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Historical Summary the Claremont - Austins Ferry Area

This document is a compilation of the local history of the Austins Ferry – Claremont area¹.

Roseneath Inn at Austins Ferry

A small and simple cottage, built by James Austin in 1809 is located a couple of hundred metres from the Austins Ferry Yacht Club.

Austin was a convict who had been transported to Port Phillip in HMS Calcutta in 1803 and then transported to Van Diemen's Land in 1804. His crime was the theft of beehives valued at thirty shillings and he built Austins's cottage on his release from local stone. He named the cottage and farm after Baltonsborough the village of his birth in Somerset, England. In 1816 James Austin and his cousin James Earl established the first trans-Derwent ferry service which remained the main transport route from Hobart Town to Launceston until completion of the Bridgewater causeway in 1838.

Early last century a grand inn stood on the corner of Harbinger Lane and Austins Ferry Road. In its heyday it was a favourite resort for "holidaying folk" from Hobart Town and it was renowned for its magnificent gardens professed to be unsurpassed in Van Diemens Land.

James Austin and his cousin John Earle were the first proprietors of this inn which is thought to have been built in early 1819, again from local stone. Newspaper records show that in July of that year Austin and Earl were granted a publican's licence for the "Barley Mow" in the Black Snake District. Though some writers suggest this inn may have been a little further up river it is most probably the inn that stood on Austin's property, built specifically to cater for the lucrative ferry trade - Austin's Ferry being the main crossing on the North/South Road. A painting of this inn, thought to have been done around 1822, shows a well developed garden around the two-story, sandstone building suggesting that it had been built, at the very least, three years earlier.

Nine miles from Hobart Town was considered some distance in the early days of travel in the colony and it was nothing unusual for travellers to stay the night at the inn before crossing the river and continuing their arduous journey into the "Interior". The inn quickly became a flourishing establishment where travellers could obtain a comfortable bed, a good meal and the "kindest attentions" of the hosts. Austin, it was reported in the newspaper of the time, "brew very good porter."

¹ The prior work of Fiona Ramshaw who runs Austins Cottage is acknowledged.

The inn became known as the “Baltonsborough” - the name of Austin’s farm which he had named after his home village in Somerset, England. It was more often than not, however, referred to merely as “Austin’s”.

The ferry and Austin’s inn and farm were renamed “Roseneath” by Governor Macquarie on his tour of Van Diemens Land in 1821 who visited Austin’s three times, staying at the inn overnight. It was in June 1821 that he recorded the following in his journal: ”Previous to leaving Austin’s Mrs Macquarie and myself (after obtaining the sanction of Austin and his partner Earl) named their place Roseneath, [the seat of the Duke of Argyle on the River Clyde] on account of the great beauty and very picturesque scenery of this place and its similitude to [the place of] the same name in Scotland.”²

Joseph Lycett’s works “Roseneath Ferry, near Hobart Town 1824” and “Roseneath, from across the Derwent 1824” depict the inn and a number of smaller buildings set out in a well organised little community. By this time Austin was the sole proprietor of the inn - Earle having opened the Northampton Arms on the other side of the river. Charles Goodridge in his book “A Narrative of a Voyage in the South Seas”, in comparing the two inns states that Mr. Austin’s was “the most advantageous, as numerous parties frequently came up on pleasure from Hobart Town.”

James Austin died in December 1831. At the time of his death Roseneath House had been almost completed - a large eighteen roomed sandstone building on the New Norfolk Road. It was this building that Solomon and Josiah Austin, who had inherited their uncle’s property, advertised in September 1832 as “their large, new and commodious” Roseneath Inn. They promoted it as an ideal gentleman’s lodgings being “an agreeable and diversified ride from Hobart Town”. The sportsman and the angler, they stated, would “find much amusement at Roseneath” where pigeon shooting would occasionally take place. The stage coach would call daily on its way between Hobart Town and New Norfolk and the steam boat, on its way up and down river, would call regularly. Little is known about the success of this venture but it did not last more than a few years.

Josiah and Solomon, “anxious to retire from public business”, unsuccessfully advertised the Roseneath Inn for lease in mid 1835. The Bridgewater Causeway was completed all but for a small section in 1836 which made travel to the Midlands and beyond much easier. Roads were continuing to be improved and this meant the traveller could cover a greater distance before those services offered by an inn were required.

Rooms in the original inn were leased for a short period of time to a Mr. A Davies. It is not known how successful the Austins were in obtaining tenants over the next ten plus years.

The Roseneath Estate including both the original inn and Roseneath House was finally successfully leased to Mr. John Brent in 1848. Both buildings are depicted at this time in the painting by James Smith that now hangs in the upstairs foyer of the Glenorchy City Council Chambers.

The old inn by the late 1880s was in a state of disrepair. The roof at the front of the building had started to collapse. Photos in the Tasmanian Mail in 1905 and 1912 show the inn rapidly falling into a state of ruin. By the 1920s it had totally collapsed and much of its remaining stone work was used to form the foundations of homes that were beginning to appear in the area. Today, all that remains of what was once an eighteen room; two story

² [] – authors insertions.

sandstone building is a very small section of the back wall usually mistaken for part of the dry stone wall at the beginning of Harbinger Lane.



Figure 1 - Roseneath House

The second Roseneath Inn, better known as Roseneath House, became the family home of the subsequent owners of the Roseneath Estate. It was unfortunately destroyed in the February bushfires of 1967. Roseneath Park has been developed on the site. Some stone work belonging to the house and stables still may be viewed.



Figure 2 - Roseneath Inn and roseneath House. A Winter 1820



Figure 3 - Roseneath Inn 1880

The Ferry between Austin's Ferry and Old Beach

James Austin in partnership with his cousin John Earle established the original ferry service from Austin's Ferry to Old Beach - a crossing of less than 3/4 mile. Both men arrived in the Colony of Van Diemens Land in 1804 having been transported from England for stealing beehives. They were released in early 1809. James was granted land on the West of the Derwent where his cottage still stands today. It was from here that the cousins offered fellow colonists transport across the river. Initially, travellers were rowed across on demand after being offered refreshments at Austin's farm. Eventually, the service became more regulated with two crossings a day. Earle built a hut on the Old Beach side of the river in 1811.

In 1815 Austin and Earle built their first ferryboat and cattle punt but it is 1816 that is recognised as the year this, the first bans Derwent ferry service, began. It was not until 1818, however, that the ferry between Austin's and Old Beach was officially licensed and became part of the Hobart / Launceston road. An inn had now been built to accommodate travellers overnight, not far from Austin's Cottage - it was later to become known as Roseneath Inn.

In 1820 Austin and Earle announced the completion of their new launch - a flat bottomed, flat decked punt - that was capable of transporting 30 head of cattle, 200 sheep, or 2 carts and 16 oxen. This "floating bridge" was towed across the river by one of the smaller boats. By 1821 Earle had built an inn at the Old Beach side of the ferry - now known as Compton Ferry. The demands for the service continued to grow and an even larger ferry was commissioned by Austin. This vessel could carry 5 loaded carts and their teams of ox, 100 head of cattle 300 sheep or "a proportional quantity of other produce."

In 1826 John Earle retired due to ill health and the ferry service continued to prosper under a new partnership - that between Austin and C. Goodridge. Austin had built two horse boats and two small boats.

During this same year the Land Commissioners in their report on the survey of the road from Hobart to Launceston complained of the delays involved in crossing the river. They were of the opinion that the ferry owners did very well out of their business and could therefore afford to offer a far better service at a lesser expense to the user. They recommended a bridge be built from Black Snake - this bridge, however, did not eventuate and the ferry service continued to be a very profitable business for at least the next ten years.

Goodridge took over the lease from Austin of both the Roseneath Ferry and the Compton Ferry in 1828. He had at his disposal three large punts capable of transporting 600 sheep or 200 head of cattle or 10 loaded carts with their teams at any one time. He also had 3 horse boats and 2 passenger boats.

In mid 1829, home sick for England, Goodridge left the colony and the lease of the ferries was taken over by Solomon and Josiah Austin - James Austin's nephews. With the death of their uncle in 1831 ownership of the ferries became theirs.

The Bridgewater Causeway was opened in 1836. The ferry service soon proved to be a far less lucrative business. Little is known about the ferry during these years. The Roseneath

Ferry with boats was advertised for lease in 1848. This was the year the bridge linked both sides of the Bridgewater Causeway and it is thought that there would have been little demand for the large punts. The Compton Ferry had been purchased by Alex Ainslie in 1840 and, as a result of a disagreement with him; the Austins had destroyed both jetties on their side of the river.

It is believed that it was in the 1850s that the Mollineaux family took over the Compton Ferry. Branches of the Mollineaux family were well known river people - transporting timber in the Derwent and Jordon Rivers. The Mollineauxs that took over the ferry had a farm at Old Beach and it was Eliza Mollineaux who became the first ferryman, strongly rowing passengers across the river. John Mollineaux, Eliza's grand son, was the last of his family to be a ferryman and it was with his death in 1952 that a ferry service between Austin's Ferry and Old Beach finally ceased. He had been a ferryman for 52 years and in that time had rowed some 80,000 miles. He rowed across the river in all weathers and as often as the need was there. On occasions, he took groups across the river in his steam launch. He travelled as far up river as Sorell Creek to take groups for picnics and as far down river as the wharfs to collect goods from town. In 1921 he made his home in Austins Ferry Road, directly opposite the home of the first ferryman -James Austin.

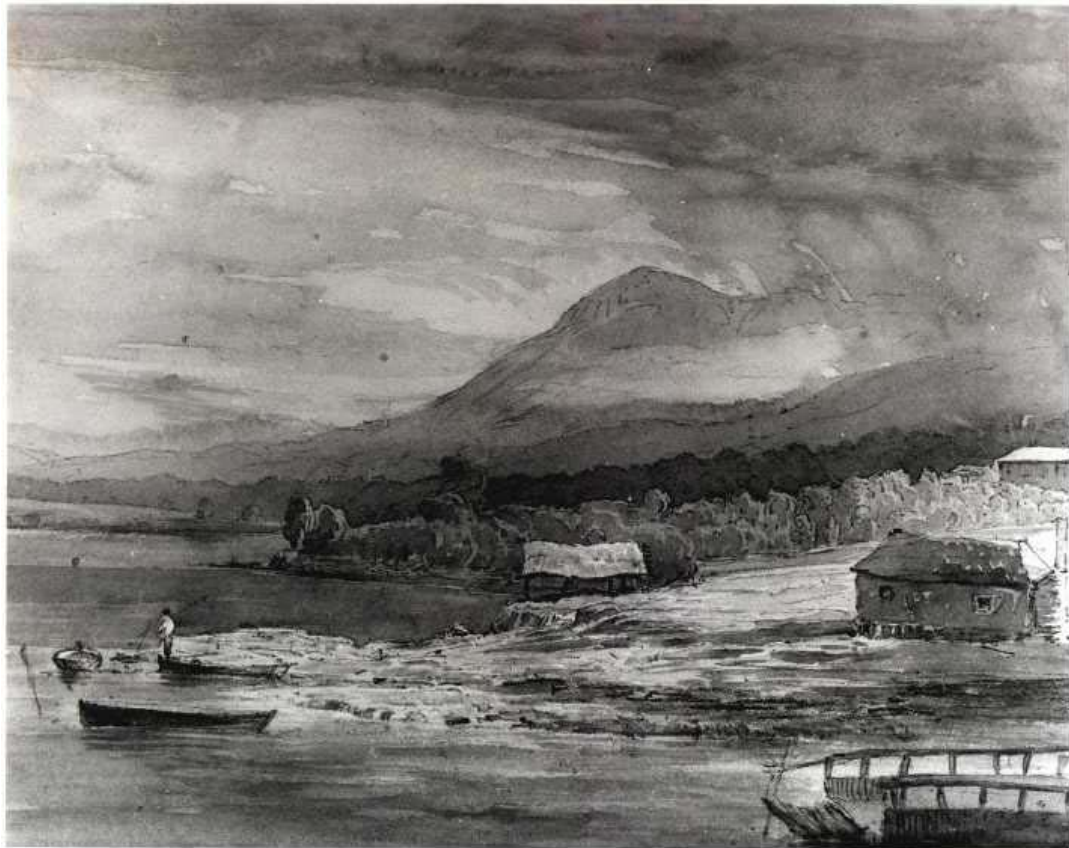
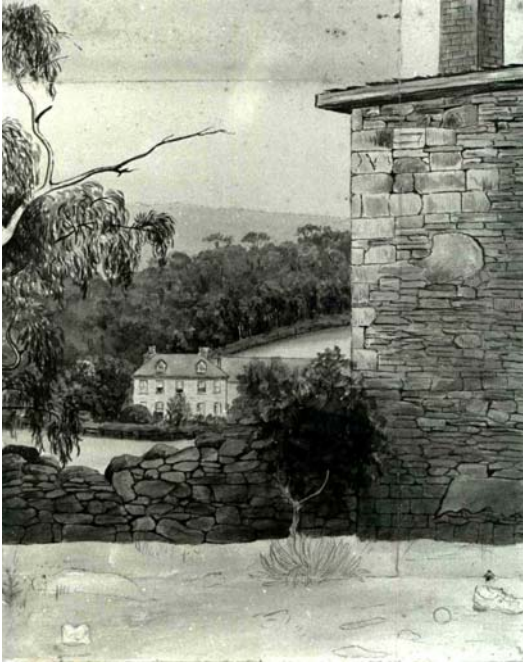


Figure 4 - Austins Ferry Boies (Crowther Collection)

The Old Stone Wall Austins Ferry



It is not known exactly when the dry-stone wall which still extends along the length of Harbinger Lane was built, but it was most probably not long after the inn was completed. The wall, which was most likely built by convict labour, again from local stone, butted up to the Hobart side of the inn as clearly depicted in a water colour done by Florence Brent (1878). Its purpose, it is believed, was to contain livestock waiting to cross the river by the ferry and to stop any animal from wandering over what would have been a fairly steep drop to Rusts Bay.

Figure 5 - Roseneath Inn Showing Inn Wall (F A Brent 1878)



Figure 6 - The Old Wall, Austins Ferry

Hestercombe Chapel



Figure 7 - Hestercombe Chapel

To the north of Derwent Retreat is Hestercombe Chapel which was built in 1833 by the Hobart merchant, Henry Hopkins. It is the oldest Congregational Church in Australia. This tiny, isolated building has a fireplace (an indication of how cold it gets in winter) and a tiny organ. It is easy to miss as it is grey and unimpressive. There is a simple asceticism to the building.

The Old Watch House

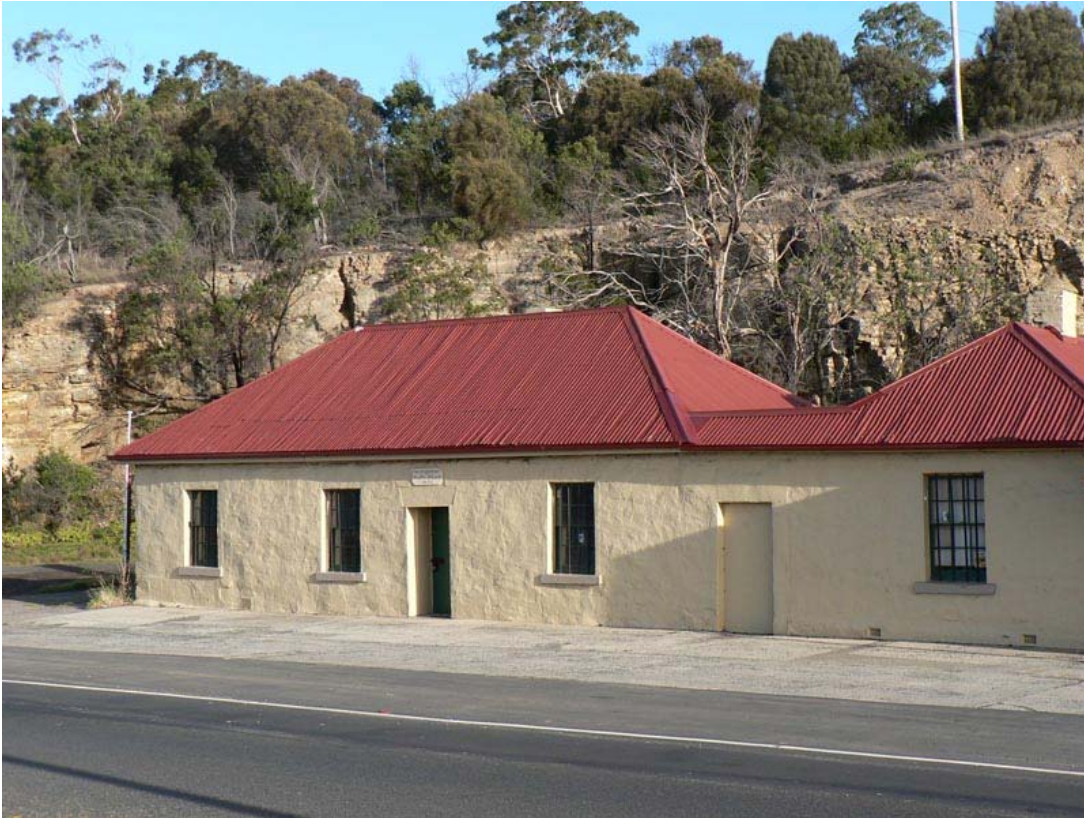


Figure 8 - The Old Granton Watchhouse

The Old Watch House at the southern end of the Bridgewater causeway was built by convicts in 1838. Behind the building is the quarry which was used to provide the fill for the causeway. The building contains the notorious solitary cell which was used to punish convicts building the causeway.

The Black Snake Inn



Figure 9 - The Blacksnake Inn

About three km to the north of Austins Ferry at Granton is the Black Snake Inn which was built by the convicts who were constructing the causeway. It was opened in 1833 and operated until 1860.

Claremont House



Figure 10 - Claremont House

Claremont or Lady Clark House as it has come to be known as was built by the early Pioneer Henry Bilton. Henry came to Tasmania on medical advice in 1825. He became a

merchant and later a gentleman farmer. As the first importer of Leicester sheep to Tasmania he gained significant wealth and turned his attention to politics. He was a Justice of the Peace and the Warden of Glenorchy for a number of years; but was unsuccessful in his two attempts to gain entry to the Tasmanian House of Assembly.