

The Invergowrie Woolshed
Douglas Moffatt
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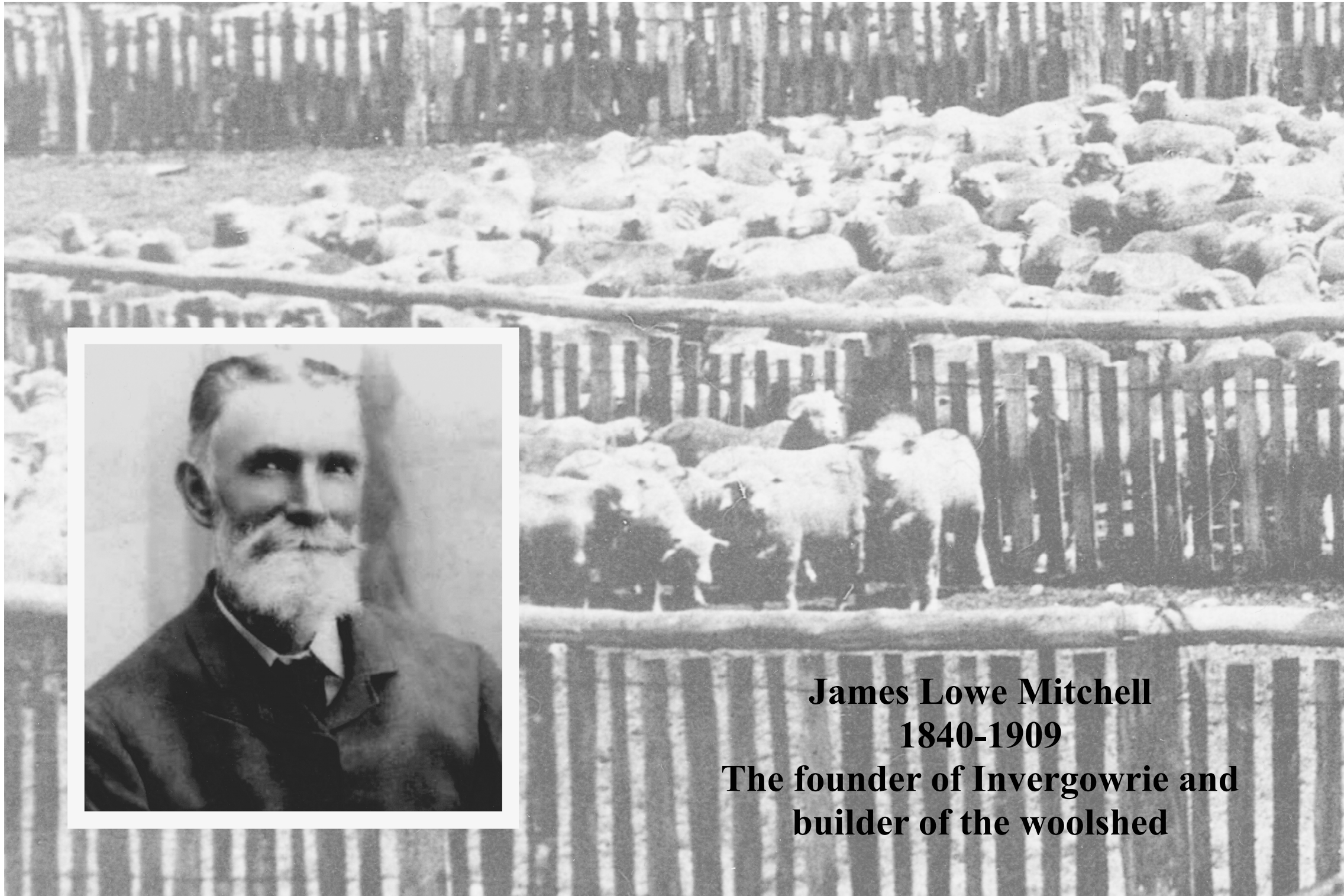
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THE INVERGOWRIE WOOLSHED

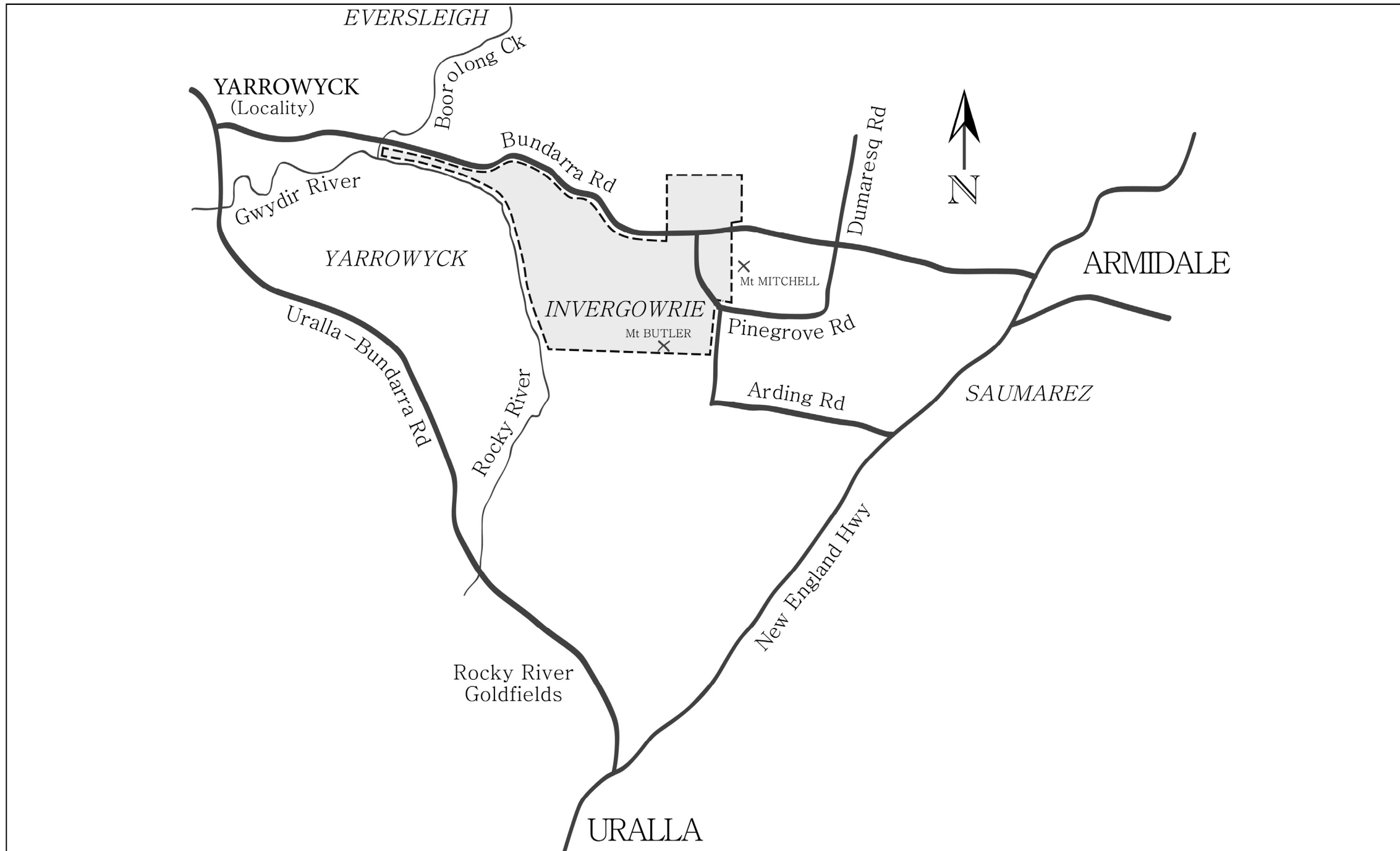
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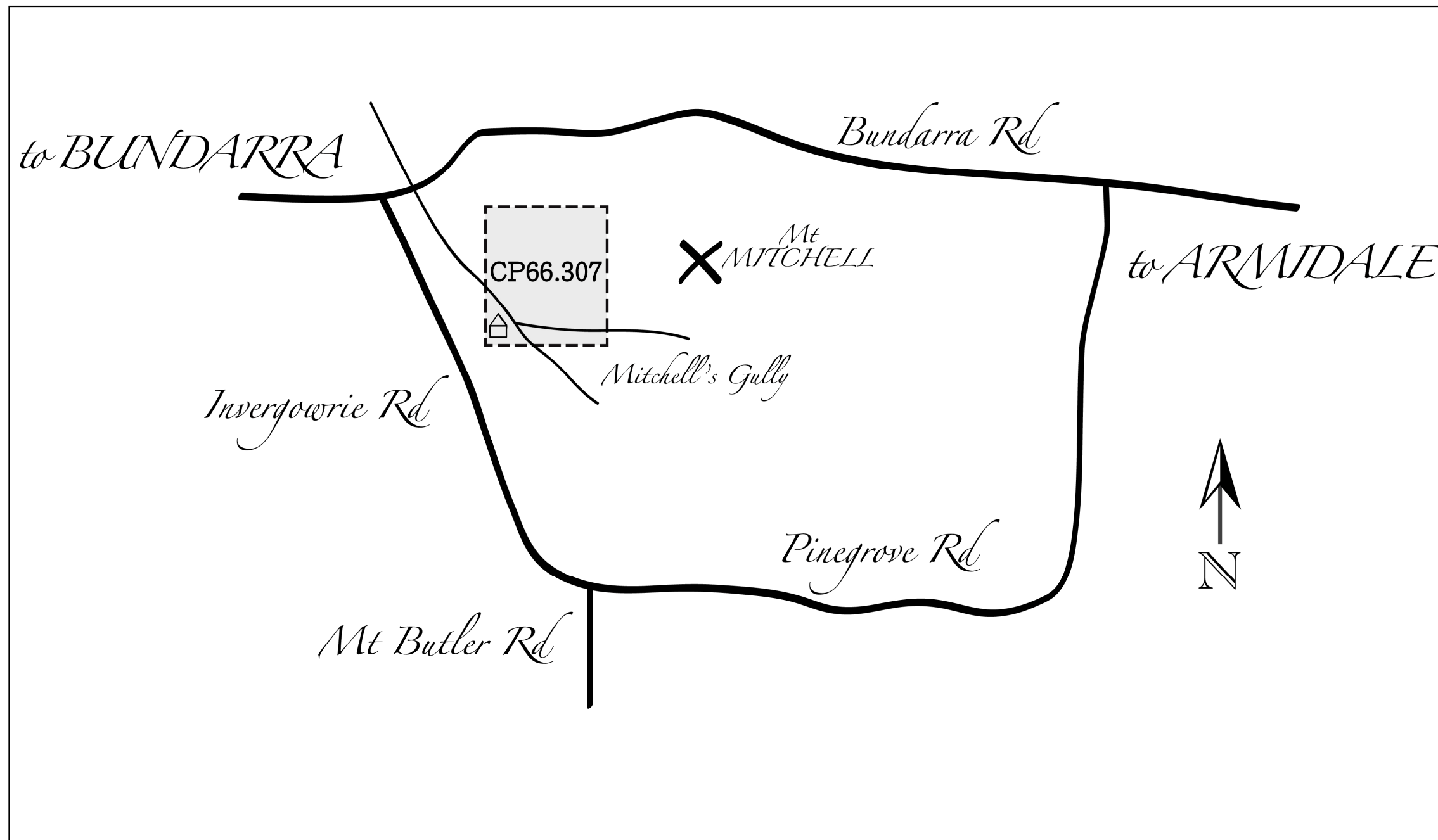
**James Lowe Mitchell
1840-1909
The founder of Invergowrie and
builder of the woolshed**

ILLUSTRATION No. 3



A map showing both the approximate boundaries and the extent of *Invergowrie* at the time of its maximum acreage.

ILLUSTRATION No. 4



A sketch map showing the approximate location of the initial 1866 land selection.

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PROLOGUE

“Australia rides on the sheep’s back” was an expression heard in this country for many decades up to and including the 1950s. That sheep was the Merino - always the predominant breed raised for wool here. Well adapted to the environment, it was grazed over a significant proportion of the continent. The contribution of the wool industry to Australia’s economic wealth has been enormous, especially during the extraordinary period of prosperity in the second half of the 19th and early 20th Century when the demand for wool seemed almost insatiable. Other industries, particularly mining, have also made substantial contributions to this wealth, but there are two major features of the wool industry that set it apart from mining. First, wool production was conducted extensively over vast areas of the country, thus widely distributing the benefits of the wealth it generated. Mining was frequently ephemeral, but when it did persist, often had only a local or regional impact. Second, while the long-term benefits of mining - gold in particular, especially in Victoria - were spread over many years, the periods of prosperity for that industry were relatively short compared with the length of time wool-growing was conducted so successfully by a great number of people.

A consequence of this prolonged prosperity was the sense of permanence and stability that prevailed amongst the pastoralists. Their confidence in the future was expressed in the major improvements they made on their holdings. A notable result in many instances was the legacy still evident today - substantial homesteads and other buildings, especially woolsheds.

WOOLSHEDS – AN OVERVIEW

Woolsheds have been built in many shapes and sizes. In the early days of the Australian wool industry, sheep were shorn by hand using blade shears, most likely in the open, and possibly on a sheet to keep the fleece out of the dirt. During the first half of the 19th Century, when these sheds were built, they were modest - simple pole structures with a bark or thatch roof made from twigs, grass or reeds, and floors of earth or stone. The photograph of the woolshed at Clayton Farm near Bordertown in South Australia, shown below, is a good example of such a shed.



The earliest woolsheds - roofed structures with open internal spaces - would have served several purposes. Apart from being used for shearing, they might have provided general storage, shelter for livestock or space to conduct other farm activities that required being out of the weather.

During the period of enormous prosperity in the wool industry the woolsheds being built by wealthy pastoralists often came to rival the grandeur of their homesteads - both reflecting the owner's perceived social standing. These buildings were an important part of the economic activity that allowed the pastoralists to live as they did. As a result, their builders often gave more consideration to the design, manner of construction and level of expenditure than was given to the homestead's other outbuildings.

The woolsheds built during this boom time were designed primarily to facilitate the efficient handling of both the sheep and the resultant fleeces. Efficiency was important because some very large sheds accommodated over 100 shearers on the board - that space within the shed where sheep are shorn - shearing several hundred thousand sheep. The whole process had to be conducted as quickly and efficiently as possible and consequently called for a more sophisticated design than simply an open space.



Sheep must be dry when shorn and sufficient numbers need to be held to permit about a day's shearing to be conducted. The design of the building had to provide covered space for holding or 'sweating' pens either in or underneath the woolshed. The location and the layout of these and the catching pens had to ensure the sheep could be herded quickly, easily and as close as possible to the shearers on the board. The board had to allow for the efficient handling of the sheep during actual shearing and provide ready access to the wool skirting, rolling and classing tables. Bins to hold classed wool waiting to be pressed into bales had to be near both the tables and the wool press. The areas to store made-up bales had to be close to the wool press and an exterior door to facilitate the rapid loading of those bales onto wagons for transport to wool-selling centres.

The design and construction of woolsheds to meet all these aspects of the shearing process resulted in most floor plans being remarkably similar. Obviously, floor plans did vary. Any differences, however, more likely arose because of the scale of the owner's operation, his own sense of style or the amount of money he was prepared to expend, rather than as a result of any variations in the shearing process.

Interestingly, the one element of design that varied the least was the board. The shearers were most often arranged in a single row, or two rows, depending on the size of the shed. Usually the board adjoined an external wall of the building. This allowed for the easy dispatch of shorn sheep out of the building and admitted the maximum amount of natural light



to each shearer. If the catching pens were immediately behind the board, it was often quite narrow.

In some woolsheds the board was located in the centre of the building with clerestory windows above to admit as much light as possible to the one or two rows of shearers. Placing the shearers in a row or rows was necessary with mechanical shearing because the individual handpieces were driven by a single lineal overhead drive shaft. Ironically, however, in many woolsheds this introduced an element of inefficiency because it meant the wool tables were frequently located at only one end of the board. Rouseabouts collecting the shorn fleeces had to walk long distances from the shearers furthest from those wool tables. In some instances this problem was overcome by placing the catching pens on the same wall as the dispatch chutes, permitting the space between the shearers and the wool storage bins to be widened, and allowing the wool tables to be placed central to the board. Such an arrangement, however, also necessitated a more complicated - and hence expensive - placement of windows to admit light, rather than just the usual open space above the outer board wall. Curiously, even when shearing was done with blades, shearers had been arranged in a row or rows.

An outcome of designing a building to meet the physical requirements for efficient handling of sheep and wool meant that not only were floor plans quite similar, but also the appearance of the buildings themselves was much the same. As well, the buildings were less useful for other purposes and lay idle for much of the year. The economic efficiency of creating a general-purpose building was sacrificed to achieve this end. At the height of the period of prosperity in the wool industry this was unlikely to have been considered an important matter.

The woolshed at *Invergowrie* was built when physical efficiency was seen as paramount.



Even if these often extremely large buildings were similar in both plan and appearance, they were nonetheless very interesting, aesthetically pleasing and splendid examples of quintessential Australian architecture. They were, however, because of their utilitarian nature generally unremarkable in appearance, but there were some notable exceptions. For example, the woolshed at *Gostwyck* (now *Deeargee*) near Uralla, New South Wales, shown above, is both visually and architecturally outstanding. Considered by some to be the oldest extant woolshed in the country, it is also remarkable because it has been in continuous use for 160 years and operated by the same family.

In plan it is a large octagonal structure with a rectangular ‘tail’ attached. A three- tiered roof, with each tier separated from the next by a row of windows, covers the octagonal section of the building. A gable roof covers the single storey tail. The octagonal section originally housed the board and the catching pens, and according to Harry Sowden, accommodated 24 men using blade shears in a near-circle, all in close proximity to the wool tables, and the many windows admitted much light. This arrangement overcame the inefficiency of the more typical board. The tail housed the wool bins, the wool press and the bale storage area.

Advances in ideas to improve in-shed sheep handling are sometimes seen as peaking in the 1880s - about the time the first mechanical shearing equipment appeared in the country. However, all the design concepts considered necessary for efficiency were incorporated into the *Gostwyck* woolshed when it was built in 1851, nearly four decades earlier. Ironically, when mechanical shearing was introduced at *Gostwyck* the board was relocated to the tail. Restoring the board as originally designed in this woolshed, or building a new woolshed with such a configuration, has only been possible since the availability of electricity permitted the introduction of individual electric motors to power each shearer's handpiece.

Shearing is usually an annual process, and historically in Australia was generally conducted in the second half of the year, with many shearers starting work in Queensland about July or August and then moving south following the available work. Nowadays the timing of shearing is influenced by a number of other factors, particularly drought or some other form of stress that may contribute to a 'break' in the wool staple. Because a break causes special problems during the spinning process, and a price penalty, shearing is more likely to be timed to coincide as closely as possible with this anticipated problem in order to maximise the length of a sound staple.

As the national flock grew, the shearing process had to become more expeditious and as noted above woolsheds were being designed to facilitate this. However, the shearers themselves contributed by learning to remove the fleece from the sheep with dexterity and speed. In time, shearing became a well-orchestrated and choreographed affair, with a series of highly standardised and formulaic 'blows' resulting in a cohesive bundle of fleece on the board. The sheep was caught around the neck, rolled onto its rump, then dragged backwards from the pen across the board by its front legs. With the sitting sheep resting between his legs, the shearer picked up his handpiece, engaged the drive mechanism and removed the wool from the belly and inside back legs of the animal. A 'blind' blow from the chest to the jaw was the first cut. After wool on the top of the head and around the face was removed, the animal was rolled first to one side and then the other as the fleece was cut away from the flanks and the legs towards the backbone. A final blow along the backbone freed the sheep from its wool which could now be picked up by the rouseabout in one piece and thrown intact onto the wool table. Skirting - removal of stained or daggy wool - rolling and classing followed before the fleece was placed in a bin prior to pressing into a bale.

Prosperity in any industry brings with it some wonderful tall tales. The early pioneers of the wool industry in Australia were frequently the adventurous sons of well-to-do English families who wanted to make money. After purchasing sheep and squatting on Crown land outside the 'limits of settlement', many did very well for themselves. Quite a few were able to return to England and live comfortably on the proceeds of their wool cheques. The story goes that some clearly seemed to forget what shearing entailed, writing to their managers 'running short of cash, please shear the sheep again', even if it was only six months since the last shearing.

THE INVERGOWRIE WOOLSHED

In January 1866, James Lowe Mitchell selected, and subsequently conditionally purchased, 100 acres of land about ten miles west of Armidale. Straddling the headwaters of a small gully, and situated at the base of the western flank of a hill - part of the Great Dividing Range - this land was the foundation of a property that some eight years later became known as *Invergowrie*. James built a hut there, and the gully and hill are known as Mitchell's Gully and Mount Mitchell respectively. When surveyed it became Portion 15, Parish of Elton, County of Sandon.

In his brief history of *Invergowrie* written in the early 1980s, Ken Moffatt, a great-grandson of James Mitchell, stated that a bark-roofed structure similar in style to the *Clayton Farm* woolshed had been built just to the north-west of this hut. Ken also spoke of this building on quite a few occasions.

John Martin Moffatt, (known as Martin), Ken's grandfather, purchased *Invergowrie* in 1916 from the estate of his father-in-law, James Mitchell after Isabella, James' widow, died in 1915. As a small child, Ken was probably his grandfather's shadow and may well have seen some ruins, or been told about them. Martin died at the age of 75 when Ken was eight years old. The period of combined recollection of these two men would have extended to within about ten years of the establishment of the property. Because the Mitchell and the Moffatt families were close neighbours, especially between the early 1860s and the mid 1880s, Martin would also have been familiar with *Invergowrie* from an early age, long before he purchased the property.

The death of Ken Moffatt in 1994 severed the immediate personal connections to the early history of the property and so it will never be known for certain now if a simple woolshed existed near the site of James Mitchell's first house. He purchased a wool press in the early 1870s and that would have had to be under some sort of cover to protect it from the weather. One cannot state with certainty it was housed in a woolshed. However, the accumulated family knowledge about the property covered a long period of time, and if people within and between generations spoke about such a building it seems reasonable to suggest that the early woolshed did exist.

The extant woolshed built not far from and north-west of the present homestead is neither rustic nor grand. Its design is fairly typical of contemporary sheds.



The *Invergowrie* woolshed viewed from the south-west, 1917.

The exact size of the property at the time the woolshed was built is not known. A New South Wales parliamentary report - dated 1885 - recorded its acreage as 2,300. While the areas of land purchased, both conditionally and outright at the time of its construction are known - about 1,800 acres - the area of land being leased is not known, but would seem to have amounted to about 500 acres. Whatever the area of the property - at just over 2,000 acres – the building was comparatively large for a property of that size.

In plan, the woolshed is a simple rectangle, about 140 feet by 70 feet, aligned east-west, constructed of hewn and sawn timber, roofed with corrugated iron, and clad with a mix of horizontal weatherboards and vertically placed sawn timber slabs. About six pairs of poles placed vertically in the ground and adzed into square section from floor level to the top plate originally comprised its central core. Framework outside the central section not directly attached to the poles is supported on sunken stumps which extend just to floor level.

The building is set about four feet off the ground. Parts of the below-floor area were used as holding pens for sheep prior to shearing - necessary in inclement weather conditions because, as noted earlier, shearers will not shear wet sheep.

The holding pens within the woolshed, the catching pens immediately behind the board, the wool pressing area and most of the bale storage area make up the largest part of the building, and occupy the centre of it, running lengthways from east to west. This area is covered by a single gable roof.

Another gable roof about half the length of the main roof and containing a large skylight on its south side is joined to the latter roof by a box gutter. This second gable roof covers the area where the wool rolling tables and the classed-wool storage bins are located in the south-west corner of the building and it abuts the skillion roof covering the board.

A skillion roof also covers the sheep entry yard behind the holding pens and part of the bale storage area on the northern side of the building. (See illustrations on the following two pages). The roof over the board extends several feet beyond the wall that forms its outer edge. A decorative timber valance hangs below the gutter on this skillion roof. (See illustrations on pages 19 and 20).



The *Invergowrie* woolshed viewed from the west.



As mentioned, sawn timber was used originally for most of the framing and all of the cladding. Most of the other outbuildings on the property had walls of split slabs. At the time they were built, split timber would have been easier to source than the sawn slabs used in some of the woolshed walls. Other materials were used when repairs were undertaken in the late 1980s.

Except for the large wooden sliding door through which sheep were driven into the holding and catching pens behind the board, the entire northern wall of the building originally consisted of wooden shutters hung above a half-height wall of vertical sawn timber slabs. The shutters, hinged at their tops, could be propped open to allow in air and light. Windows now replace most of the shutters. (See illustrations on the following two pages).

The eastern wall is comprised of vertical sawn slabs from floor level to the top plate. The gable end of this wall above the slabs is clad in sawn weatherboards. The entire western wall and that part of the southern wall under the gable roof were originally weatherboard, but are now corrugated iron. There is a row of windows, about two feet in height, at the top edge of the southern wall. Both the inner and outer board walls are made up of vertical sawn timber slabs. The outer board wall contains the chutes down which shorn sheep were dispatched. Like the wall on the northern side, both board walls are also about half height. Unlike the northern wall, the spaces above the top of the board walls and roof are not enclosed.

The eclectic mix of slabs and weatherboards as wall cladding and some aspects of the present roof form beg the question as to whether the woolshed was originally built as it is seen now, or as a slightly smaller structure that was added to and altered at some stage.

There are some signs to suggest the whole of the western end of the building was extended by about twelve feet. In addition the area where the wool tables are presently located and that part of the extension immediately adjacent to them and to the west now housing the storage bins, is likely to have been re-roofed with the second gable roof mentioned above and the row of windows below its southern edge added at the same time.

The existing evidence supporting the conclusions drawn about these possible alterations and the likely reasons for their being undertaken, are detailed below. They appear, however, to be modest enough for one to conclude that the original roof form was a gable flanked by a skillion at both its northern and southern edges – that on the south being wider, and hence with a flatter pitch than that on the north. When viewed in elevation, it can be seen that the upper extremities of both skillion roofs and the lower edges of the gable were both joined at the top plate and therefore set at an equal height. The outer extremities of both skillion roofs are set at an equal, but lower, height on each side.



The *Invergowrie* woolshed viewed from the north-west.



The signs indicating the possible alterations to the building are as follows: the floorboards in the area at the western end of the building (where it is believed the extension was undertaken) all run at right angles to the original floor; a pair of the original set of posts making up the structural central core of the building has been cut flush with the new floor; there is evidence pointing to the re-use of timber and modifications to enable the installation of extra windows.

The likely extension to the west was undertaken to create more floor space for the wool tables and the storage bins, to allow the wool press to be better placed and to provide more space for baled wool.

The skillion roof, which today covers only the board, probably covered the area where the wool tables are located. Its replacement with the present gable roof and additional windows was no doubt undertaken to provide a greater height for the easier throwing of fleeces onto the wool tables and to admit more light.

The main evidence for the change in this roof from a skillion to a gable is the untidy and clumsy junction of the two roofs. The attention to detail that is evident in those parts of the building which have clearly not been altered give the lie to any idea that the present roof form was original. (See illustrations on the following two pages). The shed to house the steam engine was built in 1901; part of the eastern wall was changed when this gable-roofed shed was built.

Transporting corrugated roofing iron to the site would have been a major undertaking. Distance and physical access to the tablelands were significant barriers to the movement of both people and freight to and from the area for many years following initial European settlement. Pioneers had travelled from Grafton, Port Macquarie and Maitland to reach the area, but by the time the woolshed was built the railway line edging its way from the south became the main transport route. Even then the task would not have been easy. Newcastle was the initial southern terminus of the Main North Line when building of the railway commenced in 1857. This line reached Tamworth in 1878 and Armidale in late 1882. Transport from Sydney to the Queensland border and connection to that State's rail system was possible only in 1889 when the Hawkesbury River Bridge was completed. As the woolshed was built between 1879 and 1882, it would have been necessary for the iron to be carted by ship from Sydney to Newcastle or Maitland, then by rail to Tamworth and by bullock- or horse-drawn drays from Tamworth to *Invergowrie*.

The contemporary use of sawn timber would have been much more expensive than the slab construction used on the other outbuildings at about the same time. This suggests its builder saw it as an important structure. Confirming the view that woolsheds generally, and this one in particular, were



Photograph of part of the woolshed viewed from the south-east.



seen this way by both their builders and other people, a journalist reporting on a visit to *Invergowrie* wrote:

“Everything about the *Invergowrie* homestead bears evidence of being carefully planned, but the woolshed, the dip, the drying stages, and drafting yards are most conspicuous proofs of the owner’s foresight and prudence.” [Armidale Chronicle November 1895]



The plunge ‘dip’ which was constructed at the same time as the woolshed, was a watertight, brick-lined and cement-rendered trench about 15 yards long, five feet deep and one and a half feet wide. The overall depth included those parts of the walls that rose a foot above ground level. Their tops were wide enough for the people handling the sheep during dipping to walk along. The ‘drying-stage’, located at the eastern end of the dip, was a set of yards with a brick-paved cement-rendered floor, the whole covered by a low-hipped roof. This building held the sheep once they had been dipped while excess water drained from them and back into the dip; they remained there until partially dry.

Sheep needed to be dipped soon after shearing, usually within about six weeks, to destroy any parasitic insects they might have been carrying. Both the health of the animal and the quality of its wool could be adversely affected by these pests. A variety of insects caused problems and some infestations were regional in nature. At *Invergowrie* the presence of both lice and ticks was the main reason animals were treated. Historically, the usual form of dipping involved immersing the animal in water to which an arsenic-based insecticide had been added. The sheep, once forced into the dip, had to swim along it and have their heads pushed below the surface of the water a couple of times before scrambling out into the drying-stage shed. Held for too short a time without some form of cover sheep could be ‘scalded’, the effect of sunlight or rain on the insecticide. Covered yards were uncommon, so the more usual practice to overcome this problem was to dip the sheep very early in the day and to turn them out into paddocks with shade trees.



The *Invergowrie* woolshed viewed from the north-east.



This important component of animal husbandry needed yards to manage sheep as well as a water supply source; at *Invergowrie* these facilities were close to the woolshed. The set of yards that had been constructed for general stock-handling purposes also served the dip, and the roof of the building was used to capture water in what was originally described as a dam, located at the eastern end of the shed. This water source would more correctly be described as a large in-ground tank. It was a deep hand-dug hole lined with vertical slabs of split timber, the tops of which were set a little higher than the surrounding ground level so soil could be backfilled against them to form a low wall designed to prevent anything washing into it. A large hand-operated pump was used to transfer the captured water to a nearby corrugated iron tank - where the insecticide was added - before being drained into the dip.



The dam at the eastern end of the woolshed used to supply water to the sheep dip.



The *Invergowrie* sheep-handling yards are worthy of special mention. They were unusual in as much as they were of a circular design that greatly facilitated stock movement through them, reducing stress on all involved - sheep, dogs and humans. They were almost identical to the *Yarrowyck* yards depicted below.



Oral family history suggests the woolshed was constructed using second-hand materials sourced from a building demolished at Hillgrove, a major antimony and gold mining centre about 20 miles east of Armidale dating from the second half of the 1870s. Indeed, some of the framing timber certainly gives such an impression. The building was constructed, however, not long after mining commenced in that area and several years before the discovery of gold in 1887, so it is unlikely any material was sourced from there. On the other hand, if the woolshed were altered at some stage, part of it would have been dismantled and the timber re-used, thus explaining what appears today as second-hand material.

If any materials came from Hillgrove, it is more likely they were obtained when mining was in decline in the late 1890s. Around this time a large quantity of corrugated iron - something that would have been used extensively on a mining site - had been used to build a shed for a steam engine, believed to have been installed in 1901, along with the overhead gear for eight shearers.

There is circumstantial evidence to suggest this latter assertion is credible. While Ken Moffatt did not include any mention of the speculation about the use of second-hand materials in his written history of *Invergowrie*, he spoke about it on many occasions. More importantly, Shirley Young, a great grand-daughter of James Mitchell, relates a story that places Hugh Fraser Mitchell - the second surviving son of James - at Hillgrove when gold mining was in decline, so he would have been aware of the availability of materials needed for the engine shed. Shirley recalls Coralie Wood, the eldest child of Hugh, born in 1894, telling her about living at Hillgrove when she was a child.

James Mitchell had worked on the Rocky River gold fields, so it is highly possible his son wanted, or was encouraged, to do the same when gold was being mined at Hillgrove. The story about second-hand materials is most likely, at least in part, true.

Originally, men using blade shears would have done the shearing in the *Invergowrie* woolshed. The exact number of shearers on the board is not known but the size of the area suggests it was probably eight or possibly ten. Machine shearing dictated the fixed positioning of shearers, but the use of blades meant men could place themselves anywhere on the board. Oral history suggests the configuration of the board may not have appeared as it does today. Access to the engine shed, once it had been built, was by way of a door at the eastern end of the board and some space that had previously been available for one or two shearers to use may have been sacrificed for this purpose. However, the distance between the stands once machines were introduced is less than that in many woolsheds, so it is more likely that the space needed for access to the engine shed was gained by placing the stands closer together. All this suggests the board housed eight shearers whether blades or machines were used. (See illustration on the following page).

The first mechanical shearing equipment in the world was installed and used for an entire shearing at *Dunlop Station* in western New South Wales in 1888. It had been in development for a number of years prior to this date. It would be some 13 years before such equipment made by the same manufacturer, Wolseley, was installed at *Invergowrie*. The substantial posts supporting the large horizontal beam needed to carry this equipment were sympathetically incorporated into the outer board wall. After being carefully positioned they, like the other posts that had been used to create the structural core of the building when erected some 20 years earlier, were adzed partly into square section above floor level. Doubtless, modifications were also made to the dispatch chutes at the same time. It is believed members of the Fardell family, long-term neighbours of the Mitchells, undertook the work. It is possible that the land purchase decisions, made in the mid-1890s, and referred to on page 30, were responsible for delaying the installation of mechanical shearing gear until 1901.



A photograph of the board of the woolshed viewed from the east taken about half way along its total length.

Although Ken Moffatt stated that mechanical shearing commenced at *Invergowrie* in 1901, and this date has been generally accepted by the family as correct, recent research has thrown doubt on this assertion.

The manufacture of the 6 HP single cylinder Clayton and Shuttleworth steam engine, long regarded as being the first and only machine to have been installed at *Invergowrie* was in fact completed on 22 August 1911. A 1901 start-up for mechanical shearing based on this information alone would be impossible. Allowing time for the transport of the machine to Australia and then to *Invergowrie*, installation of mechanical shearing equipment might be regarded as occurring in 1912 or even a bit later. This might be a reasonable assertion but for the fact there were two issues affecting the Mitchell family at the time that casts serious doubt on this being likely. There is also some physical evidence supporting the 1901 date.

James Mitchell died early in 1909, and the terms of his will made it clear that his properties *Invergowrie* and *Strathroy* were to be sold upon the death of his widow. This event occurred in 1915. In 1912, the possible date of the arrival of the machine, James' executors obviously would not have known how long Isabella Mitchell would live after the death of her husband. However, they were acquainted with the terms of his will and, moreover, would have known that Isabella was bed-ridden and in poor health and as a result the sale of the properties was imminent.

In these circumstances, there was a very important factor working against a possible 1912 or later date for the introduction of mechanical shearing, and that concerned the level of James' indebtedness. The outstanding mortgages on all of James' land had to be extinguished before the sale of the properties took place, and these amounted to some £6024 (pounds), a substantial sum of money. It is most unlikely his executors would have then embarked upon a project of a scale needed to install mechanical equipment.

In addition to the matters outlined above, there are two facts that lend weight to the suggestion mechanical shearing equipment had been installed at *Invergowrie* before 1912.

First, an examination of the official records prepared for the valuation of James' estate and subsequent payment of death duties made in 1909, reveal amongst other things that a '7 HP engine' was included in the list of his assets. Additionally the value placed upon the machine suggests it already had some age associated with it. While there is no record of the overhead gear appearing as an asset, there are no entries for any other items that might also be considered to be 'fixtures' and which would have been assessed as part of the total property value.

Second, the single most important factor supporting the 1901 starting date for mechanical shearing is the overhead gear itself. Some complete stands remain in place to this day. Experts on such machinery have stated unequivocally that it was manufactured prior to 1902, a year when some significant changes to the design and the specification of such equipment had been introduced by Wolseley. These features are absent from the *Invergowrie* examples, lending significant weight to the 1901 start-up date for mechanical shearing.

It is now unlikely that it will ever be known when the Clayton and Shuttleworth steam engine long considered as being the first and only *Invergowrie* machine, was installed. There is some circumstantial evidence to suggest the engine originally installed at *Invergowrie* found its way to *Strathroy* after the former property was sold to Martin Moffatt in 1916. The machine completed in 1911 might possibly have been purchased new or at the very least, recently second-hand by Martin. There is of course also the possibility that it was moved from *Yarrowyck* to *Invergowrie*.

It is not known for how long all stands were operational, but by the early 1950s not every one was in use. The wool boom of the time enabled the installation of a petrol-driven motor to power the board, while the number of stands was reduced to four. This reduction was a reflection of the size of the flock at the time.

For several years immediately following the Second World War, the steam engine, apart from powering the board, also drove a significant saw-milling operation, sourcing trees from the property. The strong demand for building timber in the immediate postwar period made this a very successful activity and provided a vital cash flow while decisions about livestock production could be made.

Woolsheds designed and built primarily for shearing efficiency were consequently less useful for other activities. From an economic perspective it makes sense to be able to maximise the use of the building. The most obvious way to achieve this is to extend the time the building is used for its primary purpose by shearing more, or other people's sheep. For several years the *Invergowrie* woolshed played an important role in this regard.

The depression of the 1890s adversely affected many selectors. James Mitchell, however, was in a sound financial position and purchased a total of some 2,600 acres from three such selectors at that time. These holdings were originally within the old *Nuandle* and *Boorolong* lease areas, about 20 miles north-west of *Invergowrie*. The year 1902 was the culmination of a prolonged drought and other selectors in the same area experienced foreclosure. James then purchased a further 4,000 acres from some of these unfortunate people. The property thus created became known as *Strathroy*. The individual parcels of land were not contiguous and James' son Thomas, then living at and managing *Strathroy*, embarked on an ambitious programme of purchasing land from other selectors to consolidate the holding. One consequence of the decision to give financial priority to this activity was that a woolshed was not built at *Strathroy* until 1929.

As a result, for quite a few years after the initial and subsequent land purchases at *Strathroy*, the sheep were driven up to *Invergowrie* to be shorn, a round trip of about 40 miles. When the practice stopped is not known, but it was probably when Martin Moffatt purchased *Invergowrie* in 1916. The *Strathroy* sheep had also been shorn at *Yarrowyck* and *Kingstown* before 1929.

It is possible that the woolshed served a similar purpose early in its life. An examination of Land Department maps made in the period between the mid 1860s, the date selection was sanctioned in the Colony of New South Wales, and the early 1890s reveals that quite a few people settled on land near that selected by James Mitchell. The establishment of a Post Office at *Invergowrie* in the early 1870s is further evidence of closer settlement in the immediate area.

Wool production was a profitable activity at the time; many of these selectors probably raised sheep but were unlikely to have had woolsheds. Because ill feeling generally existed between selectors and their neighbours who originally held the large runs, the people in the immediate area were unlikely to have been permitted to shear their sheep either at *Saumarez* or *Eversleigh*. *Invergowrie* was the likely location.

As mentioned earlier, the *Invergowrie* woolshed was a comparatively large building for the size of the property it served at the time it was built so perhaps James Mitchell had the idea of allowing others to use it in mind when it was erected.

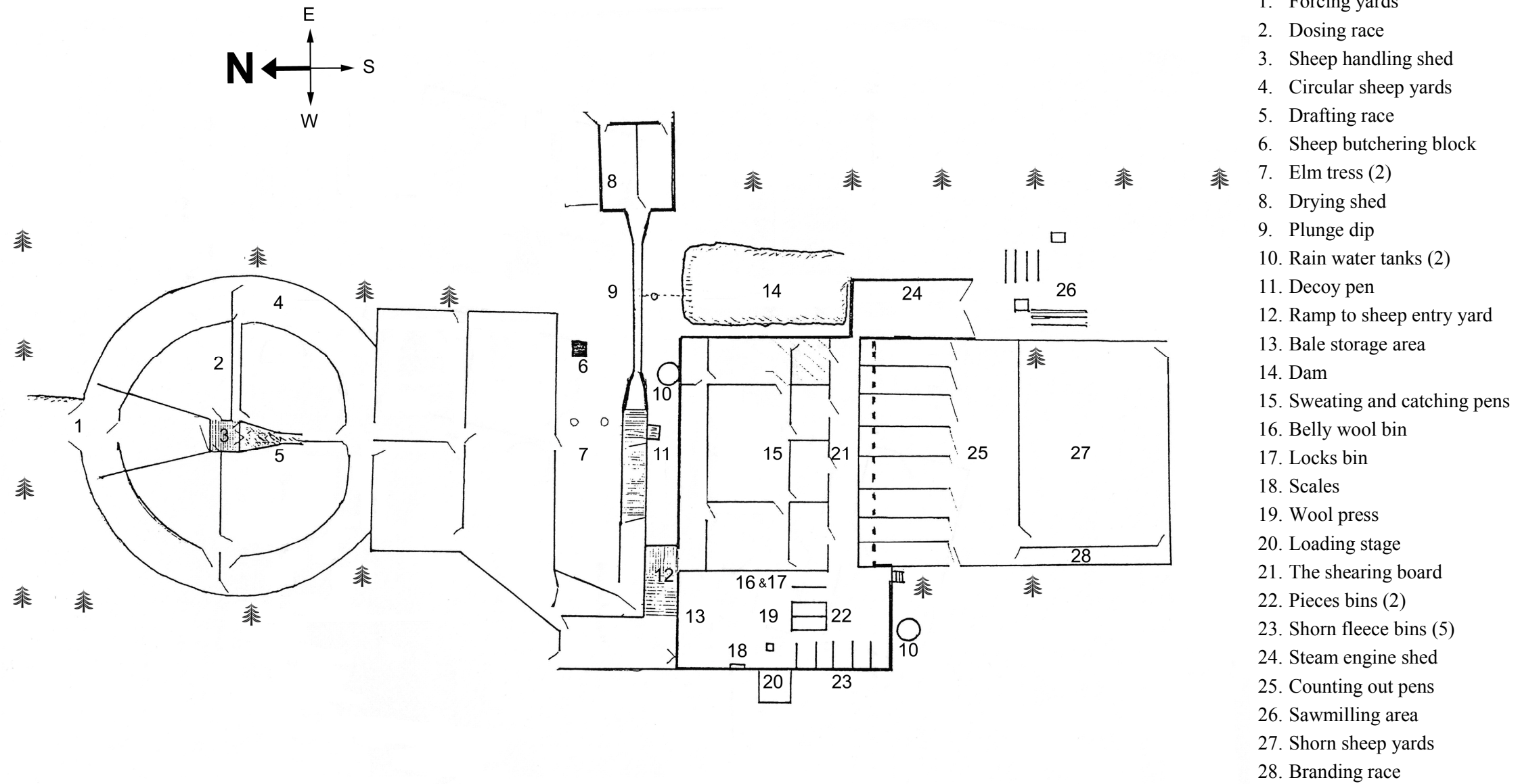
As will be explained in more detail in the following section, when the process of selection was introduced, squatters who had previously leased their land now had to purchase it. The economic prosperity enjoyed in the 1880s enabled them to consolidate their holdings, buying out the smaller settlers who had selected land on the fringes of those leases. The depression of the 1890s hastened the process, making many smaller holdings uneconomic. The owners of both *Saumarez* and *Eversleigh* were actively involved in this process as was James Mitchell. His land acquisitions resulted in *Invergowrie* becoming the major holding between the other two properties. Any role that the woolshed might have played as a community facility would have then declined.

The building was used, of course, for other sheep-related activities. Merinos need to be crutched between shearings; this involves the removal of wool from around the animal's breech - all sheep - and pizzle - in the case of rams and wethers - to help prevent fly strike, and also from around the face to prevent wool-blindness. Sheep may need to be housed during bad weather, and the woolshed was a convenient place to handle lambs during 'marking', a process of removing the tails of all animals and castrating the males.

The *Invergowrie* woolshed, like many others, was also used for less-expected purposes. James and Isabella Mitchell had twelve children, and by all accounts they were a close-knit group. As these people grew up, married, had their own children, and made regular visits home, the bed space in the homestead and bachelors' quarters was stretched to the limit. The logical place to house them was in the woolshed. The shearers' huts were not built until 1908.

In the 1950s, woolshed dances were very popular, and the *Invergowrie* shed was the scene of several enjoyable occasions of this nature. It also provided a great playground for several generations of children - those playing there in the 1960s having to overcome their fears of a long-term resident possum which was known to bite.

SKETCH PLAN OF THE WOOLSHED AND YARDS



1. Forcing yards
2. Dosing race
3. Sheep handling shed
4. Circular sheep yards
5. Drafting race
6. Sheep butchering block
7. Elm tress (2)
8. Drying shed
9. Plunge dip
10. Rain water tanks (2)
11. Decoy pen
12. Ramp to sheep entry yard
13. Bale storage area
14. Dam
15. Sweating and catching pens
16. Belly wool bin
17. Locks bin
18. Scales
19. Wool press
20. Loading stage
21. The shearing board
22. Pieces bins (2)
23. Shorn fleece bins (5)
24. Steam engine shed
25. Counting out pens
26. Sawmilling area
27. Shorn sheep yards
28. Branding race

DATING THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE WOOLSHED

It is not possible to state that the woolshed was built in a particular year. Using records of conditionally purchased land, its construction can be placed within the three-year period between 1879 and 1882. To understand how this estimate was made requires some acquaintance with the way the Colonial Government of New South Wales allocated Crown land.

During the 1840s, squatters ignored the Government's wish that settlement occur only within the area known as the 'nineteen counties' - also called the 'limits of settlement'. They moved their flocks of sheep and cattle into the vast areas of country beyond these earlier defined areas. The Government was keen to exert its authority over the alienation of Crown land, as well as wanting to implement what it saw as a desirable social objective, namely closer settlement of the land by resident owners and occupiers. The squatters, who more often than not were absentee occupiers and highly influential people, understandably sought the most favourable conditions for themselves, including a greater degree of security of tenure. Before securing land tenure the squatters had paid fees for the depasturing of their stock on a per head basis. As a result of the squatters' campaign for certainty of tenure, Governor Gipps issued an Order in Council in 1847, granting them fourteen-year leases over the land they had occupied. After that time, people with modest capital and a desire to settle and farm were able to select land within a squatter's leased area. The passage of the Robertson Land Act of 1861 through the Colonial Legislature made this possible. A number of amendments were made to this Act over the ensuing thirty years or so, and while some conditions changed, the essential principle of allowing a settler to select land before it was surveyed remained the key element of the legislation.

In New England, and some other parts of the Colony, the effective date that selection was permitted was from the beginning of 1866. The fourteen-year leases were deemed to have commenced in January 1852. Some parts of the squatter's lease could not be selected; the principal ones being those places the squatter had undertaken some major improvements, such as his homestead and associated outbuildings. Strategically, it was in the selectors' interests to choose land away from such areas because they generally faced less opposition from the squatter who now had to purchase the land he had previously leased. He was more likely to concentrate on consolidating his holdings around the improvements he had already made before worrying about purchasing land at the fringes of his property.

After selection, the chosen land had to be surveyed and, if not acquired outright, could be purchased by the payment of instalments. The selector was obliged, if paying by instalments, to demonstrate his bona fides by compliance with certain requirements. In general, it was expected he would undertake improvements that in monetary terms bore some relationship to the area actually selected. Any one or a combination of several activities

would meet these requirements: the land could be cleared, crops grown, livestock raised, and capital improvements, such as fencing and buildings, undertaken. It was also necessary for him to reside on his land. Most importantly, however, from the point of view of dating the construction of the *Invergowrie* woolshed, the selector was required to report the improvements he had made from time to time. This largely describes the process known as 'conditional purchase'.

Mention has already been made of when and where James Mitchell selected and conditionally purchased his first 100 acres in the area. The land was on the southern edge of the *Eversleigh* lease, which had been created by the division of the *Saumarez* lease in 1863, and was well away from that homestead. Over the next 40 years or so, James continued to purchase and lease land in the area. At the time of his death in 1909, the area of *Invergowrie* was nearly 7,000 acres - some freehold, some conditionally purchased and some leased. When winding up the estate prior to James' wife's death in 1915, his executors, Hugh Fraser, John Lowe and Thomas Swales Mitchell, three of his sons, created freehold title to most of the area of the property. While some portions of land had been paid for outright and others already had had debts extinguished, they paid out any outstanding loans on the land that had been conditionally purchased and bought most of that which had been leased.

Some of the land comprising *Invergowrie*, near Mount Butler, had been purchased by James Mitchell from former *Saumarez* shepherds who had selected in the area after being displaced from their jobs by the introduction of fencing. These people sold out mainly because the blocks of land they had selected were too small to be viable. A couple of very old fruit trees and the vestiges of a garden are the remaining evidence of their occupation.

The woolshed was built on a conditionally purchased portion of land adjacent to and west of that portion where the present homestead had been built in 1875. The 300 acres selected in May 1879 became Conditional Purchase No. 79-50. When surveyed it became known as Portion 140, Parish of Elton, County of Sandon. At the time, the land on which the homestead was built was the only portion of *Invergowrie* that had been purchased outright (in 1873 or 1874), as opposed to being selected or leased.

In May 1882, when reporting the improvements he had made upon this selection, Conditional Purchase 79-50, James Mitchell recorded having spent £640 (pounds) on the woolshed, the adjoining yards, the dip and the dam dug to provide its water supply. This places the construction between 1879 and 1882.

1st Law & App. 80. 41880 ✓ 21/1879

DEPARTMENTAL

14922
23 MAY 1882
C.P. No. 9. 50

D. (Alienation Act) 1881

GEO. DIV. No. II, JUN 34

REV. DIV. No. II, JAN 85

{ \$ 2201 }
{ 1640 }

21-6-82

Declaration of Conditional Purchaser under the 18th Section of the Crown Lands Alienation Act of 1861.

I, James L Mitchell of Armadale

do solemnly and sincerely declare, that I am the lawful owner, by Conditional Purchase, under the 1st section of the Crown Lands Alienation Act of 1861, of the land hereunder described, and that improvements consisting of Dam Bank Building and to the value of £640 have been made on such land; § and I declare further, that the said land has been the *bona fide* residence, continuously, of ¶ myself from the period of selection and first occupation to the present date (and that no alienation of the land has been made by any of the abovenamed holders, until after the residence thereon of such holder for a period of one whole year.) || And I make this solemn declaration, conscientiously believing the same to be true, and by virtue of the provisions of an Act made and passed in the ninth year of the reign of Her present Majesty, intituled "An Act for the more effectual abolition of oaths and affirmations taken and made in various departments of the Government of New South Wales and to substitute declarations in lieu thereof and for the suppression of voluntary and extra-judicial oaths and affidavits."

Signature of Declarant James L Mitchell

Taken and declared, at Armadale this 11th day of May 1882, before me,—

J. Bray
J.P. (or Commissioner for Affidavits).

County of Saunder Parish of Armadale

DESCRIPTION.
300 acres, at
being Conditional Purchase No. 9. 50 of 1879 in the District of Armadale made on the 6th day 1879

* State Christian and Surname in full.
† State nature of improvements.
‡ State value.
§ The words referring to residence may be omitted from Declarations upon Additional Conditional Purchases.
¶ Insert myself, or state names in full of each holder, if any, besides the original purchaser and present occupant.
|| The words in parenthesis to be omitted if there has been no transfer.

65-20589

CONDITIONAL PURCHASE COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

Declaration of Conditional Purchaser under the 18th Section of the Crown Lands Alienation Act of 1861.

I, James L Mitchell of Armadale

do solemnly and sincerely declare, that I am the lawful owner, by Conditional Purchase, under the 1st section of the Crown Lands Alienation Act of 1861, of the land hereunder described, and that improvements consisting of Dam Bank Building and to the value of £640 have been made on such land; § and I declare further, that the said land has been the *bona fide* residence, continuously, of ¶ myself

..... Signature of Declarant James L Mitchell

Taken and declared, at Armadale this 11th day of May 1882, before me,—

WOOL PRODUCTION AT INVERGOWRIE

In 1885, a government survey was undertaken to assess the effectiveness of the initial 1861 Land Act and some of its subsequent amendments. The resulting report, Land Holdings in the Colony of New South Wales, was tabled in the NSW Legislative Assembly. James Mitchell was recorded as occupying some 2,300 acres of land and running 3,200 sheep, 16 cattle, seven horses, but no pigs. While the quantity of wool these Merino sheep produced is not known, its quality was probably the medium type, *Haddon Rig* blood, 64/70 count - the predominant style of wool produced in Australia at the time. James was regarded as a producer of good wool. He had had some success exhibiting fleeces at local shows and in 1877 was awarded a Bronze Medal by the Royal Agricultural Society at Sydney.

The November 1895 Armidale Chronicle article - referred to earlier - reported that James Mitchell occupied some 7,000 acres and ran about a sheep per acre. Again, the quantity of wool produced is not known, but assuming each sheep cut ten pounds of wool, a clip of 70,000 pounds would have yielded about 230 bales, assuming each bale weighed 300 pounds.

The official documents recording the value of James Mitchell's estate and used to determine the level of death duties that were payable, indicate he owned just over 12,000 sheep. This figure would have included the sheep he depastured on the property *Strathroy* which he had purchased in two stages in the mid 1890s and 1902. The information seems to indicate that *Invergowrie* had a flock of about 8,100 sheep. In the same documents the total value of the wool clip in 1908 is shown as being £2,670 (pounds). Assuming all the sheep produced the same quantity and quality of wool, a simple estimate of the value of the clip attributable to the *Invergowrie* flock would have been about £1,800 (pounds). This was a substantial amount of money, and serves to confirm the documented success James had as a woolgrower and the reputation he had acquired by creating a valuable pastoral property. A press article accompanying the advertisement for the sale of the property in 1915 specifically mentioned these two matters.

Ken Moffatt suggested that his grandfather, Martin Moffatt, was running some 5,000 Merino sheep in 1918. This number of sheep might have yielded about 160 bales of wool. The number of bales produced was a result not only of the flock size but also of the fleece weight per head. The type of wool he originally grew was probably similar to that which James Mitchell had produced. In the mid 1930s, Martin made the switch to fine wool production due to the then greater demand for this type of wool. It was described as 74/80 count. This change alone would have contributed to fewer bales being produced because fine wool fleeces weigh less than broader styles of fleece. New England, unlike many pastoral areas, enjoyed a reputation for fine wool production - and still does.

In a 1925 diary kept by John Moffatt, the second son of Martin Moffatt, a clip of 40,540 pounds was recorded. Using the same assumptions as above, this would have yielded 135 bales.

The last two estimates of the number of bales produced are based on very simple assumptions, but they do reflect two contemporary problems faced at *Invergowrie* – drought and the rabbit plague. Droughts had regularly affected the quantity and quality of wool produced, and there was one during the 1920s. Rabbits on the other hand, had become a major problem in New England at about the time of James Mitchell’s death and were for some time after. The principal effect rabbits had on *Invergowrie* was the destruction of the native pastures. This was a huge problem especially on those areas of poor soil that made up quite a large proportion of the property. Not only was much of the good native grass cover permanently eaten out, but also the grasses that grew in its place were inferior species. Given that sheep had still to be grazed, pastures struggled. The coincidence of these two scourges during the early years of Martin Moffatt’s residence at *Invergowrie* was particularly unfortunate.

No details of flock size, the amount or value of wool produced during the 1930s are known to exist. One can only speculate that the general effect of the Depression was to decrease the value of wool regardless of the amount produced.

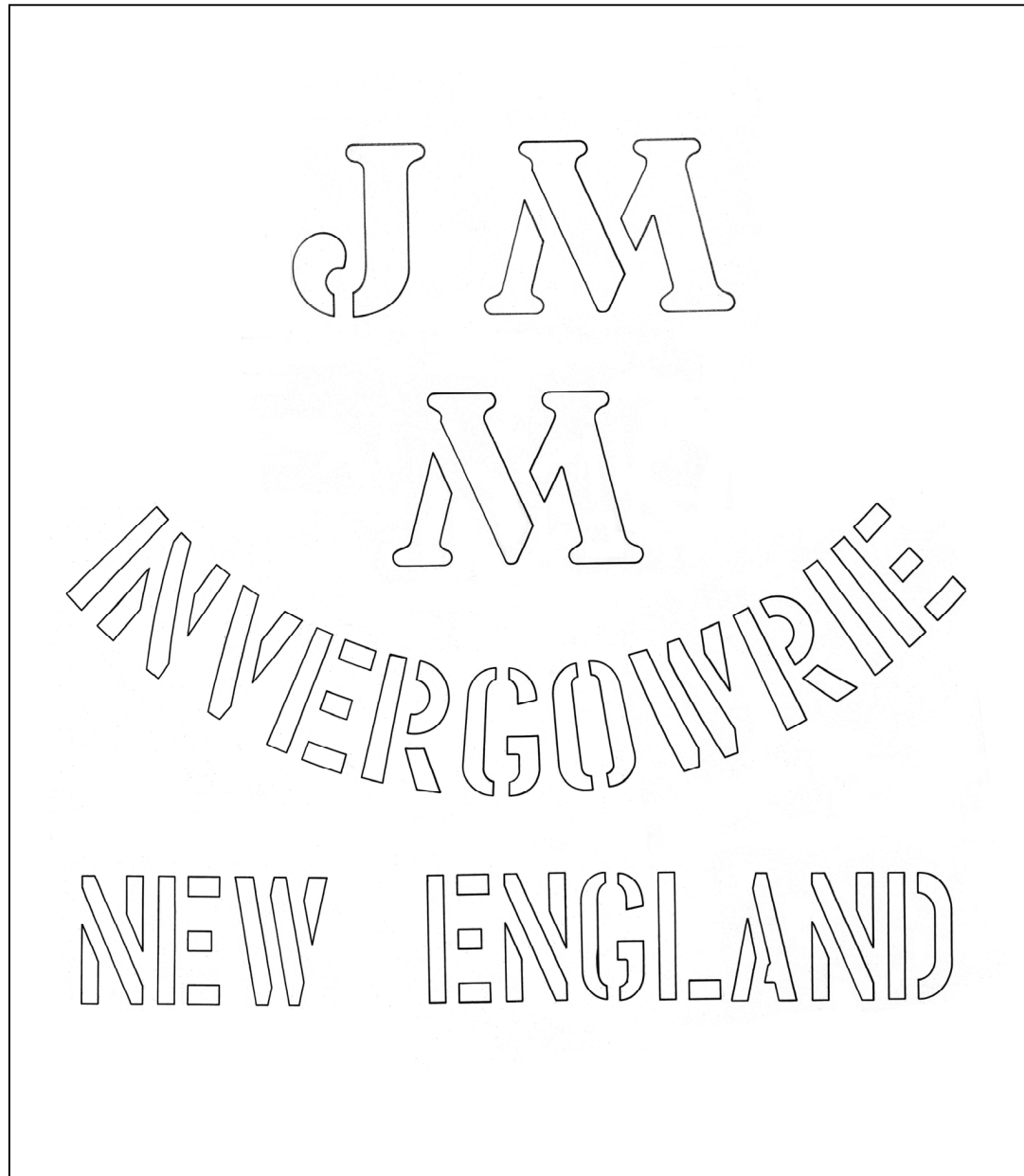
After the death of Martin Moffatt in 1941, Norman and John Moffatt, his two sons, held the land that comprised *Invergowrie*, as tenants-in-common.

Invergowrie was leased between 1942 and 1947. Scant details of the arrangements are known. The lessee lived on the property in the house John Moffatt built when he married in 1935. There is circumstantial evidence to suggest that while the lessee received the proceeds from the sale of the wool, he did not sell that wool under his own name, but that of Martin Moffatt. During that time, the number of bales produced dropped considerably. About 58 bales were produced in 1943, 46 bales in 1944, and 44 bales in 1945. In 1949, although beyond the period of the lease, only 30 bales were produced. This last figure reflects the state of the flock in that year.

In 1950, the property was divided between the two brothers and each ran their own part separately, although they both used the woolshed. Almost immediately, John Moffatt sold just over half his land. The number of bales he produced on the balance between 1952 and 1961 ranged from 28 in 1953 to 22 in 1955, averaging about 25. His 1953 clip, sold in early 1954, grossed £3,233 (pounds). A description from the wool firm’s classing report states that the wool was of “Good to medium length, good colour, 74/64’s quality, light dust, free and sound”. Like his grandfather, James Mitchell, some eighty years before him, John was also winning prices at the local show for his fleeces at this time. Norman Moffatt produced 31 bales under his own stencilled bale brand in 1950. In 1952 and ’53, prices were good and a clip of the size recorded yielded a reasonable income.

Norman Moffatt died in 1956. Between that year and 1962 the clip shorn by Gwen, Ken and Graham Moffatt, Norman’s wife and two eldest sons, averaged about 11,000 pounds, or about 36 bales, from a flock of about 1,600 sheep. Between 1962 and 1968, the clip rose to over 24,000 pounds, about 80 bales, shorn from an average of about 3,200 sheep. A Development Bank loan granted in 1961 allowed for this expansion, and included some fat lamb and cattle production.

THE WOOL BALE STENCILS



Generally, wool has been marketed in a manner that allows the owner and the property from which it originated to be clearly identifiable. This was done because buyers came to trust the quality of the wool from particular properties and graziers.

In this regard *Invergowrie* was no exception. As outlined earlier, James Mitchell was regarded as a producer of good quality wool and so was Martin Moffatt. Both their wool clips had been eagerly purchased.

At what date James Mitchell started to identify his wool by use of the stencilled branding of individual bales is not known. As noted when discussing the dating of the construction of the woolshed, conditional purchase arrangements required the landholder to report improvements he had made on his land from time to time. One such report for an 1872 conditional purchase records that James, in addition to other improvements he had made on this particular area of land, purchased a wool press at about this time. While wool presses had been in use from the early days of the wool industry, it was not until the 1870s that they became standardised, allowing for the creation of the type of bale that is still familiar today, (30 inches square by 58 inches tall). It seems reasonable to assume that the use of a stencil brand would have coincided with the production of standard-sized bales of wool. The wool press that remains installed in the woolshed was of a standard type and is probably the one referred to above.

The name of the property was included in the stencil brand. Because the name *Invergowrie* seems to have come into existence in about 1874, this date was the earliest the brand could have appeared. His ownership of a wool press and the availability of a property name suggest James Mitchell

may have first used the stencil brand in the woolshed at the site of his original house in the mid 1870s. Ken Moffatt actually stated that the stencil brand was first used in 1875. The brand is illustrated below.

JL
M
INVERGOWRIE
NEW ENGLAND

It is reasonable to suggest that Martin Moffatt was well aware of his father-in-law's reputation as a good woolgrower, because the brand he used to identify his wool was remarkably similar.

JM
M
INVERGOWRIE
NEW ENGLAND

Following the 1950 division of the property, John Moffatt retained the use of this brand, while Norman Moffatt changed his brand to that below.

GHM
INVERGOWRIE
NEW ENGLAND

This brand was again similar to earlier brands for good reasons. It was respectful of the acknowledgement by wool buyers of the property's history as a good wool-producing entity. It also acknowledged the financial contribution made by Norman's wife, Gwenyth Hunter Moffatt, who had received a substantial inheritance from a deceased uncle's estate, thus facilitating the postwar purchase of sheep.

The wool produced at this time by Norman and John Moffatt, while still of good quality, was perhaps not as consistent as before. Their return to a run-down property and a depleted flock of sheep meant they needed to address a whole range of management problems.

CHANGING FORTUNES

The viability of the Australian wool industry has always been determined by a variety of factors. Prevailing conditions and circumstances peculiar to a particular property determine that property's fate. Clearly, the price of wool is the overriding factor, but droughts and the rabbit plague are important matters relevant to the circumstances facing *Invergowrie*.

The prices paid for wool have always fluctuated, but as a broad generalisation, they were very favourable to pastoralists for most of the second half of the 19th and early in the 20th Centuries. Returns after that were generally in decline, except for the period of high prices in the early 1950s. It is not intended to canvass the industry-wide issues here, but to examine the way these factors affected *Invergowrie*.

The numbers of sheep grazed in 1885 and 1909 at *Invergowrie* have been obtained from official documents and are presumably accurate. The 1895 estimate of a flock size of 7,000 sheep, while perhaps an off-the-cuff comment to a local journalist, is consistent with the fact that sheep numbers had been and were increasing. Examination of information on flock size or woolclip in subsequent years reveals that 1909 was perhaps about the zenith of flock numbers and wool production at *Invergowrie*.

From about that time, however, things clearly started to change for the worse, and the outcome some 60 years later was the subdivision of *Invergowrie* into residential allotments. John Moffatt sold the remaining portion of his property in the early 1960s and, after having two other owners in fairly quick succession, it was subdivided. Gwen Moffatt's portion was subdivided in the early 1970s.

An examination of some of the national and local events affecting those seeking a living from *Invergowrie* may provide some insight into its declining viability.

As noted above, droughts in Australia have always caused some reduction in the carrying capacity of the land and additional difficulties posed by the rabbit plague greatly added to these problems. On *Invergowrie*, both carrying capacity and wool production subsequently declined.

The Great Depression of the 1930s had a devastating effect on the value of the land and on income derived from the property. It is believed that when Martin Moffatt purchased *Invergowrie* in 1916, it was with a considerable amount of borrowed money. He sold about 1,000 acres late in

the 1930s, as well as mortgaging his house in town to help overcome the problems created by his indebtedness.

His demise in mid-1941 meant death duties were payable. This, together with the uncertainties created by the Second World War, resulted in a decision to sell the property late in 1941. Not surprisingly, it failed to sell. It was then decided to lease it out. Oral family history suggests the lessee and his offside were incompetent and when the two brothers resumed their management roles after the war, it became apparent they had returned to a very run-down property and a severely degraded flock of sheep. The records of sheep numbers and wool production for this period support these views.

In June 1941, John Moffatt, Martin Moffatt's younger son, feeling keenly about his responsibility to serve his country because of the war, enlisted in the Royal Australian Airforce's Empire Air Training Scheme. In August 1942 he sailed to England with fellow trainees to work with the RAF. After his discharge in February 1946, he returned to the property, having being away for about five years.

Although Norman Moffatt did not serve overseas, he was called up for service during 1942 and 1943, and was not available to oversee the management of *Invergowrie*.

The 1950 division of the property between Norman and John Moffatt was perhaps the decision that had the most significant outcome. Why this decision was made is not known. Some family members, who would have been young at the time, recollect that the brothers had different views about the direction farming and grazing activities should take. It is also quite likely the experiences they had during the war made each of them see things very differently and drove a desire for each to operate independently. In addition they probably had different attitudes to the level of debt the property carried. The reality was, however, that if one property of 6,000 acres could not support the families relying upon it, two 3,000-acre properties would make this task more difficult. As noted earlier, John had sold more than half of his share of the original property in order to generate some cash to help alleviate his financial difficulties, in particular no doubt to extinguish, or at least reduce his share of the debt. Given the low prices being paid for wool in the late 1950s, it became clear that the balance of his holding, some 1,200 acres, could not generate an adequate income. This division would prove to be the death knell for *Invergowrie*. Mike Moffatt, John's son, seeing these problems, left to seek work away from his father's property in about 1960.

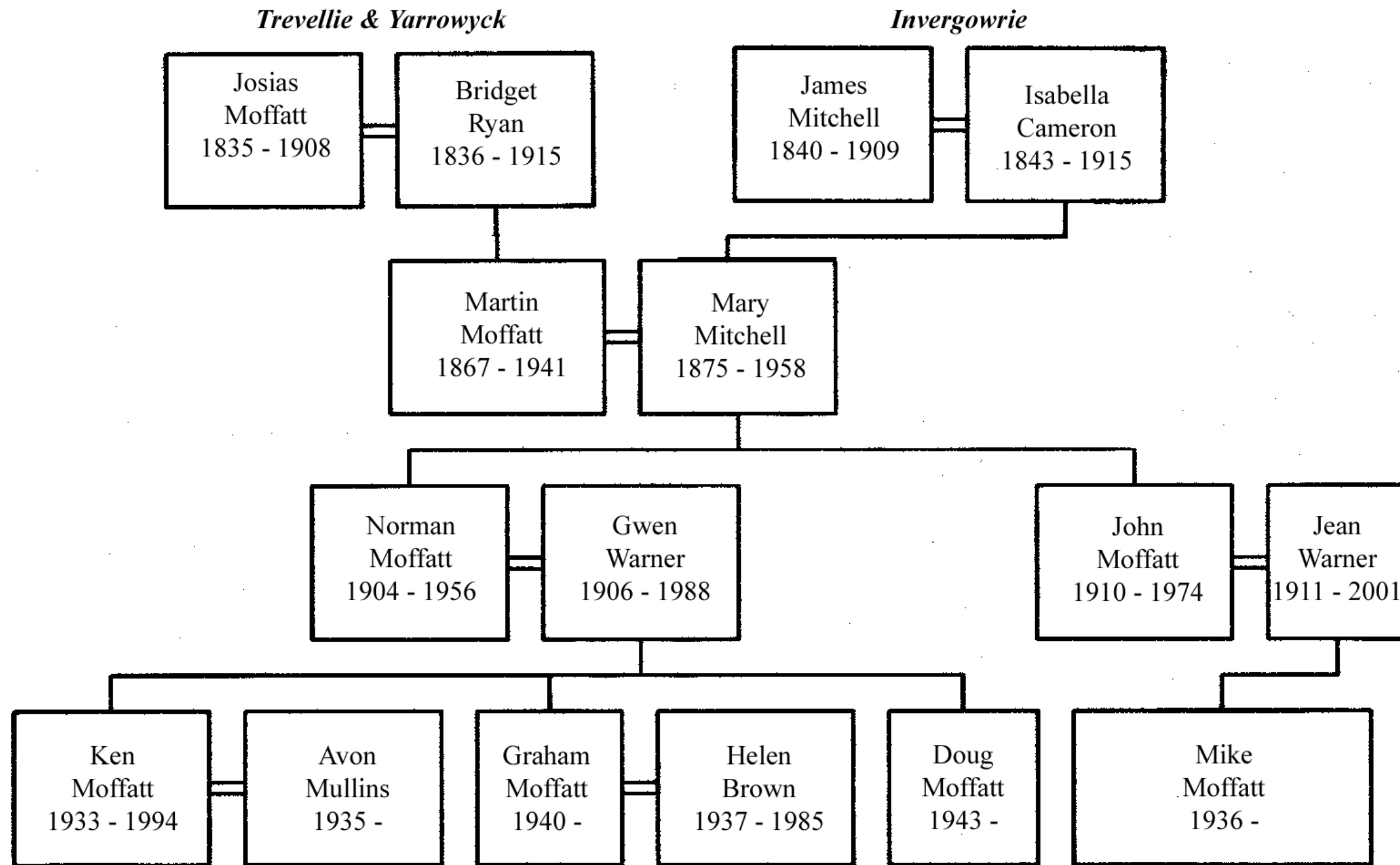
Further financial strain was imposed by the need to pay death duties when Norman died suddenly in 1956. Based on the value of the property, which had been assessed at the time of the wool boom, the duties were onerous because the revenue from the sale of wool required to finance

them had dropped dramatically by the mid 1950s. Management strategies employed by Gwen, Ken and Graham Moffatt on their part of *Invergowrie* necessarily placed a greater emphasis on dealing with short-term cash-flow issues rather than addressing longer-term flock production issues.

The drought of the mid sixties, an accident affecting Ken Moffatt at about the same time, and the realisation that the prevailing wool and stock prices had no chance of supporting those relying on them meant that once again a decision was made to sell. The property attracted no attention when offered for sale in 1973, so it was then decided to subdivide the land for residential use, with each of the four children of Norman and Gwen Moffatt being given two blocks each. The woolshed block and one adjoining it, were Ken's choices, and for several years he used his land for small-scale sheep farming.

The wool boom of the early 1950s, while of great benefit, had proved to be but a temporary panacea to the financial problems the property had faced for many years.

The last major shearing took place in the building in 1973, while the last commercial shearing and baling was undertaken by Ken Moffatt in 1994, some one hundred and ten years or so after the *Invergowrie* woolshed was built.



A diagram showing the relationship between the Mitchell and Moffatt families as it is relevant to their association with *Invergowrie*.

EPILOGUE

The expression ‘familiarity breeds contempt’ is so appropriate when anything is taken for granted for an extended period of time. It is particularly apt when consideration is given to the long period of prosperity in the wool industry.

While historical information about national wool production does exist in detail, it is at an official or government level. Comprehensive records of wool production for individual properties do exist in some instances, as do some photographs of woolsheds. However, considering the scale of the wool industry and the vast number of people who have been involved, there is surprisingly little information about the industry at an individual farm level. Because the activity of woolgrowing and its associated buildings were so familiar to so many people for so long, remarkably few records - written or photographic - were made and fewer now remain. Those that exist were seen as unimportant and languished out of sight. The buildings themselves are often in a state of decay.

Indeed, only recently did anything relating to wool production at *Invergowrie* or photographs of the woolshed come to light. The 1917 photograph of the woolshed turned up in 1998 while the photographs taken by the artist who drew the accompanying sketches were made available in about 2004. The very few records of wool production were discovered in 2009.

I have always had some appreciation of the part that sheep and wool have played in my own life. However, after researching and collating the information about wool production at *Invergowrie*, discovering the photographs of the woolshed and placing the story in the broader context of woolgrowing in New South Wales, my understanding of its role in my life and the lives of my forebears has been greatly enhanced. It is my hope that all family members, present and future, in knowing more of their past, will find their own lives enriched by the knowledge of the significant part of their heritage that is the story of the *Invergowrie* woolshed.

NOTES ON SOURCES

Primary sources of information have been used wherever possible.

In the section dating the construction of the woolshed, the original hand-written documents signed and filed by James Mitchell have been sighted and quoted.

Declaration by Conditional Purchaser and Attachments
Conditional Sales Branch
Department of Lands
File 90 4036

Information about land purchases has been obtained from the Department of Lands records held at the New South Wales Government Archives.

Wool production and/or flock size information for James Mitchell is also from primary sources. This information is also housed in the New South Wales Government Archives.

The 1885 survey of rural holdings recording James Mitchell's flock size was tabled in the NSW Legislature.

Land Holdings in the Colony 1885
Votes and Proceedings of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly Volume 3 Appendix 2.

The details of sheep numbers and the value of James Mitchell's estate in 1909 are from the New South Wales Death Duties Branch of the Stamp Duties Office.

Deceased Estate File for James L. Mitchell
Death Duties Branch
Stamp Duties Office

Information about wool production and/or flock size during the time the Moffatts operated *Invergowrie* as a wool producing property has been obtained from contemporary family records. The original documents or copies thereof are held at *Invergowrie*.

The use of the words 'acres' to describe area, 'pounds' to denote units of currency and to signify weight and 'miles', 'yards' and 'feet' to define distance or dimensions has been deliberate. The use of these terms is considered to be more appropriate for both the subject material and the time that is covered.

Information regarding the date of manufacture of the steam engine was supplied to Mr. Ron Jackson, acting on behalf of the New England Antique Machinery Club Inc., by the Museum of English Rural Life and Special Collections Service at the University of Reading in England. The museum is understood to house extensive and detailed archival records relating to the engineering firm Clayton and Shuttleworth amongst other records.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to the late Ken Moffatt, my brother, for recording some aspects of both the history of *Invergowrie* and his recollections of living here. His account has provided a particularly useful starting point for the preceding story.

I am grateful to my cousin, Mike Moffatt, and my brother, Graham Moffatt, who provided valuable information about sheep numbers and/or wool production at *Invergowrie* during part of the period the Moffatt family operated the property as a wool producing entity. Their resources, combined with some other, admittedly limited, data has enabled me to gain some understanding of the changes in wool production during that time.

My friends Jean Hegarty and Trevor Volbon and my cousin Shirley Young have provided useful comments about the text, as well as exceptional editorial advice. To each I express my sincere thanks.

I wish to thank Lee and David Moffatt for commissioning five pen and ink sketches of the woolshed after learning that the artist, Peter Coombs, had taken some photographs of the woolshed only a few years after the last major shearing and not long before the final shearing.

I thank Peter Coombs for his valuable contribution. The drawings, made in 2006, were based not only on the early 1980s photographs, but also his knowledge of the building as it appeared before Ken Moffatt made repairs to it in the late 1980s.

Peter kindly allowed copies of photographs he had taken to appear on the preceding pages. I decided that the best way to preserve the sketches and photographs was to incorporate them into a single volume together with background information.

In the late-1990s, my late aunt, Jean Moffatt, gave me the 1917 photograph of the woolshed. This is a particularly valuable contribution, not only to this story, but the history of *Invergowrie* generally. I am deeply appreciative of her gesture.

I would like to thank Maria Craven, Emily Sullivan and Steph Hunt of Big Print Central in Armidale for the work they have done in preparing the material for publication and for the patience they have displayed while doing so. Neil Hunt is also to be thanked for his work on the maps.

THE BRADFORD SPINNING COUNT SYSTEM

References are made in the text as to the type or quality of wool produced at *Invergowrie*, for example 64/70s count.

Internationally, there are several methods of describing the coarseness or fineness of wool. The one that has been adopted and used in Australia since the 19th century is known as the Bradford Spinning Count System.

The figures used are a measure of the number of 560 yard long worsted skeins (or hanks) of wool that can be produced from one pound (lb) of clean wool top. Wool top is fleece that has been scoured and combed ready for spinning into yarn. In the worsted system of manufacture, a spinning count of 70 (fine Merino) means that one pound by weight of top will spin 70 hanks of yarn, each hank being 560 yards in length. The finest wool will produce the greatest number of hanks.

The Australian Merino wool clip has traditionally fallen in the range of 64 to 80. Count 64/70 is regarded as medium quality, count 70 as fine and 74/80 superfine. Coarse wool of other breeds can have a count as low as 40, while advances in breeding have produced superfine Merino wool with a count as high as 90.

In the 1880s, the bulk of the Australian clip would have been in the 64/70 range but with time the national clip has become finer.

In some instances wool can be described as being of 74 / 64 count. Wool is usually classed in the woolshed during shearing with similar styles of fleece being put together in the same bale or a number of bales. Wool brokers also offer the classing service for their clients, and often pool fleeces from a number of growers to optimise the lot size in any one particular sale. In some cases a grower, or his wool broker, may not have sufficient wool of a particular type to make up a bale or a sale lot of bales so two styles of wool that are very similar are combined to make up that bale or lot. The number 74/64 means the bulk of classed wool in that bale or sale lot is 74 count with some of the lot being 64 count.

The Bradford Spinning Count method of classifying wool is by its nature subjective, as it depends upon visual and tactile appraisal. Today wool quality is assessed by more objective means such as core testing.

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These texts provide an excellent insight into the evolution of the use of timber in many Australian buildings, especially woolsheds.

