

## Life at 'Willis Vale'

Society member Faye Fort (nee Partington), a descendant of the early settlers of the Greensborough district, recalls another wonderful story of growing up in Greensborough, This time, 'Willis Vale' - a long gone but not forgotten property on the banks of the Plenty River at Greensborough.



Charles and Ellen (nee Whatmough) Partington  
outside 'Willis Vale' homestead  
Greensborough (circa 1885)  
[Museum Victoria - Gary Partington 2008]

When my grandfather William James Partington died in 1947, in his sleep, beside his wife Annie May, she was left alone with 150 acres of land to look after, as well as a farm to run. 'Willis Vale', a two-story house overlooking the Plenty River, by this time the house was over 100 years old. It was built in 1840. My father, his brother and sisters were all born there. The kitchen was separated from the rest of the house, the same as the homes back in England, the reason for this was, in case of fire, which often happened, when lamps and candles were knocked over, it was easier to put out a fire, the water tanks were just outside the kitchen.

After my grandfather's death, my family had to sell our house and move in with Annie May and help run the farm. We all slept up stair in two bedrooms, there was no bathroom or plumbing, we only had a large jug and basin for washing, if we wanted hot water, we had to go down stairs and out to the boiler, which was in the kitchen, where there was always hot water. Our bath was a big tin tub. There was no covering between the house and the kitchen, if it was raining you just ran like mad, the same if you needed to go to the old dunny, which had an ivy creeper growing all over it. It was scary for us as small children aged four, five and six. My brother Garry was born in 1943, six years after me.



**'Willis Vale' homestead  
Greensborough (circa 1920's)**  
[Museum Victoria - Gary Partington 2008]

Annie May lived there until she was in her sixty's, still milking her cow, and still using the log to cross over the river, now with a walking stick, she still attended church regularly, and visited friends as she had done for years. Can you believe, in those days there were no locks on the doors or windows. She loved gathering blackberries and making jam. I can still taste it today, with scolded cream on scones, yum.

My poor mother had never lived on a farm before; we didn't have a fridge, only a Coolgardie, a frame with bagging all around it, kept wet, and on top a container filled with water. We were all healthy kids. Most of our food was home grown and home cooked, always plenty of milk, eggs, poultry etc. being so young, we didn't realize how tough things were.

I remember when Garry aged about three, on two occasions, couldn't be found, they searched everywhere, of course the river being the first place, eventually he was found under the floor of the old fruit house, this was where the fruit and vegies used to be kept ready for the market, another time he was found under the fruit house again, this time playing with kittens that had been born there.

Not long after this, mum had taken Garry and the horse and dray up to town to get flour and sugar, which at that time, was in large hessian sacks, on the way home, they had crossed the ford, and were half way up the lane when mum stopped to open the gate, the horse, which had come from the Army was used to a brake being used when stopped, so of course, it backed down into the river and turned over the dray, everything getting wet, including Garry. Things weren't very happy at our house for a while.

My father, a policeman, stationed and working at Heidelberg, this meant that mum had to do almost everything, as well as lighting the fires, washing which was done in a tub and looking after us kids, poor dear. We kids all went to Greensborough Primary School, as

those before us had. From 'Willis Vale', we had to cross the river, as those before had done, on a log with wire to hold onto (The log was our bridge). Later in 1947, my family moved across the river to a new house at Whatmough Park, Annie, in her 70's, went to live with her daughter in Greenhills.



Log bridge over the Plenty River at 'Willis Vale'  
Greensborough

Now empty, vandals wrecked the old house, sideboards, and bookcases full of books, feather mattresses even the organ, all chopped up with axes, it was such a shame. The marble fireplace had been imported from Italy, the stove and boiler from, Locksmoor in Scotland; the oregon beams were also imported. No one was charged, the vandals were never found, it was so sad for my father and family. The council had bought the land but were not interested in preserving the house. Fires came through in the 1960's and finished it off, it had stood there for nearly 130 years, and there are still some of the pear trees around the oval today.

My great grandfather bought the property 'Willis Vale' in 1878; my grandfather had four brothers and two sisters they all lived there.

When my grandfather ran 'Willis Vale', he had a Jersey stud farm and a dairy farm as well as the orchards, when his first wife died in childbirth in 1900, he was left with a one year old daughter (Eva), this was when her grandmother Sarah Price came to look after her, she stayed on at 'Willis Vale' until her death in 1927, even after grandfathers second marriage to Annie May in 1905, she then helped raise their four children, because Annie May had to help with the dairy and orchards.

My grandfather Will was the first child baptised in the new Methodist Church, built in Main Street, Greensborough in 1872. My grandmother had the same seat in the same pew for over sixty years. Eva never married, she worked on the farm until about 1930, she then worked for Dr E.R. Cordner, then his son Ted, Dr E.P. Cordner, she was with them for 30 years. She passed away from cancer, a dreadful death, in 1970.

**Faye Fort (nee Partington)**

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