History of “Briarcliffe”

“Briarcliffe” adjacent to the headquarters property, is the official residence of the Air Officer Commanding , Operational Command and was purchased by the Royal Australian Air Force in 1953 from the Millingon family.

“Briarcliffe” was built in 1923 by J. C. Dunn of Glenbrook for G. H. D. Morris and named after the Morris residence in England. It is built from sandstone quarried on the property and one can see the pitting on the stone face on each block from the claws of the band-winch used to place the blocks in position.

Many years ago the owner of “Briarcliffe” A. H. Poolman personally terraced seven acres of garden. Evidence of the terracing can still be seen in the present colourful gardens.

In the scrub to the left of ”Briarcliffe” fence are traces of the stone work which formed Cox’s Road. Cox cut the first formed trail over the Blue Mountains in 1814 a year after the historical crossing by Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson.

 Lapstone Inn

The Lapstone Inn was built in 1928 and took its name from Lapstone Hill. Mrs Elizabeth Hawkins wrote in 1822 “ We then began our assent up the first Lapstone Hill, so called from all the stones being like cobblers lapstone. The horses got on very well but the bullocks could not, so we were obliged to unload, have a cart from Emu and send back some of the luggage. Even then the horses were obliged when they reached the top, to return and assist them. We only performed the distance of one mile and a half that day”.

The Inn stood on the site of “Logie” which had been built for Mr. John Lucas MLA who in 1879 was Minister for Mines in Sir John Robertson’s Ministry.

‘Logie”stood beside the Port Jackson fig tree which still grows in the present gardens. Experts have estimated the fig was a seedling around the 1790’s. Well below this still stands the old railway station serving” Logie” at that time, called ‘Lucasville” it formed part of the Lapstone Zig Zag.

 Charles Smith.

John Lucas sold the property to shipping magnate Charles Smith in the 1880’s. Smith had wide business interests. Smith built his own house “Logie” higher up the hill above Lucasville and the railway. On his death in 1897 Logie was inherited by his son Colin Smith who was reputedly a brilliant bacteriologist and experimented extensively in a laboratory he setup at Logie. Colin Smith was a kenspeckle figure and and considered eccentric in Glenbrook. Later when Logie became the Lapstone Hill Hotel his laboratory became the staff quarters.

 Herwold Kirkpatrick

In 1921 the Logie estate was purchased by Herwold Kirkpatrick and his brother-in-law G.H.D. Morris (Jack). Due to bad relations between the two Morris moved out and built “Briarcliffe” in 1923 on another part of the estate.

At that time a dwelling known as Cottage on the eastern side of a line of great conifers which ran N & W to the entrance drive of Logie. Kirkpatrick was an architect, a man of great drive and imagination and from Logie he built a fine first class hotel on the 29 acre (12 Ha) estate.

 G.H.D. Morris

G.H.D. Morris wanted to be a good artist, however, was never to realise his ambition. Morris designed ‘Briarcliffe” which he named after his home in England. It was tailored to the view and created a lot of interest in the unorthodox flat roof, originally covered by a sand textured bituminous material something like malthoid. There were many problems connected with the roof (Later a gable roof was added).

 John Dunn

“Briarcliffe”was built by John Calquhoun Dunn, of Glenbrook and his son James. J.C. Dunn was born in 1862 and a fine example of his craft can be seen is the house in which he lived.

The stone was quarried at a face on the other side of the line and south of the station Master’s residence. The blocks were carted by horse and dray and the carter was Mc Cann of Emu Plains. They were hand winched into position and the pits for the claws of the grab can be seen on each block. The great Room was originally papered in broad royal blue and gold vertical stripes which I felt were a bit overpowering. In the twenties there was a popular chocolate named “Old Gold”. They were presented in a gold and blue stripped box and the Great Room was referred to as then ‘Chocolate Box”. I cannot pin point the date of the incident from memory and could be about 1923.

After Morris “Briarcliffe” was occupied by a and allowed to revert back to .

 Albert H Poolman.

This was corrected by he next owner Albert Henry Poolman a very short man in stature but mighty in hard work. He personally constructed the paths and terraces to the gully on the south.He was prone to work in shorts only. This was not considered normal in those times and he was occasionally subject to stares, which was not acceptable. He put an end to this by causing to be erected a great fence of 7 foot corrugated iron (new) and painted green. This extended from “Mountside” to enclose all the bottom boundary, then east from the hotel entrance to a point well east of the hotel.

From A H Poolman ‘Briarcliff” passed on to Milligen family who sold it to the Commonwealth Government (1953).

There is unusual evidence of an ancient river bed used on field days conducted by Professor Edgeworth David who was one of Australia’s Geologists receiving world attention.

 D.W.S.

 “Boorara”

 October 1970