



Chapter 18 - Of Violent Events and Drought (1844 – 1847)

In seeing 1844 out, weather, grasshoppers and comets were matters affecting their environment of which the citizens of Jerry's Plains would have been particularly conscious. Their correspondent wrote to the Maitland Mercury about quiet life to be had in the town:

"A violent storm of hail, which visited us yesterday, has destroyed all the first crop of tobacco in the neighbourhood, and must have done considerable injury to the ripe wheat still standing. The hailstones were the size of pullet eggs, and of the most irregular and singular shapes; ..."

"It is to be hoped the storm will have the effect of banishing the grasshoppers, which previously promised to devour every green thing."

November 28, 1844⁶²⁶

"We have had a few remarkably cold days and nights, which have operated like a Russian winter upon the invading armies of grasshoppers. There is now scarcely one to be seen. ..."

December 24, 1844⁶²⁷

"On Saturday evening last, about nine o'clock whilst star-gazing in company with a friend, and discussing the theories of comets - having the present beautiful one in the south-west fall into view - a fiery meteor of uncommon magnitude and brilliancy took its rise near the comet, and, after careering 'through the heavens for

nearly a minute, burst like a sky-rocket, throwing its sparks in all directions. It certainly threw little light on the subject under discussion, but when at its extreme height it shed an illumination on the surrounding scenery almost equal to daylight. It is quite 'a nine day wonder'"

"... in this dull vicinage, where even the frolics of Christmas are void of animation, and the people are actually in danger of dying in their nobler part of sheer forgetfulness and the want of mental stimuli (sic)."⁶²⁸

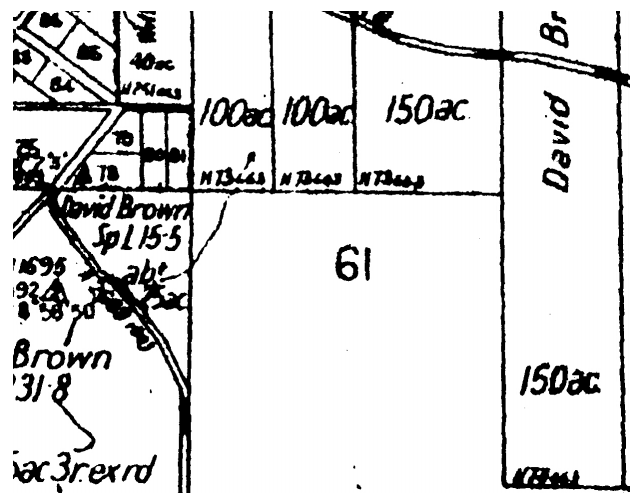
2 January 1845

The heavenly events of the closing year may well have been interpreted by some as a portent. Regardless, David's fortunes seemed to have improved for the moment soon after, for on 1 February 1845, he redeemed the mortgaged his Little Cattai Creek property (Portion 39) mortgaged to Thomas Tebbett for Two Hundred pounds Stirling. David's escape from debt at this juncture coincides with an improvement in the colony's economic conditions.

A 'Francis McMahon' purchased an allotment on the High Street, Jerry's Town, from David in 1845. He developed it as a garden. It is possibly, but by no means certain, that this person was brother-in-law to David by his first wife, Elizabeth.

Richard Boggis, aged 40 years, a farmer, "...known by the name of 'Brown's Dick', expired after an illness of a few hours on Sunday last' (8 June 1845). 'An inquest was held on the body by Lieutenant Gall, who sent to Muswell Brook for Dr West (the resident surgeon being absent from home), for the purpose of making a post mortem examination. The Dr. stated that death had been, occasioned by disease of the heart.'

'The deceased was a very industrious, striving man, and having purchased an allotment of land in the township, has just finished building a substantial and comodious cottage upon it, and fastened himself the last shingle on the roof but a day or two previous to his untimely end.'⁶²⁹



David's 25 acres block of land, SpL 15-5, he subdivided to sell as residential allotments.

⁶²⁶NLA, mfm NX 27, Reel No1. The Maitland Mercury, 30 November 1844.

⁶²⁷NLA, mfm NX 27, Reel No1. The Maitland Mercury, 7 December 1844.

⁶²⁸NLA, mfm NX 27, Reel No1, The Maitland Mercury, 4 January 1845.

⁶²⁹BDM 1845 1014 30B, and The Maitland Mercury, 14 June 1845



Richard Boggis' nickname differentiated him from various other members of the community with the name 'Richard' such as Richard Hobden senior and junior, or Richard Alcorn. It also indicates that he was employed by the Browns and seen as part of their family. He was also likely to have purchased his residential allotment from David's subdivision.

The continued dry weather and parching winds have again destroyed our hopes of a wheat crop. Our farmers have everywhere commenced making hay of what remains, or turned their cattle in upon it to eat it off. Our only consolation is, that there are good crops ever where else, so that "the staff of life" is not likely to be very high-priced,

notwithstanding the entire failure at Jerry's Plains. Higher up the country the crops are said to be equally bad.

There is a great deficiency also of pasturage, and if we have not a supply of rain before long, the cattle are likely to suffer much from scarcity

of grass and water during the ensuing summer.

Taking all circumstances into account, this part of the country is greatly over-stocked, and it is to be feared that a dry season would inflict upon us a full penalty for the offence.

9 Oct 1845. Jerry's Plains Correspondent MM

#A son, John James, was born on 21 December 1845 to Thomas and Ann in Jerry's Plains and baptised on 12 February 1846.

"The growing crops look well. Our farmers are busy in ploughing for maize. Grain has taken a rise above the Maitland price, the cost of carriage hither being superadded to the market price in consequence of demands from the interior. I am sorry to say, however, that most of the growers here had disposed of their surplus before the rise in the price.

Great numbers of fat cattle are driving through every day to take advantage of the rise in the market. Some of the squatters hint that stock will soon be "low enough," by reason of the squatting regulations driving the graziers to boil down; but the general impression is, that the said regulations will, at the first start, have rather the contrary effect, that or raising the price, by increasing the numbers of purchasers, who will be allured by the opportunity opened up to them of speculating in the hitherto tabooed department of grazing.⁶³⁰

24 July 1945 Jerry's Plains Correspondent MM

"The weather has been showery during the whole week. Our farmers have been busy planting their stubble with Cobbett-corn. This useful kind of maize had almost been suffered to run out in this

*locality, and several individuals have been obliged to go a great distance in quest of seed. It is still in great request higher up the country, and almost any price has been offered for it by persons who had been prevented by the **drought** from planting early maize.*

The tobacco crop appears to be unusually late this season, and owing to the failure of the early planting it is thought that there will be very little raised as compared with former years.

20 December 1945 Jerry's Plains Correspondent MM

Grind-stones

A stone-mason named Curtis has discovered a sort of stone within a few miles of this township, which is said to be equal to any in the colony for grind-stones. I have some stones that have been got from thence, and they have an excellent appearance, and several tradesmen that have tried them say they are of first-rate quality."

18 December 1845. Jerry's Plains Correspondent MM

Unusual Peace

"This part of the colony was never in more tranquil state; not a bushranger nor a desperado of any description, to be heard of. Even the petty thieves, whose regards used to be attracted

by saddles and bullock-harness, and whatever trifles might be left carelessly about, seem to have made off with themselves from this quarter. The cattle stealers have also left us, as unsafe to live among, and we may now be set down as a very honest, painstaking, though I am sorry to say not a very thriving-settlement.'

Storm damage

"Thunder storms have gathered every evening for the last week, accompanied with much thunder and lightning. They have however, gone by us, travelling in the direction of from west to east, which I have remarked is the invariable, course taken by these storms in this quarter. An unusual number of trees in the bush have been struck with lightning. The iron-bark appear to be particularly obnoxious to these attacks. A large tree of this species was pointed out to me the other day literally shattered to pieces; large blocks, of from two to five hundred pounds weight, had been driven upwards or fifty rods in every direction, and two or three acres of ground surrounding the stump were thickly strewn, with splinters - in fact the gigantic body of this monarch of the forest had been literally scattered to the winds.'

Jerry's Plains Correspondent MM, 31 January 1846.

David's daughter, Catherine, known as 'Kate' married Robert Bruce Hobden (born on 5 June 1824) of Jerry's Plains - by banns in the temporary Church on 16 April 1846. Robert was the son of David's long time neighbour, Richard Hobden of 'Great Lodge'. Kate was not quite 20 years old, and in consequence,

⁶³⁰ The Maitland Mercury, 26 July 1845.



her brother-in-law, Charles Solomon Capp, gave his consent and acted as a witness.⁶³¹ Clearly, David was absent, and not easily and quickly contactable, and expected to be so for some extended period. It seems improbable, that being at Cattai would have put David out of reach on such a matter. Though, David may have anticipated the event and given the nod to his son-in-law to act in his stead.

David appears to have approved of the event for he eventually gave Kate 30 acres of land from the north-eastern corner of Portion 28, known as 'Elizabeth Fields'. That land bound on the north by the Hunter River and on the east by Portion 27 originally granted to his brother, Thomas.⁶³² Kate was also given two other half-acre allotments from his town sub-division. It seems likely that these gifts were a wedding present. Kate would have been keeping house for her brothers for just under four years before she was married.

On 6 November 1846, David also gave his daughter Mary, 27 acres of land, bound on the north by Kate's 30 acres, the east by lot 27, and the south by the highway. This land in some few years passed to Kate.

Several of the oldest and most respected residents in this neighbourhood have been, strange to say, imprisoned and committed for trial on a charge of robbery and violence of a singular description. The whole charge rests on the

unsupported testimony of a labouring man, which, coupled with the previous unimpeachable character of the accused, as well as the improbable nature of the accusation, has given rise in the public mind to a unanimous and

warmly expressed conviction of their innocence. I will send you a full and authenticated summary of the circumstances for your next publication.

**Jerry's Plains Correspondent MM
28 May 1846.**

The Murder at Redbank

.- On Friday last Captain Russell, J. P., and Dr. Vallack, arrived from Singleton to hold an inquest upon the remains of the human skeleton that had been discovered near the Redbank Creek. After inspecting that portion of the remains that had been brought to the post-office, consisting of the sacrum, of the lumbar, and a part of the dorsal vertebrae, with some of the ribs attached to the upper part of the thigh-bone and hip (the os femoris and pelvis), still connected in their sockets by their natural ligaments, which appeared quite unctuous and fresh-Captain Russell took the depositions of the persons who had discovered them, and then, accompanied by the Doctor, Mr. Harpur, and Serjeant Edwards, proceeded to Redbank, for the purpose of making a personal and more particular examination of the spot in which the body had been consumed.

On reaching it, the Captain remarked, in reference to the wild and desolate character of the surrounding scenery, "that it was indeed a fitting place for the perpetration of a deed of darkness." The fire had evidently been made and carefully tended by the murderer with the view of consuming the body of his victim: not a particle of the wood remained unburned, and even the coals appeared to have been so kept together as to be mostly reduced to ashes. But thickly mixed through the ashes, and even preponderating in quantity, were the bones, most of them entirely calcined, yet retaining their form, and a few quite fresh, as if but recently stripped of their integuments, together with lumps of charred flesh and burnt fragments of clothing.

Doctor was of opinion that it might have taken place within the last two months or less. The fragments of clothing found unconsumed in the ashes consist of a small piece of a blue-striped flannel frock or shirt (the stripes of which, when worn, it is supposed, would be in a sideways or lateral direction), and of a somewhat larger portion of a Guernsey frock, striped with chains of blue triangular spots, which stripes, it is supposed, in the wearing would take an up and-down or perpendicular direction. The latter frock is likely to have been worn over the former. It is the sort of clothing generally worn by bullock-drivers and their mates, amongst which class of persons this horrible transaction is supposed to have taken place.

After inspecting the place and the marks of blood at a few yards distance therefrom, Captain Russell fully concurred in the opinion that a murder had been committed, and an attempt there made to make away with the remains of the murdered individual. The

It is to be hoped that all persons, and particularly those in the habit of travelling with teams, will communicate any suspicious circumstance that may happen to fall within their knowledge to the police, it being an acknowledged rule in all grades of society to render every assistance towards the detection of a murderer.

The Case of Robbery and Violence. - (Jerry's Plains correspondent report of 28 May 1846 refers) The persons alluded to in a former communication as having been apprehended on charges of robbery and violence of a singular and rather improbable nature, are Mr. Ellis, sen. (for these many years overseer to George Bowman, Esq., of Archerfield), Mr. Ellis, jun., his son, and Mr. Richard Hobden, of Great Lodge, near Jerry's Plains. The charge was preferred by a hired servant of Mr. Bowman's, named Waters, who had been living under Mr. Ellis, at

Harrowfield.

It appears that some disagreement had taken place between Mr. Ellis and Waters relative to certain advances the latter had made to Mr. Ellis's daughter, in consequence of which Mr. and Mrs. Ellis ordered Waters to take away a box of his which had been for some time previously in their keeping, as they desired, they told him, to have nothing further to do with him. After some altercation and delay, the box in question having been thrust out of

doors by Mrs. Ellis, Waters removed it to his own hut. Shortly after this occurrence, Waters alleges that, having been some short distance away from his hut, he discovered, on his return thereto, that Mr. Ellis had broken open the box, and abstracted from it a roll of bank-notes, which he saw in his hand, amounting to £22; that he struggled with Ellis for the recovery of his money, but the noise that was made having called Ellis's wife and daughter to his assistance, he (Ellis) succeeded in retaining the booty. Waters, in the course of a accordingly granted for the apprehension of

⁶³¹ (NSWSR Reel 5009) per Philip Booker, and Vol 3 No 545 - Bathurst Library per Marie Tattam

⁶³² David's Will.



little time after, made his way over to George Blaxland, Esq., J. P., and gave a statement of this nature on oath. A warrant was issued, and given to Mr. Everness, the chief constable of Merton, who, on riding to Mr. Ellis's residence and finding him away from home, left word with his wife that he (Mr. Ellis) was wanted on very particular business, the next morning, at Merton police-office; and having received an assurance from Mrs. Ellis that her husband would be there, Mr. Everness returned without him.

In the course of the intervening night, Waters again appeared before Mr. Blaxland, with a small portion of one of his ears cut off and bleeding, and stated that he had been assaulted by three men, who had ill-used him and cut his ear, for the purpose of making him put out his tongue, which they declared their intention of cutting out of his head; that he told them, however, he

would rather lose his life than succeeded in making his escape.

The following morning Mr. Ellis, in pursuance of the message left by Mr. Everness, started to Merton, and was there met by the warrant, hand-cuffed, and thrown into the lock-up, where, in the course of a few hours, he was joined by his son and son-in-law, Mr. Hobden, who had been taken up on the charge of assault. Another person also, named Patrick Fox, was afterwards apprehended on the same charge. They were examined and committed to take their trial on the first examination, and without loss of time placed upon the chain, for the first time in their lives, and forwarded down the country, bail having been refused by the committing magistrates.

As the case will be brought before a jury, I will not anticipate their defence by making any comments upon the proceedings. It is however to be regretted, I must say, that the committing magistrates should have thought it their duty to act with so

much precipitation, especially considering that the accused parties had previously borne the best of characters; Mr. Ellis having held a highly responsible situation under George Bowman, Esq., ever since his arrival in the colony, a period of nine or ten years, and was, I am given to understand, engaged in England by that gentleman's agent for the office; young Mr. Ellis equally unexceptionable in point of morals and behaviour; and Mr. Hobden, a native of the colony, of most respectable parentage, and considerable property-sober, industrious, honorable, intelligent, and amiable-in fine, respected and beloved, from his infancy, by all who knew him. Having been acquainted with him for the last twenty years, nothing but the stern necessity of the case could have conquered the reluctance I feel to the mention of his name in connection with circumstances so humiliating as those I have de-tailed.

Jerry's Plains Correspondent MM
Wednesday, 10 June 1846⁶³³

The case against Thomas and William Ellis, Richard Hobden, and Patrick Fox did not come up until September 1846. When their case was finally heard John Waters was absent, and could not be found.

'The Solicitor General thought there was reason to believe that the charges he had preferred were not honest and he had no desire that the prisoners would remain in custody for an indefinite period. The prisoners' solicitor Mr. Windeyer applied for a discharge on their own recognizance to appear and answer the charges preferred against them should they be so required to be do by the Attorney General.'⁶³⁴



*Sir Charles Augustus Fitzroy
Governor of the
Colony of New South Wales
July 1846 - 1856*

Just over seven months after the marriage, on 16 Jan 1847, a son, William John, was born to Kate and Robert. To be followed on 14 May 1848 by the arrival of another son, Robert Alfred.

David donated half an acre from his subdivision of Portion 28 for the Church of England place of worship and burial ground known as the 'Old Wambo' cemetery. The Church is long gone but the cemetery remains, albeit, in a run-down state, on the high ground to the south of the highway overlooking the river flat.

About the second half of 1846, after having resumed the lease for the Robin Hood from Alexander Munro, David is likely to have rebuilt his inn into a more substantial stone structure adjacent to the existing road. Even though the Hunter was suffering from drought, the Liverpool Plains had prospered. And in all

⁶³³ The Maitland Mercury, Wednesday 10 June 1846

⁶³⁴ http://www.jenwilletts.com/richard_hobden.htm



probability so did the Brown's Millie Run. David's inn would have been a place of some interest to drovers of the herds of cattle then passing through Jerry's Plains.

Drought on the Hunter

"...the cattle still suffer greatly from the want of water, there being none anywhere, but in the river, within miles of which there is not a blade of pasturage to be seen. The poor animals are consequently constantly suffering from thirst; the exertion or travelling to, and over the mountains after drinking at the river, being, in their weak condition, almost enough to make them as dry as before. Fifty per cent of the working bullocks in this locality - that is, of animals which have been worked since the commencement of the year - have perished. One poor man, a carrier, has lost

eleven; another of the same calling, five; another, three; and so on. Those oxen which survive are fed upon the leaves of the oaks growing by the side of the river, and with great attention may perhaps be coaxed to live, but to labour is out of the question.

Fat Cattle from Out West

'Great herds of fat cattle are daily driving through to take advantage, I presume, of the rise in the market. Perhaps the greater part cross the Bulga for the Sydney market, and the rest proceed to Maitland. The route through Jerry's Plains seems to be a favourite one with the drovers, doubtless for good reasons.'

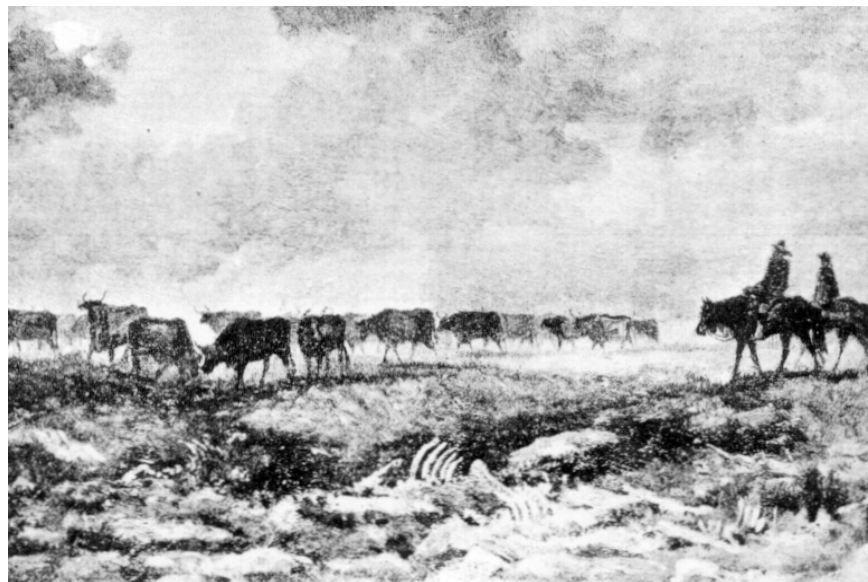
'It is strongly asserted by some of our wisecrackers, that in the event of a railroad being laid down on this side of Maitland, Jerry's Plains will most likely be the direction it will take, on account of the splendid level to be obtained from Black Creek. Singleton will thus be left to the right, and we still receive a great accession to our population. The Mechanics Institute, and all its members - in fine, the literati of Singleton will be transferred hither. Need I say they shall be received with "a hundred thousand welcomes"?'⁶³⁵

8 August 1846. Jerry's Plains Correspondent MM

'Great herds of fat cattle are daily driving through

.....

Fifty per cent of the working bullocks in this locality - that is, of animals which have been worked since the commencement of the year - have perished.'



More Pestilence

'.....The flies have become a perfect plague, and are trebly annoying from the prevalence of ophthalmia. ...

The native dogs in this neighbourhood have become exceedingly daring and troublesome, and having been

crossed with mastiff and greyhound are unusually powerful and ferocious. The proximity of the mountains affords them secure harbourage and retreat, and such facilities for multiplication, that inhabitants will, ere long, be obliged to

adopt some plan for keeping down there numbers. a yearling filly, belonging to the writer, was fairly ran down by nine of them, ...Mr A had much trouble in driving them away,..'⁶³⁶

5 January 1847 Jerry's Plains Correspondent MM

The 'Mr A' referred to in this report would have been Richard Alcorn.

⁶³⁵The Maitland Mercury, 12 August 1846.

⁶³⁶ The Maitland Mercury, 9 January 1847, Jerry's Plain correspondent.



On 24 March 1847, Alexander Gibson as innkeeper of ‘**The Green Gate**’ inn advertised for a man and his wife without encumbrance; the man to make himself generally useful and the woman to work as a laundress and to assist her husband when required.⁶³⁷

The Need of a Road

‘An official answer to the Jerry’s Plains, memorial lately presented to his Excellency the Governor, on the subject of an authorised road through settlement, has been received from - which it appears that his Excellency has given instructions to the District Surveyor to mark out, and report upon the best line of road from Singleton to Merton through Jerry’s Plains, in order that the same may be opened by proclamation, agreeably to Act of Council. A meeting of the inhabitants, for the purpose of

taking the said letter into consideration, took place at Alcorn’s Inn, Thursday evening last when a committee was appointed, consisting of the householders generally, with the view of furnishing information and assistance to G.B. White in the execution of the task, and of providing funds for the completion of the road.’

‘A good road is all that Jerry’s Plains requires to become a flourishing settlement: the grass and water at regular distances have already recommended the route through it to

the general adoption of the drovers, and as soon as the very superior road that nature has given to us, but which **has been stopped up by selfish individuals**, is again thrown open, the travelers of wool teams and travelers into the interior generally will not be slow to avail themselves of its advantages.’

The weather continues to be dry...⁶³⁸
Jerry’s Plains Correspondent MM
3 April 1847

David’s Donation

On 23 April 1847, the Sydney Herald reported on the laying of the foundation stone of St James’, Church of England saying that the site for the church is a gift of David Brown, ‘one of the first landholders of the district’.⁶³⁹ Construction of the first church in Jerry’s Plains, St James, was begun just three years after the Reverend Joseph Cooper commenced his work in the township.

For the Reverend Cooper, Jerry’s Plains was his first parish as an ordained minister, and it was he who was to baptise David’s grand-daughter, Ann Emma, and who was to officiate at David’s son, Thomas’, funeral.

This first 'edition' of the Anglican Church in Jerry's Plains was not completed until 1863, and then it was only used for 12 years. St James was situated some three miles east of the present township, close to Redmanvale Creek, so it is more than possible the building was at some time flooded or swept away in a flood’.⁶⁴⁰

River has Ceased to Run

‘.... notwithstanding the dreary aspect of the season a month ago, we have a rather favourable prospect of a crop before us now. The pasturage, although dry, is still very plentiful; but the water-holes require replenishing and the river, in places, has ceased to run, We may, however, expect a fall of rain within the next six

weeks, according to the knowing ones in weatherology, which will set everything to rights.

One of those frequent accidents to children by their clothes catching fire occurred here yesterday morning in the family Mr P. Duff, to a little girl of his: about four, years old. I am happy to state,

however, that Dr. Glennie entertains every hope of the speedy recovery of the little innocent. **The poor mother, in the act of extinguishing the flames, had her hands and arms seriously burned**, but her courage and fortitude were the saving of her child’s life.⁶⁴¹

Jerry’s Plains Correspondent MM
20 June 1847

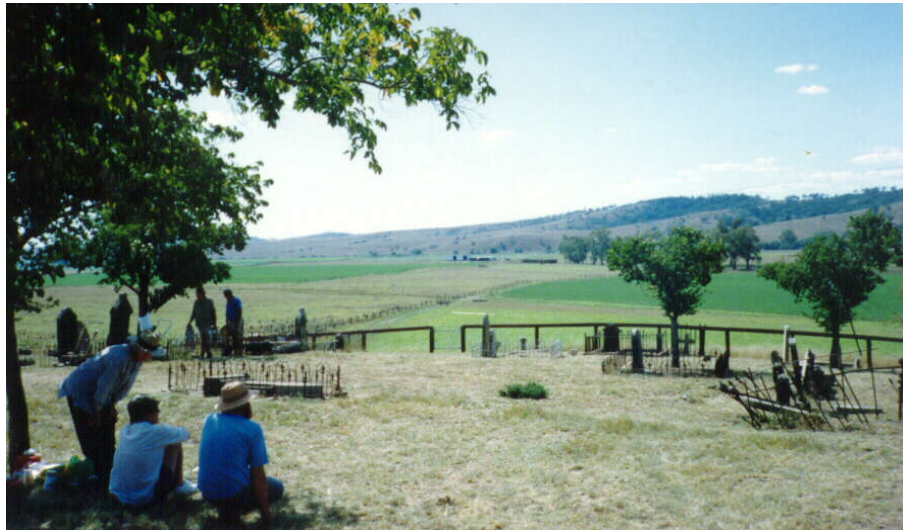
⁶³⁷ The Maitland Mercury 24 March 1847

⁶³⁸ The Maitland Mercury, 7 April 1847, Jerry’s Plain correspondent

⁶³⁹ Elizabeth Baxter, P.O. Jerry’s Plains. letter of 4 January 1981 to B & B Griffiths.

⁶⁴⁰ St. James Church, Jerry’s Plains Centenary Booklet 1879 - 1979

⁶⁴¹ The Maitland Mercury, 23 June 1847, Jerry’s Plains correspondent. The mother was Sarah Ann Hobden, sister-in-law to David and Elizabeth Brown’s daughter, Kate.



A view from the 'Old Wambo' cemetery adjacent to the old St James Church site (on Portion 28) overlooking the Hunter river flat land formerly belonging to David Brown - Taken in April 1993 during a rare working bee to tidy up the cemetery. Joy Brown, a descendent of David, at left, bending over.

Jerry's Plains was evolving a sense of community. The residents wrote a letter to the government during 1847 asking for a public school.