to former convict William Harvey.

In 1826 Irish emancipist Hugh Kelly of Irish Town (today's Kellyville) and sometimes referred to as 'There or Nowhere', bought both the Clower 50 acre grant and Harvey's 35 acres. In Hugh Kelly's will of 1835 he left this 85 acres which he called his *Vinegar Hill Farm* to his brother ex convict Owen Kelly, who then sold it to another ex convict John McKenzie of Pitt Town in 1840. Shortly after, in 1841, McKenzie sold *Vinegar Hill Farm* for £150 to brothers, William and Dr. Alexander Gamack. It is the Gamack brothers who first subdivided the land, calling it the *Village of Aberdour*, named after the village of their birth near Edinburgh, Scotland. The residual of *Vinegar Hill Farm*, 68 acres 1 rood 2 perches, (the land not part of the village) came into the sole ownership of Alexander Gamack, a surgeon in the Colonial Medical Service, by December 1843.

The *Village of Aberdour* encompassed approximately the area bounded by today's Windsor Road, east along the fenceline of Christ Church to Clower Avenue, north following Clower Avenue across Aberdour Avenue to an imaginary fence, returning west to Windsor Road beside today's butcher's shop. The park called the *Village of Aberdour Reserve* was named on the original subdivision as *Buchan Square*, and was a similar shape and dimension.

In the *Australian* of April 1841, an announcement is made for the forthcoming sale of the allotments in the newly formed Village of Aberdour: Below is an extract of that advertisement including a cute rhyme:

**Messrs. White and Co., on Friday
the 23rd Day of April, this same being St. George's day:
FOR SALE**

...this favoured spot of nature, where the surrounding scenery is truly delightful, the land fertile, the air salubrious, the water pure and delicious in the never failing streams which flow on either side of the village, enlivening and ornamenting the landscape, and in the rippling currents fish, such as perch, mullet etc. are numerous and delight to sport in the translucent wave,

**Where fish cry out,
"Now come and hook me,
Bring your frying-pan and cook me."**

Alexander Gamack retained ownership of *Vinegar Hill Farm* until 1875, when he conveyed it to Henry Nicholls for £136. Henry Nicholls' two sons gained ownership of *Vinegar Hill Farm* by gift, John receiving over 9 acres outright in 1876 and James receiving the rest of the farm in 1878, his father retaining life tenancy. In 1882 the main farm now reduced to 58 acres 0 roods and 1 perch was sold to Isaac Rhodes Cooper for £450.

I have no information on Isaac Rhodes Cooper and the "NSW Post Office Directory of 1886-7" is no help either, listing him just as *Isaac Rhodes Cooper*, no profession mentioned. In his third year of ownership, April 1885 he mortgaged the farm, discharging the mortgage just prior to selling it in 1886 for £890 to John Charles Burrell, a Chemist of George Street West, Sydney (today's Rocks area). It is probable that Isaac Cooper was the builder/refurbisher of *Aberdoon* as shown by the doubling of purchase price and the mortgage of 1885, although there is also a substantial jump in price from 1875 (£136) and 1882 (£450).

If there was a residence on the original Clower grant, it is not mentioned in any conveyance, nor is the residence we know existed on the Harvey grant, until the sale of the estate after John Burrell's death. It is in John Burrell's will we first encounter the name *Aberdoon*. No explanation for this name can be accounted for except perhaps a corruption of *Aberdour*. The name *Aberdour* we know to be correct because of its connection to the birthplace of Alexander and William Gamack. The name *Aberdoon* has no precedent until the late 1890s, but as can be seen today, this name is clearly visible on the lintel over the western door, accompanied by the date 1887. William Harvey's residence during the first years of the grant as noted in the General Muster and Land and Stock Muster of NSW 1882, would have been very austere, with no luxuries just basic shelter, built from whatever was at hand. The area at that time was a very inhospitable place a long way from civilization.

There is some evidence to believe that there was a very basic rubble cottage where *Aberdoon House* stands today. It would have perhaps had a dirt floor, no glass in the windows, solid timber shutters and one or two doors with, in the first instance, a thatched roof, later perhaps one of bark or shingles. This is a conclusion I have made based on the rubble interior of the present house. During refurbishment it was discovered that *Aberdoon's* interior (the original 4 rooms and hallway) is cement rendered rubble. It had been supposed that the walls were two layers of stone, rubble filled, the same construction technique used at Rouse Hill House. This is because they both have quoining. Quoining is the smooth stone corner detail on this house, partly a decorative feature, but more importantly a construction technique to strengthen the building. Although rubble was mentioned in the 1950s refurbishment of *Aberdoon*, it surprised many of us to find the cement render was adhering to rubble only.

In the late 1880s during the first golden period of *Aberdoon House* and farm, Rouse Hill Public School and a five roomed teacher's residence was built (1888) on the hill opposite Rouse Hill House. It replaced the earlier church school and later public school of 1875, which was part of the Christ Church Rouse Hill complex of buildings that also included a teacher's residence. The church had been built in 1863 without a chancel and vestry, which was not added until 1878, the year the church was consecrated. The teacher's residence was also erected during this period. A Police Station (Watch House) stood from 1842 until the early 1900s, across Second Ponds Creek on the corner of Windsor and today's Annangrove Road. When the Watch House was built, Annangrove Road did not exist. During the 1880s, also, within the *Village of Aberdour*, George Whitling built a rather stylish home on the Windsor Road, adding a separate building for the Post Office and General Store. This

house, today's butcher's shop is all that remains of the original group of buildings. The large verandahs have been demolished, along with the outbuildings, tennis court, neat picket fence, general store and post office. To the south along the Windsor Road across what is today's Aberdour Avenue stood the stone and weatherboard *Emu and Kangaroo Inn* and outbuildings. Further along on the Parramatta side of this complex, just past Christ Church, stood the *Queen's Arms Inn*, a well patronised coaching inn of two storey brick, stone foundations and verandahs to both storeys. It was here in 1857 that the first post office, known as the Vinegar Hill Post Office began in a back room of the inn. Names associated with this inn are the Retallick and Schofield families although the inn was actually owned by the Hon. Robert Fitzgerald and his family from 1840. There was a short period of other ownership in the middle of the century, with Robert regaining the property by 1853. Robert Fitzgerald was son of ex Irish convict Richard Fitzgerald of Windsor, who reputedly was related to the Earl of Leinster, Lord Fitzgerald a well known United Irishman. Robert married Elizabeth Henrietta, youngest daughter of Richard Rouse of Rouse Hill House. He was elected to the Legislative Assembly and was appointed to the Legislative Council. In 1863, Robert through a *deed of gift* gave $\frac{3}{4}$ acre (approx. 3000 square metres) of this land to the Bishop of Sydney to build Christ Church.

The *Mean Fiddler* was built circa late 1830s and is the same building we view today as the single level stone building at the front of the complex. It at one time had substantial outbuildings including stables, a ballroom and a blacksmith's. Other names for the inn that operated here for many years were the *Royal Oak*, and the *Half Way House*. During the 1970s, it was called *Windsor Way* when it operated as a restaurant and also as an antique shop. The original grant for this property was to John Davis in January 1818, the same date as that of Clower, Harvey and Thomas Kelly. Thomas Kelly owned the original grant of 46 acres between the *Village of Aberdour* and *The Royal Oak (Mean Fiddler)*. Later owners of this property are known to have been John Booth and wife Sarah Tighe, John Seath and family and the Petersen Family.

As the *Emu and Kangaroo Inn* disappeared from the village shortly after the mid 1880s it was the probable source of the stone used to build or refurbish *Aberdoon House* in 1887. Or perhaps it was stone from the first Vinegar Hill Tollhouse, also long since vanished from the area. It once stood on the hill opposite Rouse Hill House, somewhere in the vicinity of the 1888 Rouse Hill School. Wherever the stone came from historians and the heritage consultants agree that the stone used for the 1887 house appears to be reclaimed stone. It is pigeon picked, a trademark of the convict era.

John Devlin and Margaret Devlin, great grandparents of Elizabeth Plimer of Canberra, (descendent of the Swanns) were the caretakers of *Aberdoon* during the ownership of John Burrell. It is to Elizabeth we owe thanks for the interesting photo of *Aberdoon*, used as the template by the Council for the restoration of the house. We have other oral information transmitted via the Swann grandchildren of the happy times spent visiting the Devlin's at *Aberdoon*, where John and Margaret spent their later years contentedly growing fruit, vegetables and flowers as caretakers for John Burrell. These items would accompany the grandchildren to their home at *Elizabeth Farm*, in Parramatta. A close examination of the Swann family photo of *Aberdoon* reveals that there once was a pseudo widow's walk of wrought iron to the apex of the roofline, a typical high Victorian architectural device. It is hoped that at a later date this unusual wrought iron decorative feature can be added to the roof. Following the death of John Burrell in 1898, the executors John Devlin and his son-in-law William Swann sold the property, with the proceeds going to John Burrell's niece in England. It is in John Burrell's will that we encounter the first official use of the name *Aberdoon*.

The next owner George Whitling had previously been the coachman for Rouse Hill House, but owing to the Rouse family's financial difficulties, he was no longer employed by them and had taken the opportunity to set himself up in business as the owner of the General Store and Post Office. The signatures of 1898 preserved on the wall of the present house are Arthur Whitling, Joe & Arthur Sherwood, Billy Chambers, Percy (?) Stranger, the rest indecipherable. Arthur Whitling was the only son of George and Mary Whitling who later served on Baulkham Hills Shire Council for many years, commencing in 1912, retiring in 1941. He also served many terms as Shire President and in other community organizations. A park in the centre of Castle Hill was renamed *Arthur Whitling Castle Hill Park*, in 2001. Joe Sherwood was employed in the Rouse Hill General Store and I presume Arthur Sherwood is his brother. These Sherwood's were related by marriage to the Whitmores, who owned 29 acres to the north of *Aberdoon* and are well known Hills residents. I do not know who Billy Chambers was or who the other person is whose signature looks like Percy Stranger. However, the Strangers are also well known in Rouse Hill and Kellyville.

In 1912 George Whitling died, his wife Mary in 1916, both are buried in the Rouse Hill cemetery. The property was sold to James Hogan, by the executors Arthur Whitling and his brother-in-law Arthur Albert Roberts. James Hogan sold it soon after in 1919 to John (Jack) Campbell Lamont. Jack also owned at this time the Post Office and General Store on Windsor Road. He had the mail contract from Baulkham Hills to Annangrove in the 1920s and operated a Model T Ford Bus, which acted as a school bus for the area. *Aberdoon* later passed to his son, John Marr Lamont, as a gift, full ownership not being obtained until after his mother Janet released ownership to him in 1932. The Lamonts were well known local people. Doris Lamont, nee Bennett, wife of John Marr was so well respected that the craft pavilion at the Castle Hill Showground was named after her. Several families of Lamonts still live within the shire. Sometime during the early 1900s (Lamont ownership) the slab barn that stands to the south of the house was refurbished. We know it was during the Lamont ownership as the words "Lamont and Riverstone" (the nearest railway station) are still visible on the underside of the corrugated iron roof sheeting.

During the years 1934 – 1938, *Aberdoon* was leased to a Michael Brown and was believed to have operated as a dairy. John Marr Lamont sold it in 1938 to Caroline Pearce (probably a member of the local Pearce family), pioneers of the Hills District and previous owners of large tracts of land in Seven Hills, Kellyville and Rouse Hill. In 1944 her husband Joseph William Pearce, as executor, sold *Aberdoon* to Miss Dorothy Frazer of Parramatta. Dorothy Frazer only held *Aberdoon* for a short time reselling to Dr. Rex Angel Money in 1947. Dorothy remained as caretaker until 1949. A photo of *Aberdoon* during the ownership of Miss Frazer, in the Money family papers, shows the house minus the verandah, with a filled in skillion of weatherboard to the eastern façade and small square porch to the western façade. There are fixed hooded awnings over the windows.

Dr. Money was an eminent Neurologist, an Australian pioneer in the field of Neuro Surgery. He ran *Aberdoon* as a hobby farm with a wide variety of animals, including cows, pigs, horses and poultry of various kinds. Dr. Money kept meticulous notes on the health of each animal, their breeding programme, and in the case of their death, performed autopsies to discover the cause, carefully documenting these details in his notebooks. *Aberdoon* was a happy home for Dr. Rex, his wife Noppy, their two daughters, Angela and Carole, and their many weekend guests. The visitors in the Visitor's Book constantly praised the fresh country air, wholesome country food and hospitality. In their absence the family relied on the services of a caretaker to look after the farm. During the first years of their ownership, a major refurbishment of the house was undertaken under the supervision of

an Architectural firm in Sydney, Fowell Mansfield & Maclurcan. A local builder Gaston Lester of Castle Hill son of a local family who lived in Nelson was contracted to do the work. The rubble interior of the house was a major cause of the delay, as was rising damp and last minute additions to the original plans. Gaston quarried stone for the refurbishment from his family property in Blind Road, Nelson, an area that had been called in the past The Rocks or The North Rocks.

The architects first suggested design for the refurbishment of *Aberdoon* was for an extension each side to create the complete Regency (George IV) house. However, this design was never built owing to the high cost and the building material rationing (a result of WW11). Only the northern wing was added. This wing created an ultra modern 1950s home with kitchen, bathroom and laundry/mud room. French doors were added to the two bedrooms on the southern side. The weatherboarded eastern side was stripped and received a delicate verandah embellished with wrought iron posts and lace inserts. The southern elevation received a large pergola on which to train the wisteria already growing. Shutters were added to all the windows and painted dark green and the rather plain exterior was painted with several layers of pale pink lime wash, the recipe of which, Dr. Money had brought back from America. It was said to be the paint used on the White House in Washington.

Major refurbishment to the inside of *Aberdoon House* was also done at this time. A neat fibro caretaker's cottage was added to the eastern gateway of the house paddock.

During the next few years, Dr. Money also bought other properties in the village adding about another 20 acres to the property, including the Wright family property known as *Araluen*. It was Dorothy Wright Haywood who first told me about the wrought iron decoration which had been on the roof of *Aberdoon House*. Because of these early memories I traced the house to Elizabeth Plimer and her knowledge of her ancestors connection to *Aberdoon*, although she was unaware of the house name or exactly where it was.

Dr. Rex later changed his land from old systems to Torrens Title and sold in 1973 his bottom paddocks (William Harvey's land) as Lot 2, to Amalgamated Developments Pty. Ltd., although he retained until the late 1990s the use of that land for agistment. He later sold all the other allotments he owned in the village and more of the original Clower land still attached to *Aberdoon House* so that at the time the Council bought the house and farm, the land size was a mere 3.9 acres (1.54 hectares). Fortunately the Council also bought the land fringing Caddies Creek, part of William Harvey's 35 acres (and part of the original *Vinegar Hill Farm*), for Community Open Space. Retained as a tranquil oasis to regenerate into natural bushland, this reserve connects visually to the newly refurbished *Aberdoon House* and its curtilage. This particular reserve forms part of *The Greenway*, a soon to be completed pedestrian and cycling corridor starting at *Bella Vista Farm*, Norwest and finishing across Windsor Road in the Rouse Hill Regional Park.

If you stand on the verandah and look to the east, towards the *William Harvey Reserve* you will see the recently completed *Cultural Experience* of six large standing stones with interleaving smaller stones. These artworks are designed to evoke the "Spirit of Place", to tell the story of what was, what is and what is hoped for the future. Take time to stop by and feel the "Spirit" of Rouse Hill.

Enjoy also the vista and perhaps a visit to *Rouse Hill House* and *Rouse Hill Regional Park* visible on the skyline to the west, and the Rouse Hill cemetery on the right down *Aberdour Avenue*, just before the shops. Many of the people who lived and worked in the *Village of Aberdour*, the greater village of Rouse Hill and at *Aberdoon* are buried there.