

“Wartling” (Later Meath Ave.) Childhood Memories

June Pretzman

The Meath Avenue subdivision which extends from the Channel Highway to the waterfront occupies part of the land located to Charles Clarke in 1813. This land eventually became part of 165 acres belonging to W. Sorell, W. Fletcher and E. P. Bedford who purchased it from the Cartwright family.

In 1926 E. C. (Charlie) Mitchell purchased 12½ acres and built the substantial dwelling which is now 12 Meath Avenue. The property adjoined that of Mr and Mrs George Dixon and their daughter Grace, and on the other side were the Misses Soundy and Marsh, and Mr and Mrs Frank Purchas. Mrs Lucy Purchas was a well-known musician and singer. They all had very attractive weekend cottages on the land which is now Belhaven Avenue.

Mr H.C. Button was the owner in 1928. In 1929 my Father, Mr A. J. (Arthur) Beck acquired the 12½ acre property by exchanging it with 6 Braddon Avenue, Sandy Bay and called it “Wartling”. The house was well built in red brick with a yellow iron roof.

Mr Mitchell had the grounds beautifully landscaped, including a long gravel driveway with birch trees, some of which are still there, and red berry bushes. Half-way down the driveway divided into two, with one drive going to the front garden and front door, and the other drive to the back of the house. A lot of trellis work surrounded the house. All the paths were made of shell-grit gathered from the beach and half-way to the beach, next to a large orchard, was a tennis court, complete with shelter shed.

Pine trees stretched from the road at the top of the driveway almost to the beach on the Dixon’s side. Another row of golden cypress bordered the front garden. Together with friends we would climb these pine trees from one to another for hours on end.

The rest of the large block was divided into two paddocks near the road, all with well-made wooden fences.

There was a shed comprising a dairy and hen house, and later my Father added stables and a large storage shed for hay. These were on the Belhaven Avenue side. Below this was a very large fowl and duck run with a pond

at the bottom. There were two concrete wells, one outside the dining room window and the other in the middle of the stable shed paddock.

Half-way down to the beach on the Belhaven Avenue side my Father had built a dear little cottage for Mr and Mrs Parsons (Mr Parsnip I affectionately called him). He was a dear hard-working man who literally did all the hard work around the property. The cottage was level with the tennis court.

The bottom paddock ran right across the block and down to the beach. We had a boat shed which I think is still there being propped up by sheds on each side. It was literally our own, private beach. I have been told that Mr Mitchell moved the stones to create a breakwater, thus forming the beach. The breakwater is still evident today.

My brother, together with neighbours, the Gibsons from “Winmarleigh” and Doug Nichols from the “Grange”, used to “mess around in boats”, and Dixon’s Beach, at the base of the Taroona State High School, was his favourite playground.

I well remember the house at 12 Meath Avenue and the D-shaped drive to the portico. The front door opened into a large front hall, panelled with very attractive timber. There were four bedrooms and three had fireplaces. In between the small bedroom and the bathroom was a small dark room without windows. This was called the “Phone Room”, where one could have completely private conversations. I can remember an old upright telephone set with a receiver which hung from a hook on a shaft and the mouthpiece in the shape of a daffodil flower. The room was also a coat cupboard.

The lounge and dining rooms, with magnificent views, were down at the far end of the long hall. I remember a pianola in the lounge where I spent many happy hours. Off the lounge room was a sunroom which was open at one end and led out into the garden. It was ideal for playing in wet weather.

Outside the back door was a large, covered concrete yard. Two tanks and a trellis at one end, and an 8-9 foot trellis at the other end. About 12 feet from the house was another building which included a dairy, which was kept spotless by my Mother. There were two or three large open enamel bowls on the shelves. We had our own Jersey cow “Molly”,

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“Wartling”, now 12 Meath Avenue on the right and Retreat Farm, the home of Mr George Dixon, on the left.

PHOTO JUNE PRETYMAN.



The D-shaped drive to “Wartling”, now 12 Meath Avenue.

PHOTO JUNE PRETYMAN.

and Mr Parsons would bring in the milk night and morning. Mother would then strain and almost boil the milk before pouring it into these bowls. A very thick skin would form and when cold this would be scooped into the cream jug.

Next to the dairy was the wash house which had a large copper bowl built over a fireplace to boil the water for washing clothes. There were also two wooden pine tubs and a hand wringer to squeeze water from the clothes. Water had to be left in the bottom of these tubs at all times to avoid shrinkage and leaking. Modern laundries are a great improvement on those earlier days, but I am not sure about our modern cream and milk.

Next to the wash house was the change room where our garden clothes, tools, shoes and gumboots were kept. We also cleaned our shoes in this room.

At the back of these three rooms was the garage.

During the weekends my Mother would ask friends to stay. Some of my friends with horses would ride down from Sandy Bay. I would often ride to the shops. There were two: Mrs Hinsby's at 199 Channel Highway, which is opposite the present service station on the corner of Jenkins Street and the Channel Highway, and another small one at 235 Channel Highway, where I could buy sweets called "Clinkers" and choose from the half-penny box.

Another means of transport was by "Shank's Pony", accompanied by my dog "Spot". Dad made him a harness from an old bridle, and small cart. Off we would go to Mrs Hinsby's for one pound of butter and some bananas. We would make a few sudden stops on the way because "Spot" was a male dog and at every telegraph pole we encountered the cart would clank against it. I would always have to straighten him up before we could advance to the next pole. I contracted scarlet fever while living in Tarooma. Dr Butler allowed me to stay at home rather than go to Vaucluse Hospital because we were so "isolated". When I recovered I started school at Fahan in 1935. Mrs Higgins, who lived further down the road in Tarooma, was Matron at Fahan in those days. She very kindly took me to school each morning. I well remember her beautiful old dark blue Fiat car with one or two draughty celluloid windows, its leather

seats and brass fittings. In addition to all this it had the most superb engine, so heavy and quiet.

The trip home was different, but equally colorful. I know there are a number of people who still remember the famous old big square blue Webster-Rometch bus which ran from Hobart to Kingston. The driver, Mr Burt, was as famous as the bus, and together they made a good team. Mr Burt was in charge and the bus was his "baby". He smoked very heavily. One did not have to pull a cord or press a button to stop the bus, he just knew where everyone lived.

I remember as a child the quail my Father used to shoot in the bottom paddock, with the help of a beautiful red setter dog. He would often go fishing with Mr Parsons for flounder, and instead return with garfish, which had been speared. I remember Bess, the pig, producing sixteen piglets one morning and how concerned I was that there were only twelve "buttons". I was told that the piglets would share.

I wonder if the "heavy black soil" still grows superb vegetables and flowers. Mr Parsons would bring in an armful of vegetables and say "I can't understand why we get such fine vegetables from that damn 'eavy soil'".

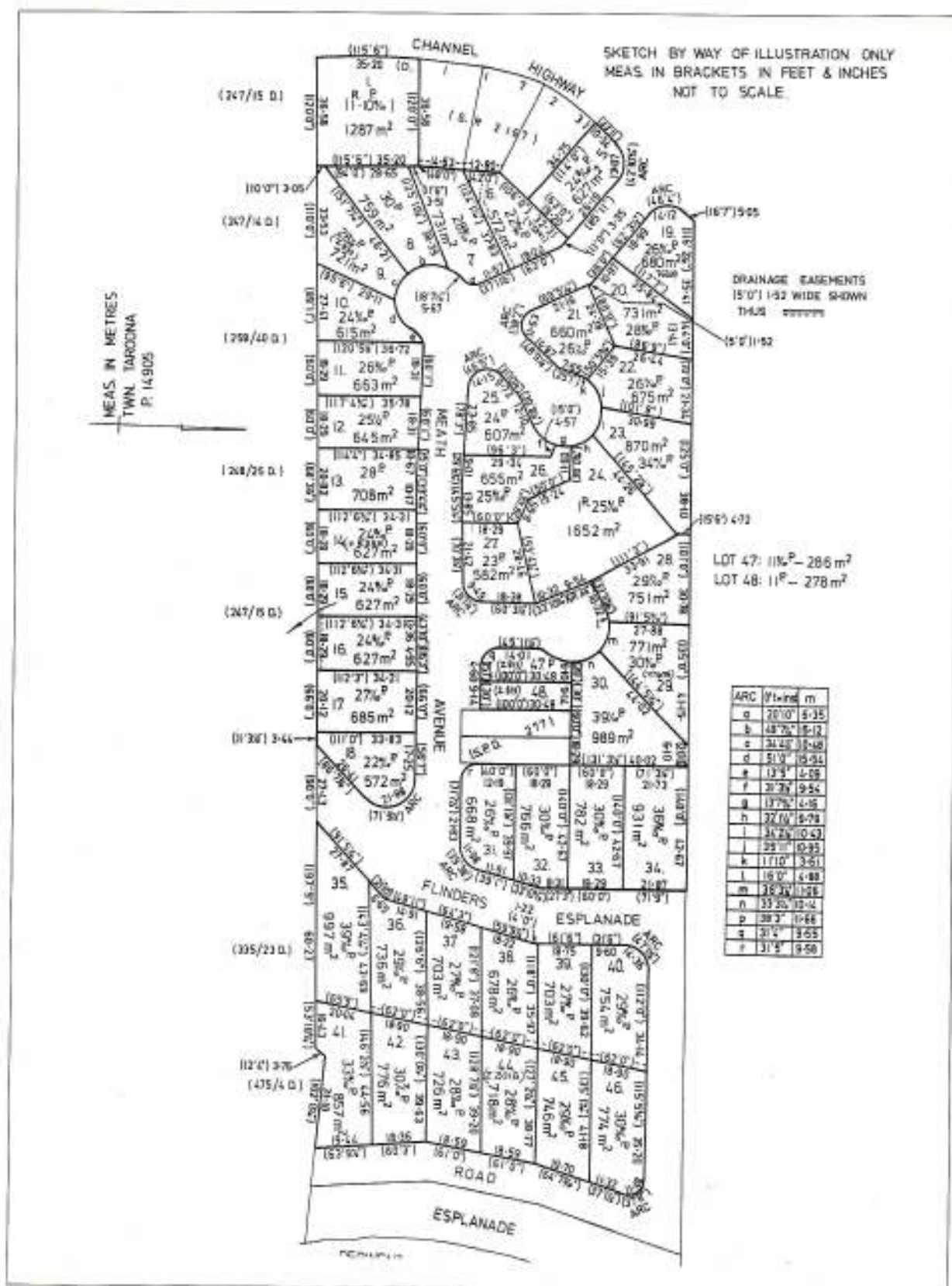
My parents eventually decided that they would have to sell "Wartling" after twelve years. My Father was the member for Denison in Parliament, the Second World War was on, and my Mother helped in his shoe store, Pikes in Liverpool Street, Hobart, while he was away.

In 1941 A.J. Beck sold the land to the Cummins family and our Mr Parsons stayed on. The property became known as "The Birches".

A.E. Palfreyman bought the house and some of the land in 1944, and resold it to the Cummins family in 1953, when the present subdivision was arranged.

It is interesting to recall that in 1954 my parents purchased the block of land and built a house at 2 Meath Avenue, on the corner of the Channel Highway, so returning to the area which they had enjoyed for so many years. Unfortunately the house was burnt down in 1955, but my Father soon rebuilt it to the original design, using the brick sections that were still standing after the fire.

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Subdivisional Plan of Meath Avenue, 1954.

“Winmarleigh”

Jenny Morris

“Winmarleigh” stands on land owned by Vernon William Hookey in 1877 and which was part of George Flexmore’s Location Order of 1813.

On the 2nd April 1885 Mr Henry William Bayley, Stockbroker, bought 23 acres of this land owned by Mr Hookey for the purchase price of £545.

A brick lodge and stables in tudor style were completed in 1888 and the main house in 1891. Exerpts from the *Building and Engineering Journal* of October 1893 referred to “Winmarleigh”, Taroom as:

This residence recently completed by Messrs Stabb Bros., builders of Hobart, from the design and under the direction of Mr. George Fagg, M.S.A., is most charmingly situated about five miles from Hobart on an elevated site overlooking the River Derwent and has a background of hilly bushland, giving it a very picturesque effect as seen from the river. The structure is of stone throughout, except as to the internal walls, and is of a very fine quality procured from the near neighbourhood.

The principal rooms are the library, morning room, drawing room, dining room and a hall or saloon running parallel with the front of the house, 36 feet by 14 feet.

A good deal of attention appears to have been given to the designing of cornices and enrichments of the various rooms which have been very well executed as, in fact, has the whole of the work throughout to the credit of the contractors. Good graining in oak has been done in the hall by Mr. Fleury. The plasterer’s work has been executed by Messrs Williams and Saunders, the stained glass is from the studio of Messrs Goodlet & Smith of Sydney. The total cost was £4,500.

The garden was created with attention to trees and shrubs. Many pines lined the sweeping gravel drives, eventually growing to such a height in the back drive leading to the lodge that they formed a spectacular archway. A cyprus hedge was planted near the roadside and grew to protect the garden and give complete privacy. Cedars, Norfolk Pine, Redwood, Roman Cyprus, Oaks, Willows, Poplars and Palms were carefully planted in the correct aspects, so that today they are greatly admired. Orchards of apple, pear and

plum trees provided an abundance of fruit, many still bearing quantities each year.

A dam built on the hill above with an extensive piping system provided water for the house and garden. A supplementary supply was collected from the roof and held in tanks. A charming wooden wash-house stood to the left of the courtyard.

A bell system operated in most rooms and, it would seem, at some stage to the lodge, with the bell board being located in the back hall of the house.

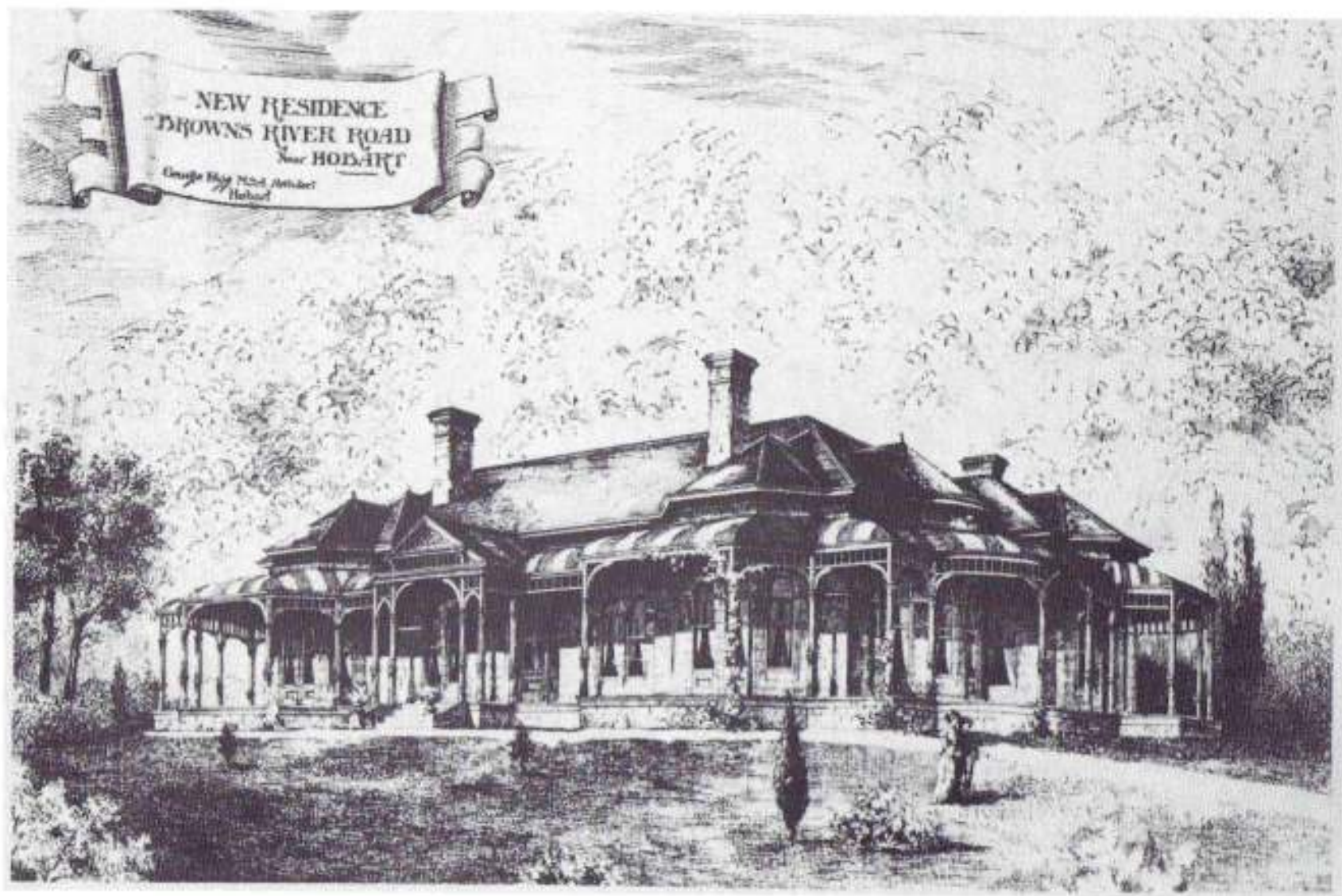
Heating was provided by the large fireplaces in every room, including the hall. This no doubt kept a man constantly at work gathering wood from the property. The handsome cast iron stove built by F. Pullinger of Melbourne, and still in working order, heated water for the kitchen and back bathroom, as well as providing an excellent cooker.

Mr Bayley, who never married, lived in “Winmarleigh” until 1922. He commuted to and from Hobart in his open gig along the Brown’s River Road. He enjoyed entertaining on a large scale, so one is told, often having friends to stay for the weekend as it was considered a long journey from Hobart. The house was certainly designed for such entertaining, although the provision of only three bedrooms in one wing and a maid’s bedroom behind the kitchen seems inadequate for a house of its size.

The property was bought in 1921 by Mrs Constance Isabel Gibson, wife of John Blacker Gibson for £5,000. It was to remain in her property until her death in 1937.

Mr and Mrs Gibson changed the large morning room to the right of the hall into their bedroom. Guests were given the whole bedroom wing. The small library became the smoking room. During this time glass enclosed the courtyard and this acted as a breakfast room. A glass verandah built on the south side may have become an extra bedroom.

In the early 1930s Mr and Mrs Gibson’s son, John, came with his wife, Dorothy Evelyn, and four boys, John, Alistair, Anthony and Richard, to live in the lodge. “Winmarleigh” and its land was a marvellous playground for these children with large hedges to climb, kangaroos to be found in an enclosure to the Northern boundary, cows, fowls and ducks in the paddocks, a good cricket pitch and an abundance of places to explore. The slate roof



*"Winmarleigh" New Residence Brown's River Road near Hobart. George Fagg M.S.A. Architect Hobart.
Building and Engineering Journal, 21 October 1893.*



The sweeping gravel drive into "Winmarleigh", c1926.

PHOTO ALISTAIR GIBSON.



The back of "Winmarleigh", 1974.

PHOTO AMY ACTON.

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of "Winmarleigh" was an exciting place for chasings if you had a strong heart.

The garden was extended and galvanised piping laid throughout to provide an efficient watering system. Daffodils grew in profusion, dahlia beds prospered and many roses were planted.

At this time there were very few houses in the area. Mr Bertie Rumney, the dairyman, lived at "Oakleigh" where Oakleigh Avenue now stands. Mr Harvey, the pig farmer, who was fond of dogs, lived on a hill (now Stewart Crescent) and J.W. Nichols lived at the "Grange". Around the south bend of Winmarleigh lived Messrs Adrian and Winston James who carried out all repairs to "Winmarleigh", more often than not to the slate roof after boisterous winds or from adventurous boys dislodging them.

During the 1920s the Gibsons granted a lease to wood cutters to clear most of the bush. Logs were cut into six foot lengths, carted to the highway on the southside and then sold to Jones and Co. This felling of trees and undergrowth helped prevent the danger of bushfires. During 1932, while Mr and Mrs Harold Ikin and their family were living in the house for a short time, a wedding was held in the hall beneath the stained glass windows. Mr Joshua Ikin married Miss Thelma Doolan, the ceremony being performed by the Rev M. Gunson.

During the late 1930s Mr George Jackson and his family rented "Winmarleigh". In 1939 Mr Justice Morris and Mrs Morris purchased "Winmarleigh". They employed Mr Coleman, the builder, to renovate the house. Every room was repainted and carpeted. In the drawing room the original gold leaf wallpaper was painstakingly restored, the ceilings and cornices painted in their original colour and the extensive verandah roof was repainted, not in stripes of brown and cream but plain grey. The kitchen was modernised with a sink, as the only means of washing up had been in a stone trough situated in the scullery. War and the black-out meant that every window needed frames built of plywood, with a heavy black cardboard covering to make sure that light did not filter through.

The garden was replanted, peacocks roamed the lawns and several wild dogs came out of the bush to eventually become pets. Rose gardens were planted in front of the house and

a beautiful shrubbery leading off the front drive was created with the help of Miss Kitty Henry. This contained brick paths and dry stone walls, and was massed with rhododendrons and azaleas. At one stage there were more than two hundred roses to be pruned.

One of the major alterations was converting what had in later years been a bedroom at the front of the house into a law library.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s the house seemed to be constantly full of interesting people. It was also lent to many charitable organisations.

Following the death of Sir John Morris in 1956, a decision was made to subdivide some of the land, but this did not eventuate until the early 1960s.

The lodge was renovated in 1959 and became the home of Lady Morris's son, John, and his wife, Jennifer. In 1964 they moved into the house with their children and Lady Morris occupied the lodge until it was sold in 1966.

The bushfires in 1967 came to within a few feet of the verandah of the house and did penetrate the eaves of the lodge. The hill behind was left devastated with hardly a tree still standing.

Over the past years the lodge has had extensive alterations. The double garage has become a dining room, the stables a drawing room and the loft a bedroom. It is now a much admired, restored house.

"Winmarleigh" now stands on a sizeable amount of land with its view of the water so far unobstructed. Over twenty years most rooms have been redecorated, the verandah restored and painted, and the garden re-established. The drawing room still has its original paper and the entrance hall the original stencilling.

It has given the family much pleasure over the years, but one must love it dearly to cope with the problems that arise. It is hoped we can enjoy its hundredth year.

