

A Short History of Duninald

By Cameron Archer

William Dun was born in London in 1789. It seems that his father, also William, was a merchant with the East India Company, the family originally coming from the village Bendochy in Perthshire, Scotland.

William married Maria Burdett in 1817 and their first child, Frances Seaton was born in 1818. In 1820 William wrote to Lord Bathurst announcing that he intended to immigrate with his wife and family to Australia. William must have had good connections and sound financial backing, as he was able to take with him a letter seeking a land grant in the colony of New South Wales. William had £1500; a large amount of money in those days. This was necessary for him to be able to convince the government he could develop and run the land he was allocated.

William, Maria and Frances departed from London on the 'Mariner' in mid 1821 arriving in Sydney later that year. A second child, Catherine was born enroute to Australia. It is understood that the family stayed with Governor Macquarie and his wife in Sydney for a period. The origins of this link are not known, however such links would have assisted his case for land. William's grant was approved on 31 December, just 16 days after their arrival in Sydney.

At this time the lands of the Hunter Valley were just about to open for settlement by large landholders. Dun was the first free settler to be allocated land on the Paterson River. His allocation of 1300 acres was to become 'Duninald'.

The Lower Paterson Valley had been subject to cedar cutting for at least 10 years, a convict cedar cutting camp being based on the Paterson at 'Old Banks' a few kilometres down the river from Duninald. William's grant was within the tidal section of the Paterson River, which made travel to and from the Newcastle convict settlement much easier than it had been for people further up the Valley.

William named his grant 'Duninald' presumably after the estate Dunninald which is near Montrose in Perthshire. It seems that the family had an association with this estate however at the time of William's departure to the colony it was not directly owned by the Dun family.

The early years

William quickly constructed a brick house to accommodate his expanding family. Part of this house still stands today and is known as 'Old Duninald', one of the oldest houses in the Hunter Valley, dating from 1823.

Details of his farming activities are scant but he was involved with a committee to correspond with other districts regarding the distress due to the importation of foreign grain and flour.

He was also involved in a proposal with James Webber of Tocal and another settler named Brown to put in place a moneyed rate of payment for government servants (convicts) but paid in maize or wheat based on the market prices of the time. It seems that Dun initially

focussed on growing wheat and maize on Duninald and also ran sheep, cattle and some horses.

Major Morisset requested that on Sundays William should collect the settlers, convicts and others together with convicts from the cedar cutting parties to conduct a divine service for them at a place about five miles from Duninald. William apparently did this for around two years, probably in the vicinity of Woodville.

Like all settlers William sought to increase his land grant. He was given more land because he had conducted church services in the area but due to his financial difficulties he later sought to sell it. This breached a condition on the land grant – that it was not to be sold for at least five years. This was a normal condition but William was under the understanding that his grant was exempt as he gained it for services rendered and was not told about the condition at the time. Unfortunately William lost out and the Governor ordered that he pay the amount received to the Crown plus interest for the period. William's financial difficulties were to increase further due to losses from fires. One of these was a case of arson by one of his assigned labourers. William again sought compensation from the Governor but failed.

In 1825 he was appointed coroner at Paterson on an annual salary of £40 and he held this appointment for 20 years. In 1828 he was a member of the Agricultural Society and in 1829 appointed a Justice of the Peace. He also subscribed to the British Farmers Magazine and subscribed to Busby's Treatise on the Culture of the Vine. William was a member of the Paterson River Farmers Club.

Seasons and prices did not treat William well and unfortunately he had to mortgage Duninald in the early 1840s. In 1843 William was insolvent and Duninald was mortgaged to Felix Wilson, owner of Tocal and a wealthy Sydney merchant. His insolvency was cleared within one year and he continued to operate Duninald. William's insolvency was mainly brought about because he held a £200 promisory note to Thomas Burdekin to cover a maturing debt owed by Richard Scougall, his son-in-law who was absent on the Darling Downs. Burdekin apparently pressed William for the money.

At that time William had wheat in store and a growing maize crop as well as his farm equipment consisting of six carts, three ploughs and a threshing machine as well as 13 working bullocks. It would seem that had Scougall been around at the time, the whole affair would have probably not occurred.

The 1828 Census records Duninald as having a workforce of 17 comprising of three females (a housekeeper and two servants) and 14 males which included an overseer, 11 labourers, a milkman and stock keeper. Ten of the 14 males were serving seven year sentences while four had life sentences.

A letter written by William in 1832 mentions 45 persons on the property including the families, which would mean a workforce much greater than in 1828.

The Dun family

William and Maria had 11 children. Baby Margaret Adria died at Paterson, as did Robert Seaton aged 21. Another William Frederick died in Honolulu in 1850. The remainder went to Queensland with the exception of Frances Seaton, the eldest, who had married Charles Reynolds. Most of the next generations of the Dun family lived in Queensland.

Frances Seaton Dun, William and Maria's eldest daughter, married Charles Reynolds in August 1844, just eight months after Reynolds had taken up the lease of Tocal from Felix Wilson. This was the beginning of a marriage that was to establish one of the Hunter's most successful farming and livestock breeding families.

Reynolds had immigrated to Australia around 1840 and had run livestock on the Liverpool Plains and more recently around Maitland. Fortunately he had not bought land on his arrival so he was able to build up livestock numbers in periods of low prices. Reynolds was the son of Sir Thomas Reynolds, noted livestock breeder from Devon.

In 1860 Charles Reynolds purchased Duninald for £4,000. Reynolds had been very successful at Tocal in general farming, and in breeding cattle and horses. William and Maria continued to live in the original house following the purchase by Charles Reynolds but later moved to Ipswich in Queensland. William died there in 1876 and Maria in 1878.

The Reynolds family

Duninald was by now operating as part of the famous Tocal stud, breeding cattle and racehorses. It later became a well known stud in its own right for racehorses and Devon and Hereford cattle.

Charles Reynolds and Frances Dun had five surviving children. The second eldest, Sidney, married Frances Eales in 1876 and they lived at Duninald for the rest of their lives. Frances died in 1908 and Sidney in 1925.

They had seven children, the eldest son being Vivian. He and Bertha (nee Fitzpatrick) had four children and took over the operation of Duninald through to his death in 1943. Vivian died intestate. On his death the property was divided and sold to his two sons. Sidney Meurant purchased the part known as 'Old Duninald' and Peter Alan purchased the part known as 'Duninald'.

The Duninald property was run by Peter Alan and his two sons, Peter Vivian and Bill. Dairying ceased in 2001 however it continues as a livestock raising property and horticultural production enterprise.

Sidney M Reynolds ran a small dairy at Old Duninald for many years but was also heavily involved in local agricultural and dairy politics along with journalism. Following his retirement from public life and dairying, he established 'Old Duninald Native Plant Nursery'. Sid Reynolds was one of the pioneers of propagating native plants in the State.

Houses & buildings

The first house was built on Duninald around 1823 and part of this still stands today. It is known as 'Old Duninald'. In 1876 a new house was built which is now known as Duninald Homestead.

The Old Duninald homestead lay derelict for a period until the 1930s but was revived and became the lifelong residence of Sidney M Reynolds, his wife Phyllis (nee Carrington) and their five children. The house at that stage was a much smaller building than it was in the time of William and Maria Dun. Adjacent to the house is a Norfolk Island Hibiscus tree

(*Lagunaria patersonia*) planted by Maria Dun. This tree is still growing and was used for many to propagate further plants of this unique Australian species. Many locals in the area will relate stories of getting plants from Old Duninald Nursery propagated from this special tree.

Old Duninald is surrounded by a massive planting of native trees undertaken by Sidney M Reynolds from the late 60s until recent years. These trees surround a picturesque lagoon adjacent to the original homestead.

Duninald homestead was extended in the 1890s and is pleasantly located among mature and picturesque gardens. It has a distinctive curved iron verandah roof painted red and white. Duninald homestead has been lovingly cared for by generations of the Reynolds family through good times and bad. It was the home of Peter Alan and Marjory (nee Munro) and their four children from the 1940s until 1978. Peter and Marjory then retired from the farm and built a new house on a portion of the property they named Durham Park near the Paterson Bridge. Their eldest son, Peter Vivian and Jane (nee Dawson) and their four children lived at Duninald until 1999.

It is now the home of Bill and Annie (nee Seccombe) Reynolds and their family. The Duninald property is one of few in Australia that have been virtually held in one family since European settlement. Duninald Pty Ltd continues to trade today in both livestock and horticultural production.

Burials

There have been at least four burials on Duninald. Two early largely indecipherable headstones exist from William and Maria's time, one concerning the death of their baby daughter, Margaret Adria, and the other said to relate to the death of a female house servant. Both deaths occurred within a short period of time. The other two burials are of Phyllis Reynolds and Sidney M Reynolds who were buried on Duninald following their passing in 1997 and 2000 respectively.

The Farm

Duninald is located on the inside of a large sweeping bend in the Paterson River. It is also near the confluence of Duns Creek and Paterson River. As a result it has extensive alluvial flats which have been most productive over its period of 180 years of continuous agricultural production. Prior to clearing, the flats would have been covered with luxuriant rainforest and massive cedar trees scattered through the forest. Adjacent to this are numerous billabongs and wetlands, some of which have been drained to increase the productive rural area. The higher country is of lower quality, however it has become very productive over the years of agricultural development.

William Dun's first crops included wheat, maize, grapes and tobacco. Few details are available on the actual production system and how his farm worked, however it would have been most productive given the quality of the land.

One disadvantage of having such alluvial land in this area is that floods are quite common and a large flood will completely destroy a whole year's crop. Duninald has been subjected to many devastating floods over the years, which have made it financially difficult at times for the property to operate.

Following the purchase of the property by the Reynolds family in 1860 it quickly became a leading stud farm. Charles Reynolds had specialised in Devon and Hereford cattle and thoroughbred racehorses. Duninald excelled in all these under the guidance of Charles's son Sidney and later his son Vivian Reynolds. It probably reached its zenith as a stud farm around 1900. At this time the Tocal stud was split between various branches of the Reynolds family with some further stock going to Duninald. This was a result of the death of Frances Reynolds (nee Dun) in 1900.

The 20th century saw Duninald change from a leading stud farm to a most successful and innovative dairy. The last Duninald racehorses were bred and raced in the 1930s by Sidney M Reynolds and his father Vivian. Sidney M also ran a well regarded Australian Illawarra Shorthorn dairy stud on Duninald for a period in the 1930s.

The Duninald river flats have been used since the early years of agriculture to grow lucerne. Duninald has produced a tremendous amount of hay over the years, in the early 20th century this was pressed into large bales driven by horseworks. These bales of lucerne hay were sold off the property. In the early 20th century it also produced Hunter River lucerne seed. This was a specialised activity, which required the lucerne to mature and set seed rather than being cut for hay when it was in flower. The lucerne was then threshed by a mobile threshing machine, which was hired specifically for this purpose. Tom Meehan who worked on Duninald in the 1920s recalled the annual lucerne seed harvest.

The Duninald dairy was one of the first modern herringbone bails built in the district. It was also the first dairy farm that delivered milk in bulk to a depot. This occurred when the Paterson Milk Reveal Depot was built in the early 1960s. Not long after this milk cans were phased out and bulk milk pick-up became the norm.

Sidney M Reynolds retired from dairying and public life in the 1960s and established a native plant nursery at Old Duninald. Sidney also totally revegetated the farm area around Old Duninald with native plants and it is now a mass of native trees and shrubs providing outstanding habitat for birds and native animals.

In the 1980s Duninald diversified into horticulture, producing ferns and other plants intensively in large polytube greenhouses. These plants were produced for local and Sydney markets.

The Duninald property is one of Australia's oldest continuously operating productive farms. It has been at the forefront of many agricultural initiatives and remains today as one of the most substantial properties in the Paterson area.

Links with Tocal

The links between Tocal and Duninald have always been strong. The family link commenced when Charles Reynolds married Frances Dun and later when Charles purchased Duninald and ran the properties as one during the mid 19th century. Even after Charles died the properties retained strong links although there were different families running them.

A report in the 1982 Town & Country Journal records that Frank Reynolds (Sidney's older brother) ran his colts on Tocal and sent the fillies over to Duninald. Workers from one

property would often work on the other. This especially applied to the Kidd family and occurred well into the 20th century. During the Curtis era at Tocal Peter A Reynolds would cut and bale hay for the Tocal estate. At the time of the establishment of Tocal College, Tocal's first dairy herd was milked at Duninald until the construction of the dairy was complete. Sidney M Reynolds of Old Duninald provided great guidance and enthusiasm for the planting of native plants on the Tocal campus until his death in 2000.

Once again Tocal and Duninald are working together on promoting open days at the respective homesteads as part of Heritage Week activities.

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