

16. The history of Richmond

The Richmond district, adjacent to Clarence, shared much the same history for many years. The original inhabitants were the same Moomairremener people who lived in Clarence – Richmond was the easternmost part of their area. The Richmond district abounded in game and shellfish, and the Moomairremener left behind traces of their lives in middens along the shores of Frederick Henry Bay, and stone artefacts sometimes found by later inhabitants buried in the ground.¹

The post-invasion history of Richmond was for many decades similar to that of Clarence. They were both country areas, farming and grazing centres, basically peaceful and conservative, distant from the city which was on the other side of a wide river. The main difference in the early years came about because Richmond was the centre of a more fertile district, and developed much more rapidly.

After the British settled at Risdon in 1803, surveyor James Meehan explored the area. To the east he found coal along the banks of a river, so named it the Coal River.² In the shortage of food which shortly overtook the settlement, its inhabitants hunted kangaroos, mostly around Hobart and Clarence Plains, but some went as far east as the Coal River. The chaplain, Knopwood, sent his men to hunt there, and visited the area himself. The first time, in 1805, he travelled east ‘across a very bad walking’. He saw many kangaroos and ‘emews’ but no coal, as the tide came up and covered it. On a second trip in 1808 Knopwood did find coal, and his man shot a duck and some birds, though no kangaroo – perhaps their numbers had been thinned by hunting. The coal, noted Knopwood, was ‘very good’.³

From 1808 land grants were given in the Clarence area and also Pitt Water (Sorell), and soon afterwards the Coal River district was settled – it did not take people long to realise that the land was fertile. The fact that in 1813 Governor Davey himself had a large farm there shows how prized the area rapidly became. Out of the first fifty people to be granted land in the Coal River district, thirteen – governors, officers, administrators and surgeons – received large grants comprising 82% of the land; 37 ex-convicts and non-commissioned officers received the rest. For

¹Snowden pp 16-7; Lennox p 1; Jones p 64

²Snowden p 17

³Nicholls pp 82, 160, 93; HRA 3, 4, 638

a period the Coal River was also on the route north – in 1814 the governor passed through on his way to Port Dalrymple – but soon people preferred the route through Bridgewater.⁴

Mentions of the Coal River area in the *Hobart Town Gazette* of 1816-9 show it as one of the four areas of settlement in the south, a place of scattered farms whose population earned money by selling meat and wheat to the government. But most mentions show the precariousness of life: rain damaged wheat, gardens, fruit trees and fences; a cart crossing the Coal River was washed downstream by the fast-flowing water; a boy convict ran away from a farmer; and again and again, sheep and cattle were stolen, trespassers were prohibited and bushrangers were active. No wonder several landowners employed people to work their farms and lived themselves in the safety of Hobart. In fact very few of these early settlers remained in the district in later years, so it must have been hard to prosper. In Clarence at this date a community was growing up, with hotel, shops, houses and a population of over 300; Richmond had under 100 people, almost all male convicts.⁵

Bushrangers were active, and convict servants and ex-convict settlers were often in sympathy with them. The following story illustrates how difficult it was for the authorities to control bushranging. In January 1815 some of George Gunning's servants caught a party of three bushrangers who had been stealing sheep. One of the servants, James Whitehead, was a former bushranger himself, and persuaded the others to let the bushrangers go on the condition that they did not come back. But they did return, and the next day were again captured at a stockkeeper's hut, though the stockkeeper insisted that before they left, they be allowed to eat the meal he had cooked for them, salt pork and dumplings.

By this time night had fallen. The servants took the three bushrangers to Stynes and Troy's farm, but Stynes and Troy refused to help guard them, saying they were tired after spending the day reaping. Again, one of the servants tried to persuade the others to let the bushrangers go, but his companions, determined that they should not escape, took them to Gunning's house. The bushrangers escaped on the way.⁶

The lives of Stynes and Troy themselves show that settlers too faced difficulties. Both were ex-convicts, who had been punished in New South Wales for trying to steal a heifer – Troy sentenced to a thousand lashes and Stynes to five hundred. They received land grants at the Coal River, started farming, and were described as 'respectable settlers', but ran into problems. In

⁴Lennox p 1; Nicholls p 191; Snowden p 21; Evans pp 72, 127-8, 131-2

⁵HTG 2.11.16, 15.6.16, 20.7.16, 27.7.16, 10.8.16, 10.10.17, 2.8.17; lived in Hobart HTG 7.12.16, 15.6.16 (Gunning lived in Hobart 8.6.16)

⁶R.F. Minchin 'Coal River Bushrangers', in *Coal River History* 2, pp 58-61

September 1816 ‘lawless Banditti’ – the opposite of respectable settlers – stripped their house of every article of value; three months later they lost 140 of their 300 cattle to bushrangers; a ‘black native’ they employed ran away; and in 1817, 700 of their sheep were driven off, though some were found in the possession of a settler at Clarence Plains. Then Troy entered his horse in the races at Orielton Park, but lost, missing out on an enormous prize of £200.⁷ They must have felt that nothing would go right, and in the following years they left the area.

Even the governor was the victim of bushrangers, with his farm, Carrington Park, robbed twice in 1816. In September Michael Howe’s gang arrived, heavily armed. The governor was absent, and from his overseer they took and cooked ham and eggs, and made spirits, cream and eggs into a drink. Then they ransacked the house, taking thread, ammunition, tea, sugar, wine, bread and the overseer’s dictionary. One made a hot drink of milk and grog for a sick convict, and Howe asked that his compliments be given to the governor. By Christmas there was a different overseer, but he too was robbed by a drunken gang of six men and two Aboriginal girls. They stole food, ammunition and clothes, even taking the overseer’s new trousers ‘off my legs’ as he wrote. They then forced the farm employees to drink spirits, perhaps so that they were incapable of giving chase.⁸

The Aboriginal people resented their land being stolen from them, and fought back. In 1806 at Pitt Water they attacked kangaroo hunters, and in 1814 Governor Davey noted the ‘very marked and decided hostility... evinced by the natives in the neighbourhood of the Coal River’, caused by ‘a most barbarous and inhuman mode of proceeding acted upon towards them, viz. the robbery of their children’ – for example the Aboriginal ‘lad’ employed by Stynes and Troy, who ran away but was caught and imprisoned. His work does not sound voluntary. As in Clarence, the Aborigines seemed to avoid trouble as much as they could, but whereas Clarence was more coastal and the Aborigines seemed to have abandoned it early on, the Coal River area was not only more central for them, nearer the inland, but more fertile and with better food resources, so they remained there longer. Consequently there were more clashes between them and Europeans, though most occurred after 1820.⁹

Despite these challenges, the new Coal River settlers flourished. More farms were established, and by 1820 all available land was taken. It was good for sheep and cattle – in 1820 there were seven or eight thousand sheep around the Coal River – but the main activity was growing wheat. By 1816 the district was exporting wheat to New South Wales, and with adjacent

⁷HTG 28.9.16, 14.12.16, 25.10.17, 20.12.17, 5.10.16; Minchin p 61; Evans p 104

⁸HRA 3, 2, pp 590-1, 603

⁹Lennox pp 1-2; Nicholls p 109; HTG 25.10.17

Pitt Water it became known as the ‘granary of Australia’, a major wheat-producing area. In 1819 Knopwood again visited the district, accompanying the governor for the annual muster of population. ‘I see the finest country ever seen; the plains very extensive and the finest crops ever known.’ In the tent put up for the muster, he performed the first church service in the district, attended by settlers and convicts. The next year he also attended the muster, and performed divine service in Bartholomew Reardon’s barn. The sermon was ‘upon Industry and very much liked’ – doubtless farmers appreciated their workers being preached to on this topic.¹⁰

Governor Macquarie, visiting from Sydney in 1821, was also pleased with the ‘beautiful and rich agricultural settlements’ where settlers carried on their farming concerns on a much more extensive scale than anywhere else in the island. Travellers had to cross the Coal River at a ford, so a bridge was made from local sandstone, quarried by convicts at nearby Butcher’s Hill. It was opened in January 1825, the first multiple-arched stone bridge in the island.¹¹

The bridge area was the natural site for a town: a stopping place on the main road east, in the middle of a rich agricultural district, with a good water supply from the river, near water transport to Hobart. In 1824, in the presence of ‘all the respectable inhabitants’, Governor Sorell proclaimed the town of Richmond. The name probably came from David Lord’s nearby property Richmond Park, from which land was taken for the site. Sorell himself had a farm in the area, again underlining its desirability. A site at Dulcote was also selected for a town in 1826, but this never eventuated; Dulcote remained a small farming settlement.¹²

Richmond went ahead rapidly. Naturally in a convict colony, two of its first government buildings were connected with the convict system. A gaol, designed by John Lee Archer, was erected in 1825, to house convicts being taken further east, members of chain gangs working on buildings and roads, and locals who broke the law. Over time it was extended, and included single cells, prisoners’ rooms and quarters for the gaolers, until a separate gaoler’s house was built in 1833.¹³

A brick court house was built in 1825, dwelling houses rose, and inns developed to serve travellers and the local people, with the Lennox Arms licensed in 1827.¹⁴ Settlement was still held back to a certain extent by fear of Aborigines and bushrangers. Aborigines resented having their country taken, settlers were often violent towards them, and Aborigines, a naturally peaceful

¹⁰Jones p 10; Nicholls pp 316-7, 341-2

¹¹Evans p 70; Snowden pp 69-70; *Coal River History* 1, 1999, pp 3-5; Jones pp 22-3

¹²Snowden p 32; Reid p 25; Jones pp 13, 26

¹³Lennox pp 12-13; Snowden p 172; Jones pp 35-37; Reid p 28

¹⁴Jones pp 15, 61-2; *Coal River History* 1, p 30; Snowden p 169

people, became violent in retaliation. ‘They consider every injury they can inflict upon white men as an act of duty and patriotic, and however they may dread the punishment which our laws inflict upon them, they consider the sufferers under these punishments as martyrs for their country having ideas of their natural rights which would astonish most of our European statesmen’, wrote Gilbert Robertson, the chief district constable of Richmond. There were killings on both sides, with violence escalating from 1826.¹⁵

In 1827 a group of Aborigines was held in Richmond gaol, and settler James Gordon of Forcett recommended that the governor release them, as there was no charge laid against them. They should be given provisions, advised Gordon, in case they started ‘prowling about the settlers’ houses by which they will be in danger of being shot’. This was certainly a danger, with both Europeans and Aborigines using violence. ‘I am daily receiving reports of the aggressions of the Aboriginal tribes’, wrote the Richmond police magistrate in 1828.¹⁶ In November the governor declared martial law, and appointed roving parties to search for Aborigines. Gilbert Robinson was in charge of one, and near Swanport captured five Aborigines, including a chief, Umarrah. They were lodged in Richmond gaol, from where Umarrah escaped, but he was later recaptured, and was attached to Robertson’s roving party.¹⁷

In October 1829 another Aboriginal group was held in Richmond gaol, and was visited by George Augustus Robinson, who was trying to conciliate Aboriginal people. He found four women, three grown boys and four small children and thought them a ‘fine race of people’. At the end of the year they were transferred to Hobart. More Aborigines arrived in Richmond, and in 1830 Robinson was told that an Aboriginal woman had assaulted a sentry at the gaol. She had been deprived of her son, which caused her much grief, and the soldier taunted her about it. She threw a stone at him, and he hit her on the head with his musket-butt. Robinson declared this a cowardly act against a defenceless woman, and took the group back to Hobart.¹⁸

While Robinson was persuading Aborigines to move to Flinders Island, the governor instituted the Black Line, of soldiers and settlers, which was meant to sweep all Aborigines into the Tasman Peninsula. Many men from Richmond took part, one group having to keep a signal fire alight at Brown Mountain for five days and nights. After seven weeks of searching through the bush, two Aborigines were captured near Sorell and the Line’s participants returned home.¹⁹

¹⁵Lennox p 2; Snowden p 53

¹⁶Jones p 19

¹⁷Lennox p 2; Snowden p 53; Jones p 20

¹⁸Lennox p 3; Jones p 20

¹⁹Jones p 20-1; Lennox p 2; Snowden p 54

Meanwhile Robinson's work was succeeding, and from this period there were no more Aborigines noted as living in Richmond.

Another original inhabitant which disappeared was the Tasmanian tiger. In 1823 a 'striped hyena' killed a lamb near the Coal River, but no more were reported.²⁰

There was still danger from bushrangers. John Butcher had lived in the Derwent Valley but bought Lowlands near Richmond because he felt it was safer from attack. This proved an unfortunate miscalculation. In 1825 Matthew Brady's gang raided Lowlands, terrorising the inhabitants by threatening to blow out their brains if they moved – one of the maids fainted twice – and robbing the house of every item of value they could carry. A visiting doctor was also robbed of his gold watch and chain. Two months later a convict servant was walking to his master's home on the Coal River with a knapsack of provisions, when he was surprised by three bushrangers in Brady's gang. They took him to their bivouac on Butcher's Hill, where they were resting, sitting round a smokeless charcoal fire, playing cards, dancing and singing. Brady was back a month later, and stole three horses from Gunning's farm. Gunning's servants tried to resist but were injured, one having his ears cut off.²¹

The next year bushrangers attacked the De Gillerns, settlers between Richmond and Cambridge. They robbed them of 'everything' wrote Knopwood, including all Mrs De Gillern's jewellery and rings. Later that year two bushrangers were caught near the Coal River. After this period, bushranging declined.²²

Richmond, on the other hand, prospered. In 1827 it was still considered an outstation, but soon afterwards Governor Arthur divided Van Diemen's Land into ten police districts. Richmond was the centre of one, with its four corners at Bagdad, South Arm, Tasman Peninsula and Orford. This gave Richmond added importance, and with its rich grain crops, its administrative importance, and its position on the main eastern road, it boomed. In 1831 it had its handsome court house, gaol, two commodious inns, lofty windmill, neat bridge and about thirty houses, and reminded an observer of 'a thriving English village'. Three years later it had almost doubled in size, and in 1835 it had Van Diemen's Land's third largest district population, after Hobart and Launceston.²³

Farmers were the mainstay of Richmond. By 1833 a monthly market provided for the sale of all sorts of livestock and farm produce, and trades associated with farming grew: blacksmith,

²⁰Bolt [p 5], quoting *HTG* 2.8.23

²¹Minchin pp 62-3; Reid pp 25, 28

²²Nicholls pp 472, 477

²³Jones p 27; Snowden pp 9, 78, 166-7

wheelwright, saddler, joiner, woodcutters and charcoal burners, and tanners, who processed cattle and kangaroo hides.²⁴ Wheat was the main product, and to process it, mills were built. In the 1820s the government miller in Hobart, John Walker, built a water mill by the river, with a dam to provide an adequate water flow. In 1826 W. Wilson leased the mill, and also sold tea, sugar, tobacco, soap, rum and wine, for sale or in exchange for wheat. But in 1828 floods carried away part of the dam, and in 1830 Walker sold the mill as a dwelling house. Meanwhile, James Buscombe built a windmill. Other mills were built; in 1831 the district housed six, four driven by water and two by wind. They were not all in the town, as some settlers built them on their properties. To hold wheat, in about 1832 a granary was built in Richmond, with a horse-operated hoist which swung bags high above the footpath inside the building.²⁵

Grain was sent to Hobart for sale or export, by land or sea. The land trip involved a hilly 'bush track' to Kangaroo Point then a ferry across the river, and water travel was easier. Small boats could come up the Coal River nearly to Richmond, and a jetty was built for public use. In 1830 George Wray of the Packet Inn built the *Richmond Packet*, which sailed a regular timetable between Richmond and Hobart, though before it left it had to be searched for convict absconders. Wray went bankrupt in 1834, so perhaps his business did not pay well enough. A second ship, the schooner *Mary*, also traded between Hobart and Richmond.²⁶ Another transport route was available from 1834 when the new Grass Tree Hill road, steep but part of a shorter route from Hobart, was opened. Coaching services connected Richmond with Hobart to the west, and Sorell to the east.

An industry which did not develop was coal mining, despite this being the original attraction of the Coal River. Knopwood praised the coal as did others, and a small open cut mine was worked near the town boundary for some years, but it was also reported that the cost of getting it to market made mining unprofitable, and the quality was poor. Whatever the reason, there was little mining.²⁷

The population who worked on farms and in the town needed some amenities. People started shops and a service selling water from the river, and inns were plentiful. There were up to seven at one time, such as the Bridge Inn, the Star and Garter, the Lennox Arms, the Richmond Hotel, and George Wray's Packet Inn near the wharf. As in Clarence, they often opened, closed and changed their names, and some provided a wheelbarrow to take intoxicated patrons home.

²⁴Snowden p 97; Jones p 58

²⁵Snowden p 61-2, 97; Jones pp 53-5, 62

²⁶Jones pp 9, 62; Lennox p 18

²⁷Snowden p 56; Jones p 59; Reid p 38

The Richmond Hotel had as its licensee Lawrence Cotham, brother of the Catholic priest, Father James Cotham. As time went by there were several breweries as well – the Bridge Inn had its own brewery – and some inns were the starting point for coaching services to Hobart or Sorell. There were also inns on roads around Richmond – one near Dulcot, one on top of Grass Tree Hill on the new road, and another at Malcolms Hut between Grass Tree Hill and Richmond.²⁸

The government believed in the power of church and school to combat the effects of the convict system, and provided Richmond with both. There was a small school in Richmond as early as 1821, with fourteen children, and in 1835 a sandstone school building, designed by well-known architect John Lee Archer, was completed. The first teachers were Mr and Mrs Atkinson, but Atkinson proved too fond of the bottle and was dismissed for drunkenness the next year. Better teachers followed, notably Mr and Mrs John Low, who were selected in England in 1841 and taught at the school on and off until 1867. In 1844 there were 40 boys and 22 girls enrolled.²⁹

Various private schools were opened, by men or women who ran little schools in their homes, some of them boarding schools. As in Clarence and all Tasmania they tended to come and go. Mrs FitzSimmons ran one school in Geraldine Cottage, and was said to have divided her pupils into two rooms, Heaven and Hell (Catholic and Anglican, but which was which is unknown). She also covered the legs of tables and chairs with old stockings – possibly from modesty, and possibly to stop children scratching them.³⁰

The government assisted in building churches. Anglican services were held in the court house until a local body collected money to build a church. The government doubled it, and St Luke's church, designed by Lee Archer, was built by convicts from local sandstone. It was opened in 1837, and the Rev. William Aislabie took up office. The following year, as in the Clarence Plains parish, Aislabie prepared children for confirmation, performed by the Bishop of Australia.³¹

For about eighteen months from 1824 an itinerant priest ministered to the area's Catholics. After this Catholics were without a priest, but in 1835 they raised money for a church and with the aid of a government grant, St John's church was opened in 1837, on land donated by parishioner John Cassidy. A 'highly respectable and numerous assembly' was surprised and no doubt pleased to find a most efficient choir singing (brought from Hobart), and after a 'most solemn and imposing ceremony' the congregation was treated to a sumptuous repast provided by Cassidy.

²⁸Snowden pp 206-211; Jones pp 13-16, 62

²⁹Lennox p 18; Reid p 30; Jones p 51; HRA 3, 4, p 40

³⁰Jones pp 18, 51-2

³¹Jones pp 40-42; Snowden pp 187-190; Nicholls p 679

Father James Cotham was the first priest. In 1843 the Richmond priest withdrew twenty children from the government school to start a Catholic school.³²

As in Clarence, the Congregational church was enthusiastic about encouraging worship in country areas. From 1838 the Rev. Alexander Morison was in charge of the Pitt Water district and conducted Congregational services in the Richmond court house. A church body was formed in 1844, with ten members. The following year they built a chapel in Richmond, with a burial ground. There was no Methodist church, but for some time services were held in the court house.³³

As a major country centre housing so many government employees, from the 1820s Richmond had resident doctors. Two early doctors died: one drowned trying to cross the Coal River at Campania in 1836, and in 1840 another succumbed to typhoid caught from patients he was treating. Shortly afterwards Dr Coverdale arrived, and practised for many years.³⁴

Residents joined together to provide cultural and leisure activities. The Richmond Literary Society and Library was formed in 1835, but more popular was racing. As early as 1815, Edward Lord held races at his property between Richmond and Sorell, Orielton Park, and races were held on New Year's Day from the 1820s – on New Year's Eve in 1832 and 1835 Knopwood noted many people going to Richmond for the races. By 1833 the Richmond Race Course was established, though the site changed several times. There was also a hunt club, encouraged by the Kearney family who loved hunting, and bred blood horses. The hunt met at their property, Laburnum Park, and chased kangaroo.³⁵

Altogether, Knopwood was most impressed with Richmond when he visited in 1837:

This morn I rode to Richmond for the first time since the Township was began... It is much admired by every one, all the houses built with white stone and some very good houses. A most beautiful bridge of 6 or 7 arches... the greatest ornament that can be to the Town of Richmond... The country most delightful, having gon under a very great changes since 32 years ago when I was there emew hunting... [I was] very much delighted with my excursion, the kind treatment I received beyond conception.³⁶

The farming on which this prosperity was based was carried out by manual labour. Seed was sown by hand, and to prevent birds eating it, the soil was harrowed or raked. Crops were

³²Snowden pp 192-4, 148; Jones p 42-3

³³Snowden p 201; Jones p 30

³⁴Jones p 40; Lennox pp 6-7

³⁵Reid p 35; Snowden pp 10, 225; Nicholls pp 608, 642; Jones pp 16, 62

³⁶Nicholls pp 664-5

reaped by a sickle or a scythe, hard work needing special skills. The crop was tied into sheaves, and stood up in groups of six to eight to form a stook, with the grain heads open to the sun to dry. Dry wheat was beaten with flails to thresh the grain from the stalks. Straw was picked up, and chaff removed by winnowing.³⁷ With so much manual work needed, no wonder Van Diemen's Land farmers prized the cheap and plentiful labour provided by their assigned convict servants. Convicts were also extremely useful to clear the land, laborious work with only axes to cut down trees.³⁸

Convict labour did have drawbacks, arising from convicts' lack of expertise, propensity to drunkenness and sympathy for thieves. In 1822 farmers around Richmond formed the first agricultural society in Van Diemen's Land, pledging not to exchange spirits for sheep or stock, not to transfer stock to convict servants, and to offer rewards for information about sheep stealing. Edward Lord of Orierton was the first president and Governor Sorell took an active interest, but both soon left the colony; enthusiasm waned and the society faltered.³⁹

In 1836 a group of farmers, meeting accidentally in the Lennox Arms in Richmond, decided to revive the Agricultural Society, with more scientific aims. Industry had benefited enormously from newly-invented machinery, and farmers too were looking to machines to assist their work. This new Society aimed 'to advance every branch of rural economy by eliciting useful information, perpetuating valuable observations and establishing an improved System of Agriculture, by experiments well authenticated'. It held quarterly meetings and made awards for competitions, such as the best horse, bull, ram and various crops. These competitions developed into the Richmond Agricultural Show.⁴⁰

Not all those who were given land grants prospered. George Gunning came to Van Diemen's Land as a lieutenant in the army, but was soon appointed inspector of public works, and received a land grant at the Coal River. By 1815 he was an established farmer and rose to prominence, in 1827 acting as police magistrate; he experimented with growing hops and had extensive vineyards and orchards. But in 1842, presumably due to financial problems, he had to sell his properties, and he died shortly afterwards.⁴¹ Another who ran into difficulties was Major De Gillern, who bought the property of Glen Ayr in 1830 – already the third owner. He was ambitious; in 1841 the property contained barns, hop kilns and water laid on by pipes, and he invested heavily in a still to produce spirits, which he must have thought was a sure winner in

³⁷Reid pp 31, 33

³⁸Snowden p 75

³⁹Snowden p 244; Jones p 56

⁴⁰Snowden p 244; Jones pp 56-7

such a hard-drinking colony. But he lost heavily when the government increased excise duty on locally-made spirits, and also suffered from bushrangers and a fire in 1840, so he too had to sell.⁴²

In 1808 Catherine Kearney and her sons William and Thomas arrived in Hobart with other settlers from Norfolk Island. Catherine ran a dairy in Hobart, and the sons received small land grants in the Coal River area. By hard work, and through taking over his brother's farm after his death, William built up a fine property, Laburnum Park, where in 1829 he built a two-storey stone house. It had its own chapel and belfry, the bell used to summon workers to church on Sundays and to meals at other times. William was almost the only one of the early settlers who prospered and remained in the area. Known as the 'Squire of Richmond' for his sporting activities, generosity and hospitality, he loved horseracing and established the Richmond Hunt Club. It is said that this, and his generosity, caused his finances to dwindle; Laburnum Park was sold after his death in 1870.⁴³

Another sort of settler entirely was Gilbert Robertson, born in Trinidad in 1794, the son of a British father and a West Indian mother. In 1822 he arrived in Van Diemen's Land with his wife and first child. He was given a land grant but failed, and was imprisoned for debt. He appealed to Governor Arthur and was put in charge of the government farm, but was dismissed in 1827, and granted 500 acres in Richmond. It was rare for a landowner to have Afro-American blood, and Robertson was unusual in other ways: Lady Franklin, who did not have much tolerance for outsiders, called him 'a perfect miscreant, equally devoid of principle and feeling, a half cast of the West Indies, of great corporeal size and strength and of the most brutal countenance'. Rather surprisingly after this history – but the governor did not have much choice of men and at least he was not an ex-convict – Robertson was appointed Richmond's chief district constable. He joined the opposition to Arthur, starting a newspaper to voice this. He was convicted of libel, and sentenced to two years in prison, but afterwards became the inaugural secretary of the Richmond Agricultural Society. He left Van Diemen's Land in 1844.⁴⁴

Another who fell foul of authority was Dr John Coverdale, appointed district assistant surgeon in 1840. The next year a drunken patient died as the result of a fall from a cart. Coverdale did not attend the accident, saying that he had received one message and expected another, but when this did not arrive, concluded that the case was not urgent. The governor dismissed him for neglect of duty. Great excitement prevailed, and the Rev. Aislabie persuaded

⁴¹Lennox p 6; Snowden p 60

⁴²Snowden p 51

⁴³Jones p 71; Reid pp 28, 30; Snowden p 45; Evans p 132

⁴⁴Lennox pp 35-6; *Coal River History* 1, p 19

twenty-five respectable inhabitants to sign a petition asking that Coverdale be reinstated. After a great deal of commotion he was, but was transferred to be medical officer at the gaol on a reduced salary, and in 1847 he was charged with neglect again, though the charge was dismissed.

Presumably all through this he carried on a private practice. In 1846 he became deputy-registrar of births, deaths and marriages, and in 1853 bought a house in Edward Street where he used a small stone building as a dispensary and morgue.⁴⁵

A settler who prospered was James Buscombe. An innkeeper and builder in England, he arrived in Van Diemen's Land in 1822 as a free settler. He moved to Richmond, and in 1827 built the imposing two-storey stone inn, the Lennox Arms. It was not just a drinking establishment like many other inns, but provided good accommodation, acted as the post office, and had a public room for meetings. Buscombe branched out into other enterprises. He built a mill, and ran a large shop, selling groceries, hardware, meat, clothing and haberdashery, Miss Buscombe attending to the latter two departments. The post office moved into the shop in 1832. The family lived in an imposing brick house, Prospect, which Buscombe built in the 1830s. He retired from the inn in 1839, but kept working; his business interests included not only the inn, post office, mill and shop, but nine cottages, other shops and a blacksmith's forge. He remained working as postmaster until his death in 1851.⁴⁶

The gaol provided numerous personalities, notably Ikey Solomons, on whom Dickens based the character of Fagin in *Oliver Twist*, and George Grover. A ploughman, he was transported in 1825 for housebreaking. He was assigned to a farmer, and in two years received two lots of 25 lashes, once for fighting in the barracks. By 1829 he was the javelin man and flagellator at Richmond gaol. At one stage he was charged with insulting the police magistrate, and was given another 25 lashes. He was also charged with rape. In 1832 this unattractive character visited Gilbert Robertson's servants, who were celebrating the end of the harvest with rum traditionally given out by the farmer at this time. Grover was drunk when he arrived, and intended to steal wine. Scenes of riot and insubordination ensued and Grover quarrelled with Robertson's men, some of whom 'expressed themselves very hostilely towards him'. On his way home, Grover rested on Richmond bridge and fell asleep. He was thrown over the parapet.

A constable found him at 2 o'clock in the morning, 'almost crushed to death with the fall under the bridge on the broken rocky ground'. He had enough breath to accuse four men of throwing him over, including James Coleman, an ex-convict; but then said he wanted to die in peace, and did so. At the inquest, the verdict was wilful murder by Coleman and other persons

⁴⁵Jones pp 48-9; Snowden p 99

unknown. The governor, disgusted by the scenes of riot, threatened to withdraw Robertson's convict servants, but nothing else happened. Tradition has it that Grover was a brutal man deservedly unpopular, and perhaps this influenced proceedings.⁴⁷

Grover was not the only tough character at the gaol, where conditions for the chain gang were severe. Hours of hard labour varied from 11.5 hours a day in summer to 9.5 in winter; gangs were housed in the prison where there was often overcrowding; punishments for breaking any rule was severe, generally flogging. In 1834 eight men escaped one night by raising the floorboards, digging a deep hole beside the foundations and removing large stones from them, then digging out. The governor ordered the gaol to be repaired and a closer watch kept on prisoners, but soon afterwards three more escaped. The magistrate found that the javelin man, described as very old, lame and 'worn out', had taken the prisoners from the sentry 'in a very promiscuous and irregular manner' and did not count them properly. The three men had broken down part of a fence, piled up bedding then when the sentry turned his back, ran on top of the bedding and jumped over the fence. There were more attempted escapes, and finally the whole gaol complex was redeveloped. No more escapes occurred for some years.⁴⁸

The first gaoler at Richmond was W. Speed, who with his wife had taught at the Clarence Plains school, and been dismissed. The Speeds had many problems. A son died, a daughter was severely handicapped, and Speed was imprisoned for debt. In 1826 he was appointed keeper of Richmond Gaol. In 1827 the town was threatened by fire, and Speed and his two sons prevented the gaol from catching alight. Three years later, however, he was charged with keeping some of the prisoners' rations for himself, and feeding them with doughy bread and bad vegetables. By this time Speed was trying to get his wife admitted to the Sydney Lunatic Asylum, but when he could not do this, he turned her out. Mrs Speed, whose girls' school at Clarence Plains was admired by the governor's lady for its neatness, now had no support from her husband, who claimed that she was not really his wife; he had met her at a brothel in America when she was sixteen, and he was over forty. But a prayer book was found with the date and place of marriage written in his writing, so he was proved a liar. Perhaps after this incriminating prayer book was produced, Speed behaved violently in the presence of the magistrate and doctor, boasting of his immorality and depravity, and he was sacked from the gaol, aged about seventy. What happened to him or to his wife is not known.⁴⁹

⁴⁶Lennox pp 18-19; Snowden pp 46, 85

⁴⁷MacFie pp 18-20; Lennox pp 24-5

⁴⁸Lennox pp 25-6

⁴⁹Lennox p 17

The next keeper of the gaol was charged with giving no meat to the chain gang; he resigned. The third gaoler also ran into trouble and resigned. His successor, Randal Young, served for seven years, during which he was briefly imprisoned for debt; he was dismissed after a prisoner escaped. The fifth gaoler lacked cleanliness and discipline and was dismissed, the next died, and the seventh was accused of a string of offences such as misappropriating government stores. He was dismissed; the next gaoler resigned; and his successor was dismissed after six men escaped. This meant ten keepers in the years 1826 to 1850, none really satisfactory.⁵⁰

Even less satisfactory were the javelin men and flagellators, almost always convicts. In 1829 one 'attempted improper freedoms' with a female prisoner, but was disturbed by hearing a prisoner, confined for intoxication, gnashing his teeth. Some javelin men were old or sick, others were those unattractive characters Ikey Solomons and George Grover. They inflicted thousands of lashes on convicts; in the eight years 1830 to 1837, 656 men were flogged 22,533 lashes, an average of about 34 each.⁵¹

The gaol also housed female prisoners, and in 1835 women's solitary cells and a women's room were built. Many convict women behaved well and never saw the inside of the gaol, but others did, and from 1837 to 1840, 261 women were held there. Many were only passing through on their way elsewhere, but some had been convicted at the Richmond Court, for crimes ranging from insolence, stealing brandy and assault to being absent without leave, and one was sentenced to fourteen days solitary confinement for allowing a constable to be in her bedroom. Reports about female assigned convict servants varied, from 'the very best conducted Female servant I have ever had in the colony... honest, sober and trustworthy' to 'quite useless'. In the worst cases, constables conveyed drunken convict women in wheelbarrows to the gaol or the watch house.⁵²

All through these sagas Richmond had been prospering through its wheat crops, and this continued in the 1840s. In 1841 it was still by far the major wheat producer in Tasmania, with double the production of its nearest rival, Norfolk Plains.⁵³ The next year it had a population of 517 adults, living in 86 houses. But despite this prosperity, Van Diemen's Land was still a convict colony, and there was a good deal of crime. In 1855 bushranging appeared once more with Rocky Whelan's gang, who often holed up in the wild area around Grass Tree Hill. One evening William Kearney was riding home to Laburnum Park when he was held up at gunpoint by two bushrangers, one of whom was Whelan. He grabbed Kearney by the coat and pulled him from

⁵⁰Lennox pp 17, 20-1

⁵¹Lennox pp 22-3

⁵²Lennox pp 31-35

⁵³Lennox p 2

the saddle, searched his pockets, took his silver, freed his horse and left him to walk home. But Kearney had half expected to be held up by bushrangers and had hidden his gold sovereigns in the band of his hat. Whelan was caught, found guilty and hanged.⁵⁴

The town was agog in 1859, when two murders were committed in the district. On 23 November a farmer from Black Brush was shot between Brighton and Bridgewater, while taking his produce to Hobart. Four days later, nearer Richmond, a crippled cowherd called John Dowling had his throat cut, skull broken, and some of his fingers cut off, presumably while struggling with his murderer. The police arrested John Nash, who had a history of violence, and lived a few miles out of Richmond.

In court the story unfolded. Dowling came with two men to Richmond's Bridge Inn, and paid for a glass of ale with a pound note. Nash was sitting on a couch nearby. Later a clergyman found Dowling's body, still warm, with Nash not far away, and traces of blood on his trousers and shirt. Evidence was given that a notched knife found on Nash's person and with blood on it, could have inflicted Dowling's wounds.

Nash argued that he had bought the knife from a Mr Scott, and the trousers, complete with bloodstains, from a fellow-prisoner at Port Arthur. But the evidence seemed overwhelming, and a sentence of death was imposed. Then it was found that Nash had indeed bought the knife from Scott after the murder had been committed, but the Chief Justice felt the sentence should be carried out since 'there is no moral doubt of his guilt'. Nash was executed, still protesting his innocence.⁵⁵

As in Clarence, the 1850s brought change from this tale of prosperity, crime and rough living. Transportation ended so there were no more convicts, and many ex-convicts and other men went to the gold rushes in Victoria. Wheat-growing was very labour intensive, and this loss of labour was a blow. But, like Clarence, Richmond became more respectable, with fewer convicts, and the number of inns fell. Its wheat became less important, and it lost its dominant position. In 1860 it was still a major centre, with Bridge Street, the main thoroughfare, containing no fewer than seventeen shops, three pubs, two blacksmiths, a brickyard and a woodyard. Many of these establishments catered for passing trade as Richmond was on the main road to the east, but in 1872 the new Sorell causeway meant that the main road bypassed Richmond. The causeway had a swinging section to allow vessels to pass through to Richmond, but it also caused the mouth of the Coal River to silt up, so water transport from Richmond petered out. To make

⁵⁴Minchin pp 63-4

⁵⁵Lennox pp 39-40

matters worse, saleyards were built in Sorell that year, so Richmond lost this activity. From this date, Richmond became a quiet country backwater. In 1862 the population numbered 1608, and much the same, 1680, a century later in 1957. In 1890 Bridge Street only contained nine shops, two pubs and one blacksmith, a real decline from thirty years before.⁵⁶

In 1861 Richmond became a municipality, its area stretching from Dulcot and Grass Tree Hill through Richmond town to Campania, Woodlands and Colebrook. The court house was used as the council chambers. The municipality was divided into three wards, south, central and north, and each chose four councillors. For decades Council was dominated by landowners, as in Clarence, so the two municipalities, side by side, were very similar.⁵⁷

The first warden of Richmond was Dr Coverdale, and the second was Winston Churchill Simmons, who served a record term as warden of 42 years, from 1866 to 1908. A relation of the later prime minister Churchill, Simmons was born in Hobart in 1827, the son of an army engineer, and in 1845 moved to the Churchill estate on the Colebrook Road. As well as serving as warden, he was chairman of the Court of General Sessions, president of the Library Board, chairman of the Richmond Road Trust and president of the Cricket Club. He was remembered as a fair and just man who, when some local youths knocked part of the bridge parapet into the river, made them retrieve the stone and repair the bridge themselves. Simmons was obviously something of a non-conformist, for he would never wear a tie; in a portrait in the Court House a tie has apparently been painted in.⁵⁸

Richmond Council, like Clarence, was in charge of the police until 1898, but crime was no longer rife, and the police found life dull. They regularly reported that the district was quiet, and in the 1880s the sub-inspector stationed in Richmond, C.S. Lynch, called it 'this blank old mausoleum' where life was 'dull as dishwater'. Fees and fines had declined, which Lynch put down to the moral influence of Sunday Schools and the temperance movement, as well as police efficiency. In 1886 he complained that Richmond was a model community, with little for police to do – certainly a change from the rambunctious early years.⁵⁹

One crime which did occur involved a police constable, when Mrs McQueen found her husband, Constable McQueen, in Old Nelly's shanty having sex with 'notorious' Mrs Saunders, while both were drunk. She broke her umbrella over her husband's head, and he threw his handcuffs at her. While Mrs McQueen was shouting, 'I caught him! He was doing it!! He was

⁵⁶Snowden pp 68, 57; *Coal River History* 1, pp 22-24, quoting Valuation Rolls for 1860, 1940

⁵⁷Stefan Petrow 'Policing a rural mausoleum? Richmond 1861-1898' in *Coal River History* p 8

⁵⁸Snowden p 156; Reid pp 36, 38

⁵⁹Petrow p 9

having it!!!', her two daughters and a female friend helped her take McQueen to his quarters. McQueen was suspended for misconduct, but charges were dropped after he resigned. Mrs Saunders was sentenced to six months in gaol, as a vagrant.⁶⁰ The pettiness of this crime, annoying for Mrs McQueen but not really challenging public security, was typical of the period – there were no more ex-convicts committing murders.

Perhaps as an alternative activity, sport developed. The Richmond Races continued, still held at New Year.⁶¹ The Richmond Cricket Club, claims to be one of the oldest in Tasmania. In the late nineteenth century a football club started, and played other country teams, probably including Cambridge and Sorell.⁶² There were also cultural and social groups. In the 1870s two lodges, the Good Templars and the I.O.O.F. (Oddfellows) met in the old Congregational church, until the roof was blown off in a storm in 1876. Fortunately by this stage a new church had been built, opened the previous year. The Ladies' Temperance League of St Luke's perhaps was part of the movement which influenced the town's morals for the better, as Inspector Lynch commented. In 1884 the Richmond Brass Band held its first concert. It continued for some years and built up an excellent reputation.⁶³

A flourishing business was Nichols' store. The Nichols family arrived in Hobart in 1835, free settlers, and Joseph Nichols later founded a shop in Richmond. It continued in the family until 1921. Joseph flourished, buying the mansion of Prospect. In his large shop he sold bread, groceries, clothing and many other items – it was said that the shop stocked everything from a reel of a cotton to a piano, and Nichols had a reputation for being 'very good to the people of Richmond'. The Nichols family also ran shops in Campania, Colebrook and Buckland.⁶⁴

There were some noteworthy events in these years. In 1866 the Presentation Sisters arrived from Ireland and were stationed at the Richmond Catholic school for two years, before moving to Hobart. Later, in 1899, the Sisters of St Joseph came to Richmond to teach in the school. Another story connected with churches shows that there was still some rough behaviour in the district. At about the turn of the century the Congregational clergyman, Rev D. Tinning, was travelling round his parish when he was stopped by two ruffians. On getting a closer look at him, one exclaimed, 'Gawd Bill, let him go, we've baled up the Parson!'⁶⁵

⁶⁰Petrow p 19

⁶¹Snowden p 225

⁶²Snowden pp 232, 224, 228

⁶³Snowden pp 12, 202, 219; Jones p 63

⁶⁴Snowden pp 86-7; Jones pp 60-1

⁶⁵Jones pp 45-6

There was a major fire when in 1886 the Lennox Arms, built in 1827, burnt down, and was replaced by the Commercial Hotel. Council lost one of its main functions twelve years later, when control of the police was centralised.⁶⁶ Like Clarence, the Richmond Council now had little to do, mainly keeping roads in repair and running its three public pounds. Even the roads were taken over for some years by the Richmond Road Trust, though its members were almost the same as Council's.

In 1900 the *Cyclopedia of Tasmania* described Richmond as a splendid agricultural district. The town had its hotels, churches, schools, post office and a weekly stock sale. It also had a butter factory, while Daniel Pitt was a successful fellmonger. He had bought the first rabbit skins in the district, and by 1900 was buying large amounts of rabbit, possum, wallaby, sheep and other skins, as well as wool and poultry. He had a small farm, was treasurer of the Road Trust and a member of the Richmond Racing Club – but note that this small farmer and merchant was not a member of Council, which felt itself more suited to large landowners.⁶⁷

In 1911 Richmond had a population of 1798, so had hardly grown since 1861. But it had its three churches and three ministers, two doctors, town hall (built in 1908), post office, schools and a coach service to Hobart.⁶⁸ In 1909 an American arrived in the town – Dr William Clark, who was the district's doctor for twenty-five years. He became an institution. As a resident wrote:

He was not only popular, but more important still, he was trusted and respected, unflinching in attendance on his patients at any hour of the day or night, and infinitely lenient over unpaid bills. Any family which could not afford to pay his fees was not expected to pay; it is still remembered that when a certain patient needed additional milk and could not afford to pay for it, the Doctor purchased a cow and had it delivered to the patient.⁶⁹

Dr Clark had only a few medicines – a white concoction for stomach problems, and a licorice black one for chest infections. If anyone needed the doctor, they would put a broomstick with a towel on it, or 'something at the gatepost', and if he saw it while doing his rounds, he would know that he was wanted. Dr Clark had a motor car, which helped him to reach his patients, and he took an interest in community life, for example helping a local association raise money to paint the dilapidated building and fences in Richmond.⁷⁰

⁶⁶Lennox p 16

⁶⁷Snowden p 97-8; Reid p 36

⁶⁸Reid p 33 quoting Walch's Almanac 1913

⁶⁹Snowden p 102, quoting Mary Kinloch Wishaw

⁷⁰Snowden pp 102-3

Like Clarence, Richmond sent off a large contingent of young men to fight in the First World War, of whom a number died. Among those who served were Norman Marshall, son of George Marshall of Sunnyside, who served in Gallipoli, Egypt and Palestine; and Kenneth Ogilvy, a later warden. A branch of Red Cross was formed in 1914, and worked to support the troops. Later, probably in the 1920s, a branch of the Country Women's Association was formed and flourished for many years.⁷¹

After the war, some land in Richmond was turned into farms for soldier settlers, though it was always hard for these to prosper, partly due to the men's inexperience and partly because the farms were too small. John Jones of Richmond remembered seeing them working through the night, trying to finish their tasks, never really able to prosper because their farms were not large enough.⁷²

Though tough for many soldier settlers, the 1920s were a prosperous period for country districts generally. Richmond people were shocked when the landmark of Nichols' store burnt down, but in other ways the town flourished; a new Catholic school was built in 1926, and a few years later in 1932 electricity was connected. The annual Richmond Show was a big event. The warden from 1922 to 1938 was Robert Grice, who owned Carrington for some years, but sold it in about 1930 and ran a butchering business in Richmond town. He held many other positions in the community: foundation secretary of the Agricultural and Poultry Society, secretary of the Richmond Hall Committee; coroner; special magistrate for pensions and chairman of the Court of General Sessions. He strongly advocated a water supply, electricity and recreation grounds, and was active in the Progress Association as well as many sporting bodies.⁷³

As a young reporter in the 1920s, Joe Cowburn was sent to cover meetings of Richmond Council. Councillors travelled to meetings by horse, and the use of a typewriter with carbon copies was a speciality in the office, he recalled. Councillors varied from dignified landowners to 'several lesser residents who tilled the soil on small farms and, in some cases, lacked skills in the presentation of the needs of some sections of the community'. He always supported those who 'aimed at getting something done for the benefit of the general run of people'.⁷⁴

Many clubs and societies were active. In 1921, for example, the Richmond Football Club played Colebrook for the Kerslake Trophy. 'Both teams were confident of winning, and a good game was witnessed by a fair number of spectators. The Richmond brass band was in attendance

⁷¹Snowden pp 183-4, 221, 220, 156

⁷²Snowden pp 27-8

⁷³Snowden pp 87, 120, 148, 157, 244

⁷⁴Snowden p 165

and played several selections during the afternoon....The game was open and fast from start to finish.’ The final score was Colebrook 5.9.39 to Richmond 4.8.32.⁷⁵ Norman Marshall was active in sports in Richmond, being secretary of the Football Club, secretary of the Richmond Rifle Club and founder and secretary of the Richmond branch of the Southern Tasmanian Anglers’ Association. The Cricket Club was strong, and horseracing continued, with the Richmond races remembered as ‘one of the biggest events in Tasmania’.⁷⁶

The Depression was a hard time, with very low prices for primary produce, but as in Clarence, people on the land at least survived as they largely grew their own food. By 1938 Richmond had a number of people earning a living. Apart from farmers and labourers, there were a blacksmith, a wheelwright and a garage-keeper; four shopkeepers as well as a baker and a butcher; three carters; three dressmakers of whom one ran a boarding house; two nurses; two publicans; the postmaster; the teacher; the nuns at the convent; the clergyman; and the doctor. Unusually for a country town of the time, there was an artist, John Eldershaw, who had converted the mill into a residence and lived in Richmond for many years.⁷⁷

Then came the Second World War. There had been some preparations for this, and in the mid-1930s the Brighton Light Horse was renamed the Richmond Light Horse and moved to Richmond. Many young men joined, ‘mainly because of the money’, recalled John Jones. ‘With the horse, and my pay, which was fourteen shillings a day, it was more than I was getting paid for farming!’⁷⁸

The Light Horse was disbanded during the war, and John was among the young Richmond men who enlisted. He served with the artillery, mainly in the Middle East. There were fewer soldiers from Richmond in the Second World War than the First,⁷⁹ largely because many men were forced by the Manpower authorities to stay on their farms and produce food.

As in other areas, the population at home prepared for invasion, digging trenches for air raid shelters and being informed of evacuation plans. Women joined the Red Cross, and raised money and knitted clothing for the troops. Some local properties were used for army training. To help provide food, the Women’s Land Army provided assistants on farms, and other women worked on their own family properties.⁸⁰

⁷⁵Reid p 38 quoting *Weekly Courier* 2.6.21

⁷⁶Snowden pp 227, 228

⁷⁷*Coal River History* 1, pp 68-9, quoting Wise’s Post Office Directory 1938/9 p 185; Snowden pp 7, 76

⁷⁸Snowden p 181

⁷⁹Snowden pp 181-2

⁸⁰Snowden pp 185, 135, 221

After the war, Richmond remained much the same, and newcomers commented on the dilapidated houses – little painting had been done for years – so that most buildings looked old. They were often covered in dust from the gravel roads.⁸¹ But there were some changes. In 1943 the Hobart Bridge opened, which meant travel to Hobart was faster. A few farmers started to irrigate their land. A market garden was begun and was later taken over by Jimmy Chung, remembered by many for his generosity and kindness; but this was the town's only industry. Gradually roads were sealed.⁸² At this period Bellerive and Lindisfarne were booming with house prices rising, and some people thought this would happen in Richmond. But it did not; Richmond was too far from town to become a commuter centre yet, and no industries developed. It continued to rely on agriculture, and its population remained static, so it appeared to be a backwater where nothing happened.⁸³

Richmond did have a priceless asset: because it had been such a backwater, little had changed since the colonial period, and its original houses and other buildings made it Australia's finest Georgian town. It contained the nation's oldest bridge, oldest Catholic church, oldest school building still in use, oldest post office and (possibly) oldest court house; while the gaol was still in its original state. There were many other beautiful Georgian sandstone buildings, and as an added bonus, five were said to be haunted. Standing by its beautiful river, with hills around, it was extremely attractive from a historical, antiquarian and picturesque point of view.⁸⁴

There had already been a move towards preserving Richmond's heritage. In 1943 Richmond Council returned the gaol to the state, and it was made a reserve under the control of the Scenery Preservation Board. Some tourists arrived but little was done for them, and the gaol stood in a paddock full of briars.⁸⁵ By the early 1960s, tourism generally was increasing and interest in Richmond was growing. In 1964 the Town Planning Committee of the Tasmanian Chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects held a meeting about Richmond, inviting representatives of interested bodies. It aimed to preserve the town's historical character and guide development, and set up the Richmond Preservation and Development Committee.⁸⁶

The following year the Richmond Agricultural Society presented a display entitled 'Richmond as it was, is and might be', to encourage discussion on encouraging development

⁸¹Snowden pp 17, 12

⁸²Snowden pp 74, 63, 125

⁸³Snowden pp 113, 12

⁸⁴Rose and Brooks passim; Snowden p 169; Lennox p 4

⁸⁵Snowden pp 92, 247-8; Lennox p 16

⁸⁶Snowden p 159

without endangering Richmond's historical character.⁸⁷ But all this was put aside temporarily the next year. On Black Tuesday, 7 February 1967, devastating bushfires threatened Richmond. By the valiant efforts of firefighters, lives were saved and only two houses were destroyed, one being the historic homestead of Richmond Park. The year after the fires, local farmers formed the Coal River Products Association. The first chairman was George Casimaty, who had bought the property Strath Ayr, where he developed a flourishing industry in growing mushrooms, then instant lawn.⁸⁸ In 1968 the first tourist venture started in Richmond. Alice Krongaard had lost her home and studio near Hobart in the bushfires. She found a neglected building in Richmond which had been a shop and saddlery, and established a gallery, Saddler's Court, as an outlet for Tasmanian arts and crafts.⁸⁹

In 1971 the new National Parks and Wildlife Service took over Richmond Gaol, repaired it, and employed staff to run it. By the end of the decade the gaol was one of the Tasmania's most popular tourist attractions, with over 60,000 visitors a year.⁹⁰ At the same time, many historic buildings were being restored, tourist businesses started, and as an example of the changed atmosphere, in 1972 a competition was held to find a new name for the main hotel, called the Commercial Hotel since its establishment in 1888. New owners did not think this fitted Richmond's historic village style, and it was renamed the Richmond Arms.⁹¹

Tourism and development were in the air, but these caused controversy. The Tasmanian Tourist Council financed a town plan to preserve Richmond's environment, but many residents feared that tourism would mean commercial interests taking over – 'neon signs, blatant placards, masses of plastic gimmicks' – and heated debate caused the press to call Richmond 'the town where tourism is a dirty word'.⁹² Richmond was changing for residents as well, with running water, sewerage, and new activities such as sports clubs. Sewerage too created a 'great battle' since it would be expensive, but eventually in 1971 it was pushed through Council. Land values rose.⁹³

After a great deal of discussion, in 1975 the town plan was prepared. It tried to keep as much open space as possible, and included a bypass of the main street, but after much controversy

⁸⁷Snowden pp 159-60, 154, 249

⁸⁸Snowden pp 126-9, 647, 62

⁸⁹Snowden pp 250, 251-3, 161; *Coal River History* 1, 31

⁹⁰Lennox p 16; Snowden p 247

⁹¹Snowden pp 107, 115, 212; *Coal River History* 1, 33

⁹²Snowden p 248

⁹³Snowden pp 121-3, 235

this was deleted. Controversy erupted again in 1978 when plans were made public of an 800-acre subdivision north of the town.⁹⁴

Local people were active in forming the Richmond Community Group to undertake works not being done by Council, such as revitalising the river bank, planting trees, setting up rubbish tins, seats and play equipment, organising Australia Day activities and welcoming newcomers. Shortly afterwards, the Richmond Chamber of Commerce started the Village Fair, in 1984. By now parts of Richmond were entered on the register of the National Estate.⁹⁵

There was yet more controversy in 1981 when Council suggested a new civic building. This would entail demolishing the Miller's Cottage, built in 1831, and a committee was formed to save it. It won the battle, and the cottage was restored and leased to the National Trust. Council planned to extend the Council Chambers, but the National Trust declared the concrete block extension to the 1825 court house an intrusion. Council was victorious here, and the extension was built. At the same time, the area round the bridge was upgraded, and more businesses opened. By the mid 1980s Richmond was established as a premier tourist site, with its bridge, gaol and other historic buildings, cemeteries, art galleries and attractions such as the maze and the model village, a fine restaurant at Prospect House, the Richmond Arms, tea rooms and shops.⁹⁶

In the early 1990s the government announced a round of municipal amalgamations, including Richmond. The town would merge with Clarence, and the northern wards would join the new Southern Midlands municipality. There were many objections from people who did not want the old municipality split or Richmond to lose its identity, but ratepayers had no real say, and the mergers went ahead in 1993. The last Richmond Council meeting was held in March 1993, with many former councillors and wardens present, and a wake was celebrated to mark its passing after 132 years. The Richmond Advisory Committee was established with representatives of community and sporting groups, to advice Clarence City Council on issues involving Richmond.⁹⁷

(I would like to thank Dianne Snowden for permission to use her comprehensive study 'A Thematic History of the Cultural Resources of the township of Richmond and a statement of cultural significance' as the basis for this chapter, and for reading and commenting on this chapter; any mistakes remain my responsibility.)

⁹⁴Snowden pp 162-4

⁹⁵Snowden pp 222, 240, 164

⁹⁶Snowden pp 164, 250-1; Rose and Brooks passim

⁹⁷Snowden pp 164-6, 252