

MOSES THOMAS (1825-1878)

It is believed, my husband Neil's GGG Grandfather Moses Thomas started the township of Mernda in Victoria.

When Moses came to Australia from Scotland on 26 Jan 1842 (Australia Day!), he was just one month shy of his 17th birthday. A year later, on 20 October 1843, he married Janet Grierson. They had 7 children together. After living for a number of years in Collingwood, Moses purchased the 'Bridge Inn' and 400 acres of land in Morang (now known as Mernda). The family arrived in April 1851, a short time after the historical 'Black Thursday' bushfires which had ravaged the whole countryside of Whittlesea and Eltham. He named his farm 'Mayfield', in honor of his mother (May). The family moved into their first home, a wattle and daub structure known as the 'Bridge Inn', on the banks of the Plenty River, where he also built the biggest steam powered flour mill. He donated 2 acres of his land and built the first school in the district, Mernda SS.488. Being a God fearing man he felt the need for a church in the district so he donated a further 2 acres and it is believed he built the bluestone Mayfield Presbyterian Church in 1861, which stands to this day. The traffic to the goldfields was along the Plenty Road, so Moses relocated his family from the banks of the Plenty River and built a home "Mayfield" alongside Plenty Road, where it still stands. After the death of his wife Janet in 1861, he remarried on 28 Feb 1862 (on his 37th birthday), to Ann McLean, and they had 11 children together. Even though he had a rapidly growing family this didn't prevent him from expanding his business interests. He was running a store selling supplies to travellers going to the goldfields from the front of his house. At some point in the 1860s, Moses relocated the 'Bridge Inn' to where it presently stands on the corner of Bridge Inn and Plenty Roads, being the heart of Mernda. He gave the Inn to his eldest son Walter, as a wedding present, to give him a start in life.

In 1853 Moses gave his brother in law John Cockerell a start in life, by assisting him in purchasing the land, where he started his business as a wheelwright and blacksmith, known as the Cockerell Forge. Located opposite the Bridge Inn Hotel, two generations of the Cockerell family ran the business for 100 years.

Moses passed away aged 53 years as the result of 'heart failure', and who knows what unfinished business he had, but there is no doubting he contributed a lot to the community, not just for himself.