

CHAPTER IV

Houses and Properties

"Acton"

Adriana and John Wimpole

On rounding a bend in the Channel Highway approximately one kilometre south of the Taroona Shot Tower, the traveller catches his first glimpse of "Acton", a three storied sandstone house built down the slopes of Bonnet Hill. On turning yet another bend and arriving directly in front of the main entrance one is surprised to find what appears to be a typical little Georgian cottage.

Historical documents which record the exact date of construction of "Acton" have not been located and perhaps no longer exist. History seems to confirm that the house was constructed in 1842 to accommodate the Superintendent of the Brown's River Probation Station. The first Superintendent to occupy the house would be Mr James Skene and he was followed by Mr J.B. Fraser. It was probably he who resided in "Acton" until the Brown's River Probation Station was closed down.

Between 1848 and 1919 little seems to be known about "Acton", the Acton Estate or the tenants. From 1919 until 1951 the property was leased to several tenants amongst whom were J.B. Watkins (1919-24), Francis Even Owens (1924-25), Wilfred Hobart Russell Colbeck (1925), Elizabeth Ellen Mather (1925-29), S. Marley (1929-32), S. Gibbon (1932-39).

On the 9th February 1951 the property which at that time was 50 acres and 3 roods was purchased by a former lessee, Mr Wilfred Hobart Russell Colbeck, a dairyman from Taroona, for the sum of £475 by means of a "purchase grant".

In 1978 Sander Moen Frith-Brown a "student farmer" bought the property. Photographs of "Acton" taken a few years beforehand clearly show that the house was in an advanced state of disrepair. However, Mr Frith-Brown gave the old house the love and care it deserved and with the assistance of some of the best tradesmen in the area transformed it into a comfortable family home.

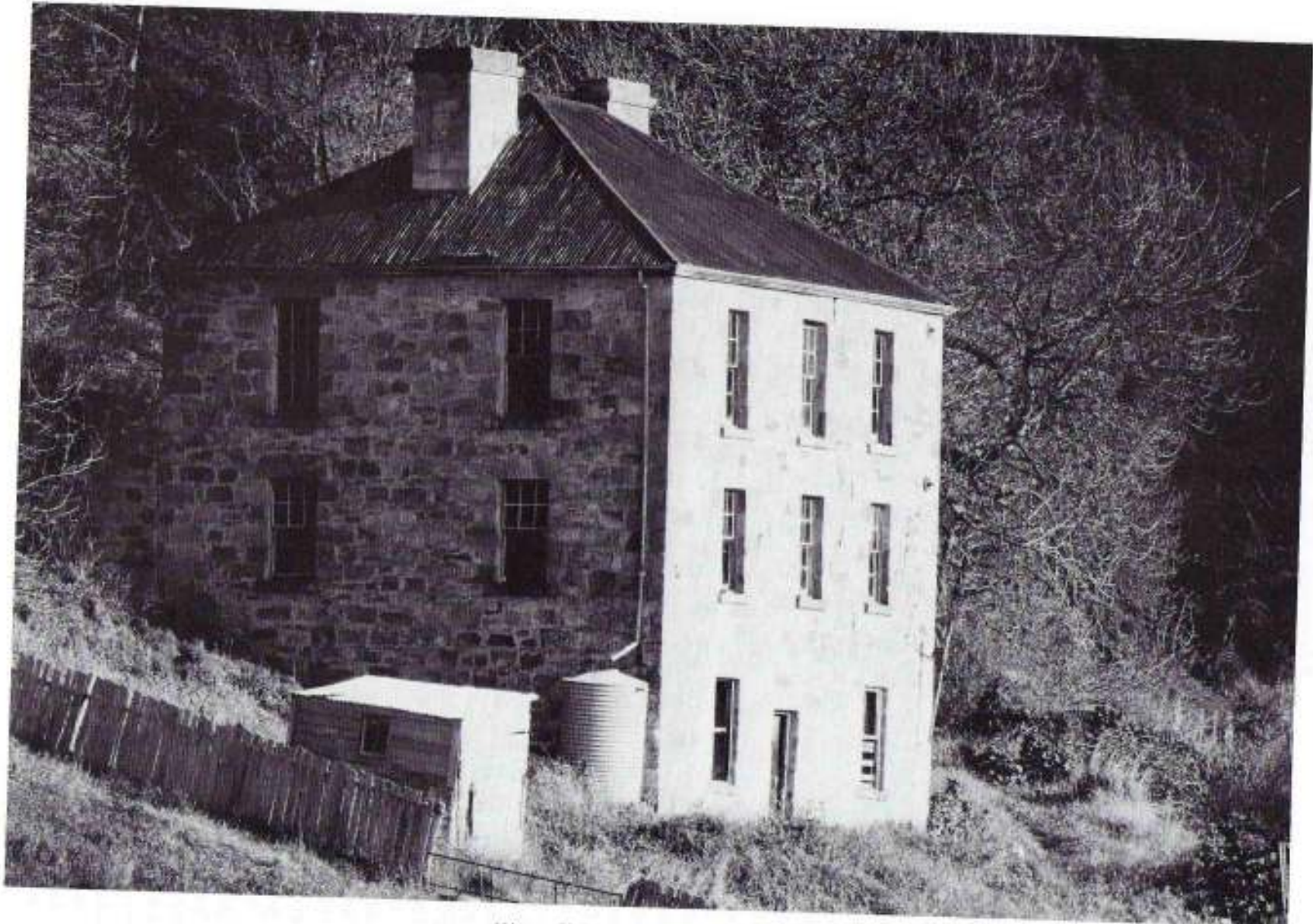
The property changed hands again in 1981

when it was purchased by Mr Mark Lynch, a public servant. Mr Lynch built the barn, a very useful addition to the property, which now stands alongside the house.

When Mr Lynch and his family moved to Canberra in 1983, he sold the property to Mrs Elizabeth Stuart of Sydney, who in turn sold it to its present owners in December 1985.

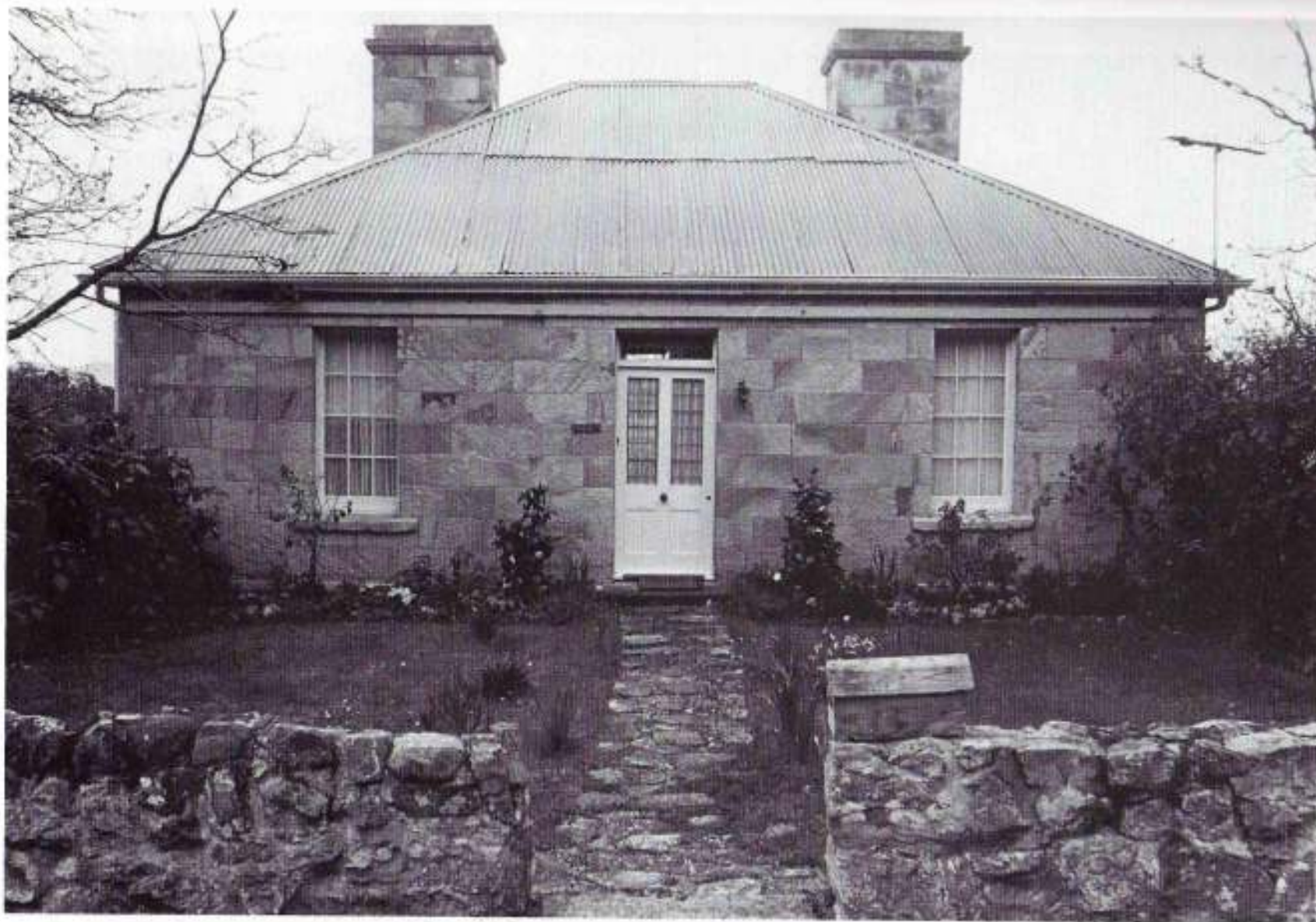
Dr. E.G. Robertson in his publication "Early Buildings of Southern Tasmania" described "Acton" as an "enigmatic house". Even after restoration it remains a house which arouses the curiosity of the passer-by - "I wonder who lives there?" or "what must it be like inside?" are the comments which are often overheard by the occupants. As to be expected the traditional open fire places in eight of the rooms, the convict built bread oven in the kitchen and the magnificent views across the site of the former Brown's River Probation Station and the Derwent through the antique Georgian windows enrich the home with the charm of a bygone era which is now difficult to match.





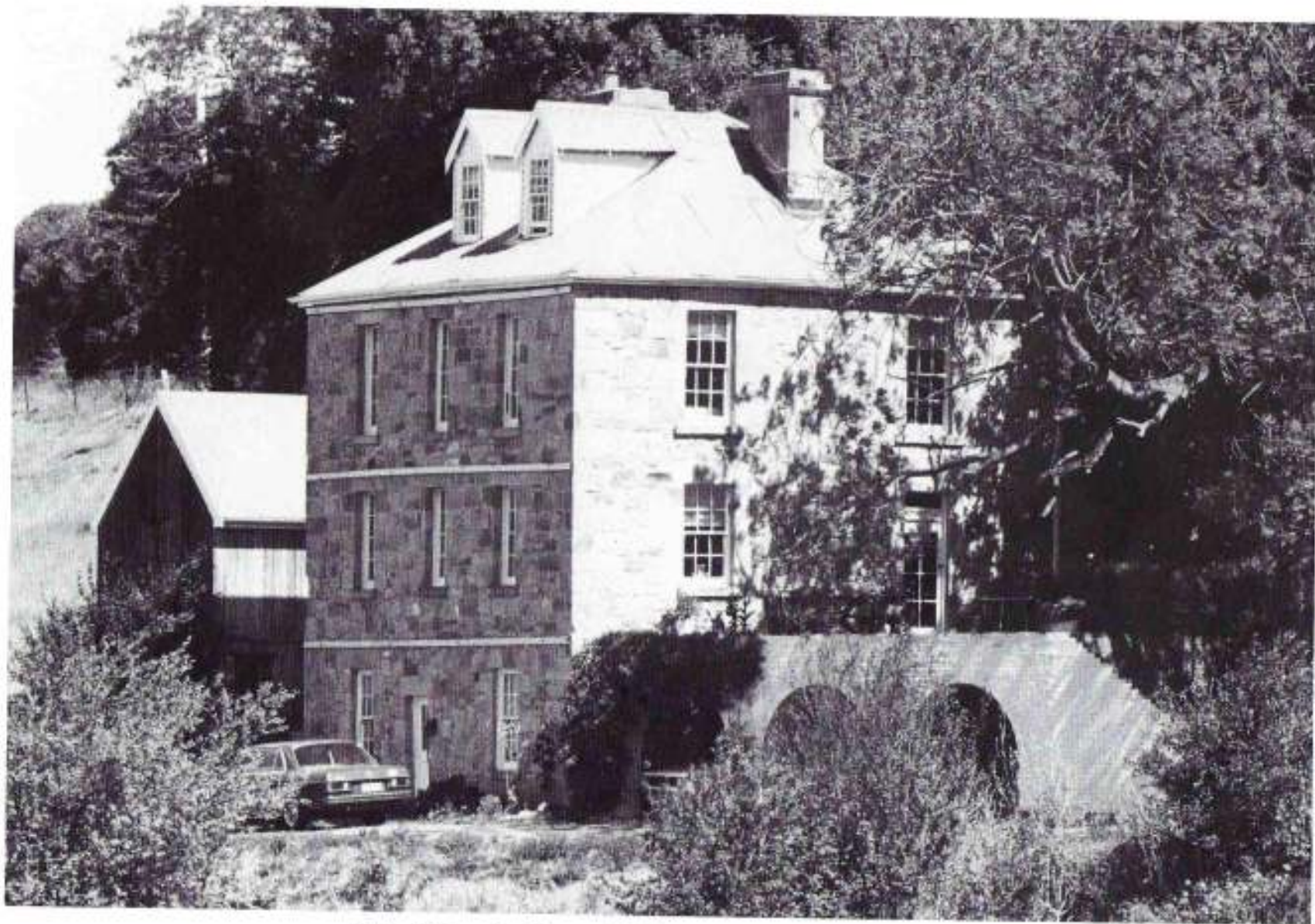
"Acton" before restoration, 1981.

PHOTO FRANK BOLT.



"Acton" from the front, resembling a typical little Georgian Cottage.

PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN.



"Acton" from the Channel Highway, after restoration, 1986.



The ground floor kitchen at "Acton" before restoration, with the bread oven on the right, 1981.

PHOTO FRANK BOLT



The kitchen after restoration, with the bread oven on the right, 1986.

PHOTO JOHN WIMPOLE

26 Channel Highway

John A. Boot

Travelling from Hobart in 1938-39 along the road then called the Taroona or Kingston Road, now the Channel Highway, beyond the Hobart city boundary one passed the timber cottage of "Keltonlea" and the old Grange property on the left hand side. Some homes had been built there already near the end of the Grange Avenue. On the right hand side was Mr Bertrand Rumney's dairy, with paddocks as far as the present end of Oakleigh Avenue.

Further south along the right hand side was land belonging to the carrier, George A. Jackson. His son John had just built a house there. The land on the riverside was partly cleared and partly secondary bush, and belonged to two old ladies, Keyworth and Finlayson. Apparently they had inherited that land long before I came there, but lived in England. Their property stretched a long way south along the bay that everybody called "the river".

The land of the two old ladies seemed to be an ideal spot for my growing family. Edney Moore's estate agent, Jim Clennett, told me the asking price for this: £100 an acre. Knowing the enormous difference with Sydney prices, I was tempted to ask for 7 acres. However the old ladies, who had tried to sell their land for nearly 25 years, could not believe their luck when my offer reached them, and at the same time one from somebody else for a block further south, opposite "Winmarleigh". They decided to cash in on their windfall and increased the price to £110 an acre. Somewhat grudgingly I accepted and took an option for a further 7-7½ acres, at a price to be agreed upon later. Some years later we used our option, but in the meanwhile the price had nearly doubled.

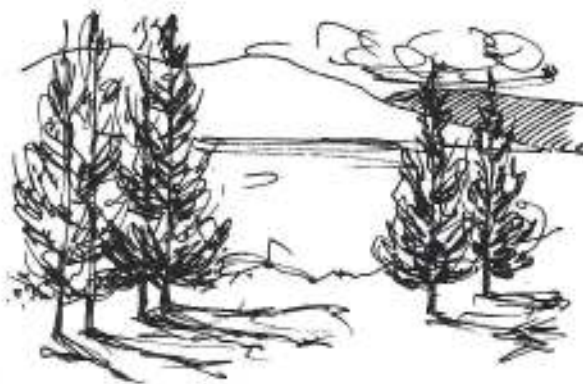
All land outside the built-up area of Hobart was very cheap at that time. Reg Blundstone, later the manager of the Edney Moore-Hooker business, told me afterwards that everybody in his boss' office was sure this newcomer from Sydney was silly to buy land that was 5 miles from the G.P.O., Hobart.

Actually the price was not as cheap as it now sounds. Wages for the working man were about £3 to £5 a week, and for many people £110 corresponded to about 6 months' wages.

After our house was built we came to know the neighbours. Three of them, Harold Solomon, Fred Mitchell and John Morris, represented the legal eagles. With pleasure too I remember Mr Joe Nichols of the Grange, and Mr Bertrand Rumney. The latter had originally hired the land we finally bought as an extra paddock for his cows, and had put new barbed wire on the broken-down fences. He took that wire quickly away when he heard of the coming change of ownership, but afterwards felt he might legally have done the wrong thing, as the wire had been nailed to the old fence posts. Voluntarily he offered to give the wire to me. A real gentleman. But, of course, his offer was too generous.

I always had a great liking for Mr Rumney. With pride he showed me one day a little dam he had built in the hill beyond his paddocks, and the long galvanised pipe that brought the water to his cowsheds. He also told me about the former timber mill that had existed in the gully near the quarry at the town boundary. Some wooden rails could still be seen of the spur line that served for the small trucks that carried the timber down to the mill. When our children grew up we had long walks from the quarry to the top of the hills that are called Albion Heights. The highest part of the hills formed a grassy table land. What seemed to be wild horses roamed there.

Yes, this part of Taroona had all the advantages we wanted for our family.





Number 26 Channel Highway, the home of Mr J.A.P.G. Boot.

PHOTO LEABON H. STARR.