

## House Fire near the Probation Station in 1847

Gwenda Lord

When one thinks of the land near the Probation Station in the 1840s, and which is today's southern boundary of the North Ward of Kingborough, one is inclined to overlook the fact that there were farms nearby. However, the following article in the *Hobart Town Courier and Gazette* of Saturday morning, the 20th February 1847, indicated that this area was also privately and intensively farmed. This is shown by the amount of farm produce that was saved in the outhouses by the convicts from the Probation Station, and that which was destroyed in the upper rooms during the fire that burnt this stone and timber farmhouse.

### Fire

Shortly after 9 o'clock on Wednesday morning a dreadful fire broke out in the dwelling house of Mr John Mathison of Brown's River, which, owing to the position of the house on the top of the mount called the "Bonnet", and a strong breeze blowing at the time, spread rapidly, and in spite of the most vigorous exertions could not be got under, until the roof had fallen in, which eventually burnt out, leaving the blackened walls. It is supposed to have originated in a spark from the chimney having ignited the shingles, near the centre of the roof. Some of the furniture, &c., was saved. Immediately on hearing of the fire, Major Frazer despatched all the men he had at the [Probation] station, under constables Simmons and Stewart, who exerted themselves in saving several window frames, doors, spouting, &c., which had not caught fire; but the want of water prevented any effectual check being put to the flames. All the property saved was carefully collected by them, and removed into Mr Mathison's barn. The attention of the constables in preventing the flames from spreading to the bush, and thereby saving all the out-houses, nearly filled with grain, from destruction, is deserving of much praise. It was most providential that the fire happened in the day-time; had it occurred in the night, it is more than probable that some of the numer-

ous family of Mr Mathison must have perished. The upstairs rooms were entirely of wood, easily ignitable from the long succession of dry weather, and it was not until the entire roof was in a blaze that the discovery was made by Mr Mathison's little boy, who was playing outside. Mr Mathison had left for town only about half an hour previously, and the men had just left breakfast to their respective labours on the farm. The wind was blowing fresh, and the fire commenced at the end of the building directly in the wind's-eye, and thus the flames spread with astonishing rapidity. A quantity of grain and potatoes(*sic*), stored in the upper rooms, were consumed. In addition to Major Frazer, the utmost praise is due to the Rev. Mr Freeman, Dr. Hewson and Mr Allen, postmaster for their efforts in preventing the fire from spreading.

### Reference

"Fire", *Hobart Town Courier and Gazette*, 20th February 1847, p.2, col 3.

