

From Burra to Bendigo

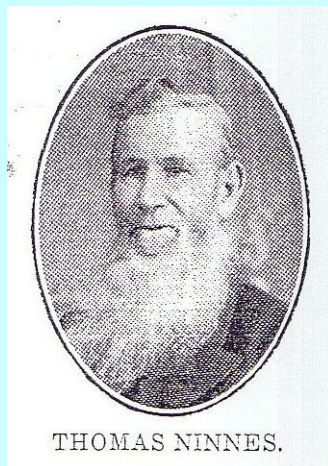
Including The Story of the Ninn's Lonely Grave of Bendigo

There were two significant discoveries of ore in the area of Burra, South Australia in 1845 by shepherd William Streat and later Thomas Pickett which quickly turned this sheep grazing area into a significant copper mining area which helped support the fledgling Colony of South Australia.

The area consisted of several townships including Kooringa, Redruth, and Lostwithiel (Cornish) Aberdeen (Scottish) Llŵchwr (Welsh) and Hampton (English). The settlement quickly grew to an established community of some 5,000 and was collectively known as "The Burra". This was at a time when Adelaide only had a population around 18,000.

The lode, though initially rich in ore lasted only some 32 years. In its lifetime the mine produced ore worth (then) 5 million pounds. On a hill above the town, a lonely stone sentry stands where once an army of Cornish miners dug deep.

Gold was discovered in Victoria in July 1851 and much of the mining labour scrambled to the lure of gold.



THOMAS NINNES.

Thomas Ninn's native of Towednack in Cornwall, his wife Maria and children arrived in Burra in April 1849 to join other family members and friends already there. They had been for a short time in the Pyrenees area of Victoria and then at Geelong.

Following the re-discovery of his Notebook in the State Library of South Australia in recent times by Neil Field and the digital photography of original by Moira Drew it was transcribed by Glenys Savage. Neil is a descendant of Thomas Ninn's sister Mary.

Tom and Libby arrived at Burra on 4 May 2006 to follow in the footsteps of his party in 1852 to the goldfield of Bendigo. The party was going from one Cornish settlement to another as we believe they had plans to settle in Long Gully the Cornish heart of Bendigo.

After time on the diggings of Victoria Thomas returned to South Australia and became a notable citizen and Justice of the Peace in the Clare District. He led a party in the 1860's that cut a track through nearly impassable scrub from Clare to Kadina. In this area a locality is named after him and the district is known as the "Hundred of Ninnes".

This story though is about his trek to the Goldfields and is typical of so many who made it in search of a better life.

Extracts from his notebook are listed in italics along with our comments on the trip. We have left the spelling as it was written all those years ago. After time on the diggings Thomas returned to South Australia.

RECORD OF THE ROUT TO THE DIGGERS (SIC)

Of the start of their trip Thomas wrote: *Feb 3 1852 We left the Burra for the Victoria diggers. Brother Joseph and myself bought 2 horses and dray. Brother Joseph wife and Wm ROACH in our dray, John THOMAS, sister Mary [THOMAS, wife of John] and family in Hasset bullock dray, self, wife and three children in John THOMAS 2nd bullock dray We locked up our furnituere up in one house and let two. We went on to Kapunda, Angastown, Colingrove Mr Angas Station fine land all about Angas' Station near Angaston We saw a woman carrying one end of the yoak a pretty bullock walking in the furrow drawing plow after them A man we suposed the husband holding the handles of the plow It was free sandy soile The bullock was fastened to the yoak but the woman had a long slender end just resting on her shoulder. She did not appear burdened We gote to the Ready [Reedy] Creek Mine and on the sandy bank of the Murray River A most peaceful road*

Of this part of the trip we took three days as, after leaving Burra we deviated from the route taken by the original party to visit Mintaro, Clare, the Clare Valley and the now disused Spring Farm Cemetery where Thomas Ninnes, his second wife Charlotte and other family members are buried. We drove down Spring Farm Road looking for any remains of the Spring Farm Wesleyan Church but could not find any. Glancing through the overgrown hedge rows we spied a headstone and thus found the Cemetery. The grave of Thomas Ninnes and Family was in good order but overgrown with vegetation. Many other graves were hard to read so we photographed them all before time and the bush covers them forever. Thomas's first wife Maria buried near Bendigo is mentioned on the headstone. From here we picked up the trail again and ended up for two nights in a lovely cabin retreat on Blue Gums Farm, which is situated on a hill overlooking a valley with Kapunda in the distance.

Sunday was spent photographing around Kapunda visiting the local Library with their wonderful Genealogy records, photographing the eight metre statue at the entrance to the town of the Cornish Miner. This statue is named in the Cornish language "Map Kernow" (Son of Cornwall).

Compilers' Note: Just three weeks after our visit to Map Kernow, vandals burnt it to the ground at 5:30am on 3rd June 2006 Plans are in hand to replace this wonderful statue.

Kapunda was the first mining town in South Australia. A visit late on a cold Sunday afternoon to the local Cemetery revealed the headstones of many Cornish people including several of our extended family members.

The weather had improved on Monday morning when we resumed our trip to the next points mentioned in the diary namely "Angaston and Colingrove". Both are beautiful areas which we saw at their best as in the past fortnight good rains had fallen and all the vineyards and deciduous trees were ablaze with autumn colours. From here the original party would have travelled toward the Murray River through the Eden Valley. At this time of the year this is picture postcard country. At the small village of Springton we came across the Herbeig Family Gum Tree. Inside the base of this tree the Herbeig Family lived from 1855 to 1860.

From here we followed the pipeline to the pumping station at Mannum on the Murray River. This is Adelaide's water supply. Mannum is a lovely town where we stopped for lunch before continuing on our journey via Reedy Creek (mentioned by Thomas) and Murray Bridge to the punt over the Murray River at Wellington. This punt is just above where the Murray runs into Lake Alexandrina at the end of its long journey across South Eastern Australia.

Of this part of the journey Thomas wrote: *Reached the Wellington on a hot thirsty day and sum took a little too much Porter at the Publick House We crossed the Murray on the Punt two drays at a time There is a strong cable rope fastened at each side of the river at the landing places, drawn tight across the river It runs over rowlers on the bulwarks of the punt The men puls at this rope The stronger you pull the faster the punt goes A fine sheet of soft water You could see that it was running towards the sea by anything on the surface of the water About one fourth of a mile wide ? should the Porters caused sum rash words between relatives I should have said that Thomas THOMAS of Skilly, [Wilhelm] BRUCE [BRUSE] from the Burra, John ROACH and others was in company*

We have come across the name of Porters in this and other diaries and can only imagine it to be the local South Australian ale of the time.

This punt runs regularly twenty four hours a day and is free and unlike the team above we just lazed around and photographed whilst a trusty diesel engine did all the work. We last travelled on this punt back in 1986 on a business trip to Adelaide. Nothing has changed in that time.

Thomas then writes: *We reached the Policemans Wells MacGraths Flat the Corong A good many blacks They gote us plenty of nice fish for flour, sugar and tea.*

Leaving the Punt we turned right and set out for the Coorong going right through Meningie. The Coorong is a wonderful area of sand hills lakes and the sea. Birdlife and Australian native fauna abound everywhere. The scrub, dunes, limestone outcrops and islands provide habitat for a multitude of species of animals and birds. Grey kangaroos, wombats, echidnas, emus, sand dragons, swap harriers and even sea eagles may be seen. The Princess Highway runs along the eastern edge of the Coorong and the Lakes providing easy access by conventional vehicles. Thomas's comments on trading for fresh fish with the local Aboriginals at the time reflect the make up of this area. It is a vast wetland ecosystem that consists of ocean beach, freshwater lakes, estuaries and saline lagoons.

It is a beach that stretches 200km from Encounter Bay in the South to Lacedpede Bay, uninterrupted except when the mouth of the mighty Murray River opens to the sea.

It becomes apparent why this was the route travelled as there are many wells strategically situated along the length of this delightful region. Like the Ninnes party we stopped at Magrath Flat a set of very old buildings which it would seem is in the process of restoration. A Bronze Plaque erected by the Brine Family in 1988 as a Bi-Centennial project is displayed as a memorial to all who passed that way. We reached Policemans Point which is possibly what Thomas called Policemans Well, then on to Salt Creek.

Compilers' Note: Re Magrath Flat the name has been corrupted to McGrath Flat.

Source: Mannings Place Names of South Australia. Geoffrey H. Manning published 1990.

Thomas next entry states: *We went through the desert a scrubby sandy poore country Salt Creek where Malady MARTIN murdered Maria MANAMAN an old servant for her money & buried her in a wombat hole Hall he was hanged We reached Maria Creek where the blacks murdered & ate the crew of a wrecked ship in the early days*

His comments definitely reflect the type of countryside around Salt Creek and this was exasperated in our case as it was coming on to rain and cold mist in the very late afternoon and we had been travelling since early morning.

His next entry: *Reached Tilleys Flats Our cat we took with from the Burra we lost here possibly kild by the wild dogs or something At the hind part of the dray we had a coope of fowls Feed and watered them in a trough outside of the bars of the coope*

Tilleys Flats was not on any map we could find but away to the left of the road was a huge swamp that ran for many miles called "Tilleys Swamp". It is our belief that from the southern end of the swamp the party turned inland now travelling South East. In our case being very tired and with daylight fast disappearing and the rain getting heavier we continued down the highway to overnight at Kingston S.E. We had a lovely meal and a good night's sleep resolving to pick up the trail again tomorrow and head for the Victorian Border.

Compliers' Note: H.C. Talbot talks of Tilley's Accommodation House which was one of the stages of the Overland Road to the Victorian Diggings....and is shown as such on early pastoral lease maps.

Source: Mannings Place Names of South Australia. Geoffrey H. Manning published 1990.

Starting out next morning we also turned inland heading for Lucindale and Narracorte and found a very confusing set of statements from Thomas's notebook which went like this:

We got on to BAKERS Jackie WITEs, Mackintosh Mount Arples I had rather a sharp attack of disentry here We had passed the Border One Publick House Very few settlers anywhere about

Let us take them in the order that they were written. The only references we could find to Bakers was Bakers Range on the map a low range of hills which we crossed before Lucindale and a Bakers Range Road just South of Lucindale on the road to Narracorte.

Compilers' Note: An 1851 Pastoral Map shows a Mr. Baker being in occupation of adjacent country.

Source: Mannings Place Names of South Australia. Geoffrey H. Manning published 1990.

Jackie Whites was a drainage creek we passed over twice half way between Kingston and Lucindale.

Compilers' Note: Jackie White Swamp in this area was named after John (Jacky) White who in 1843 took out a lease over 135 square miles of country in this area. He was trampled to death by a mob of horses that had broken out of a yard in 1860.

Source: Mannings Place Names of South Australia. Geoffrey H. Manning published 1990.

Mackingtosh had us completely baffled and no one in Lucindale could advise us. Also where would they have crossed the border into Victoria ? Baffled we drove on to Naracoorte a very picturesque town.

Naracoorte is a large (population in excess of 5,000) country town some 330 km south-east of Adelaide and 63 metres above sea level. Like so many Australian towns the correct spelling (it is derived from an Aboriginal word) has ranged from Gnanga-kurt to Nanna-coorta, Narcoot, Nancoota, Narricourt, Narcoota, Narracoorte and Naracoorte. There is a similar problem with the meaning of the word. Some sources insist it means 'place of running water' but equally reliable sources claim it means 'large waterhole' and even referred to a specific waterhole in the area. A visit to the local information centre and the purchase of a book "Naracoorte Jubilee 150" solved our problem.

What Thomas described as Mackingtosh (sic) was what is now present day Naracoorte.

In 1845 William MacIntosh, a prosperous Scot who owned most of the land around the site of the present township, decided to establish a township. He named the town Kincaig after his birthplace in Scotland and duly built a hotel and a store hoping to attract settlers to the town.

It wasn't until the early 1850s, and the discovery of gold in Victoria, that the town began to grow. The gold escorts made their way across South Australia to the coast. It became an important stopover point and, at various times, the town was awash with miners moving to and from the diggings. It is said that in one year more than 7000 Chinese (presumably many of those who had been illegally dropped at The Coorong) passed through the town on their way to the diggings. It was in 1869 that Kincaig officially became Naracoorte.

From maps in our possession it would appear that The Gold Escorts under Commissioner Tolmer, from Mount Alexander Goldfields to Adelaide did not travel through Naracoorte but passed further North through Bordertown.

In 1986 we passed the gold escort re-enactment team just south of Wellington, and then watched them arrive in King William Street, Adelaide. This re-enactment was part of South Australia's 150th celebrations.

Thomas Ninnes and his party would have crossed the border into Victoria just west of Apsley and then gone on to Edenhope with its Lake Wallace.

We also have a copy of the diary of Edward Snell who used mainly the same route with minor variations. Snell however left from Glen Osmond at the Adelaide foothills and mentions Lake Wallace. Lake Wallace was a beautiful stretch of water surrounding Edenhope but today in 2006 after ten years of drought is like a small millpond. Mount Arples mentioned would be Mount Arapiles near the township of Natimuk and is twenty six kilometers West of Horsham.

Thomas then writes: *Crossed the Wimmera at Salter WALDENs Station Reached Horsham One Publick House smithy store and 3 or 4 stone huts Now is very large I think Miss Rohan told me there is 10 Publick Houses in Horsham*

Horsham is the major service and commercial centre in the Wimmera a huge farming area. As famous author Mark Twain noted: "Horsham sits in a plain which is as level as a floor". The Wimmera River flows picturesquely through the town. It is located 299 km north-west of Melbourne and 138 m above sea-level. The population is currently around 14 000. Wheat and sheep, together with fruit and vegetables, are the main produce of the area. The town also has an industrial sector. Horsham also functions as a base for those wishing to explore Grampians National Park which is just to the South West. Edward Snell mentions viewing the Grampians away to the West as he travelled from Horsham South to Glenorchy.

The next long trek towards the goldfields evokes only one sentence from Thomas in his notebook which states:

We passed the 4 post Publick House on the south end of the Wimmera Plain Reached Daisy Hill , Messers HALL and Mr NEILs Station

This covers a huge area of Western Victoria and has many possibilities on the route travelled. Edward Snell mentions Glenorchy and the Avoca Diggings. We had one advantage which enabled us to map what we thought would have been the most likely route this being that Tom travelled all this area with it's small townships extensively as a company representative in the 1960's and his mothers family lived and farmed here. There are still family members farming there today.

On the South end of the Wimmera Plain the Pyrenees Mountains present a barrier that would be nigh on impossible for horse and drays to negotiate. To go around the western end would require many additional miles so we opted for the eastern end which is also nearer to Avoca and Daisy Hill. We travelled south from Horsham to Glenorchy then via Campbells Bridge to Navarre. From here we crossed the lowest part of the Pyrenees range to Moonambel then on to Avoca. The map will show that this is a very direct route and the hills would have been negotiable for horse drawn vehicles. This is the route we feel Thomas and his party would have travelled.

From Avoca it is a direct easterly route to Daisy Hill which is today situated on the main Avoca, Maryborough Road known today as the Pyrenees Highway. Daisy Hill was a mining settlement in the 1850's and Tom's Great Grandmother Eliza East was born there in 1859. Daisy Hill is not to be confused with Amherst.

Compilers' Note: Daisy Hill, former Goldfield 5km's North of Talbot. Adelaide Diggers opened up field in 1852.

Source: Place Names of Victoria by Les Blake.

It was at this point that Thomas and his wife Maria started to get troubles as he writes:

1852 Mar 30th

At night my wife was confine in Jane She never had a better time Child born all right in little time Sister Mary THOMAS present We had a splendid tent on our dray of close tick All our bedding in fact it was as comfortable as a bedroome The following night Maria in her sleep being covered rather close put out her armes turned back the clothes and gote cold about the arms brest and neck She awoke me about 3 o'clock She said she was cold I got her something not at once She improved but never gote right as before She had an attack of disentry We was now about 10 miles from Busembank 6 miles from the Pirenees and 25 miles from Mt Alexander We stoped a week

Busembank mentioned by Thomas can not be found anywhere but Edward Snell definitely went to Burnbank on his trip to Mount Alexander. We also went to see Burnbank which today is only a locality. Burnbank is also about ten miles from Daisy Hill so our assumption is this is the area he meant. In another part of his notebook Thomas writes: *"Jane Ninnes was born at Daisy Hill on 20 March 1852 on our way to the diggens"*

The next entry of Thomas leads to conjecture over the route taken from Daisy Hill to the Bendigo Goldfield:

13 April

We pitched our tents on Bullock Creek about 8 miles from the Long Gully We pitched to work in the Long Gully John THOMAS and John [NINNES] Wm Henry [THOMAS] full share James 2/3 of share brother Joseph and self We had two good holes in Long Gully

A little local knowledge enabled us to make a decision on whether the party went to Bendigo direct or via the Mount Alexander (Castlemaine) Goldfields. The route direct from Daisy Hill to Bullock Creek is much shorter than going around by Castlemaine. In his diary Thomas states that Jane was born on 30 March after which Maria became ill and they stopped for a week. This would have them leaving Daisy Hill (Maryborough) on about 7 April. Notebook entry above shows them arriving at Bullock Creek on 13 April. Eight miles from Long Gully would be up at the Marong section of Bullock Creek near what is now Edwards Road. They could not have made this time with a sick lady if they had gone via Castlemaine.

Now for some further information:

1. Bullock Creek rises in the hills just North of Castlemaine and flows northwards West of Bendigo thence to the Murray River. Near where they washed their dirt it has a granite sand base and even in dry years you can get water by digging deep into the sand. Native Blackfish used to swim in the many permanent water holes prior to the introduction of English Perch (Redfin).
2. The summer of 1851-52 was a drought year at Bendigo hence carrying the dirt back eight miles to Bullock Creek to wash.
3. Long Gully was to become the Cornish area of Bendigo and this is where Thomas was heading as mentioned in his diary below.
4. Bendigo became Sandhurst in the mid 1850's and remained so until July 1890 when it again reverted to Bendigo.
5. Maiden Gully is just one hill short of Long Gully.