

"Reaghill"; a 30 acre property in Bedford Road, Heathmont was bought from the Blood family about 1910 by Mr Seymour Davies as a weekend retreat from his busy life as a manager with the Glenferrie (or Hawthorn) branch of the English, Scottish and Australian (ES&A) Bank. He and his family came by train to Ringwood and then drove a pony cart up Bedford Road to a gateway at about number 139 and then a long drive, which wound up to the top of the hill. There was a wonderful view of Mount Dandenong which later became obliterated by tall eucalyptus trees. The land which became "Reaghill" was part of an 80 acre crown land sale to Mr Robert Blood on 12 March 1872. More information on the Blood family involvement with the area is given on pages 13-17 of the original 1974 edition of Hugh Anderson, Ringwood, Place of Many Eagles. Another section of this land was bought by Mr Frank L Walker and subsequently became "Wombalano Park".

There is a quarry on the property from which stone was used for the long driveway. The garden was mainly left natural although we have two large Liquidamber trees which were planted by his wife Dora Davies (nee Hall). Surely these were some of the first to be planted in Melbourne gardens. A small weatherboard, galvanised iron roofed cottage was built on the top of the hill. At the time the house was built there was a strike of plasterers - as a result it was lined with timber, an unusual combination at that time.

The Davies had a daughter and two sons - Dora (born 1897), Geoffrey (1900), John (1902). All studied medicine at Melbourne and practised, Geoffrey in Sydney, John in general practice Melbourne while Dora went to England in the 1930s and never returned. John and Dora married in 1933 and 1938 respectively and had families. Soon after the beginning of the 1939-45 war Geoffrey enlisted in the AIF as a Medical Officer and was in Singapore when it fell to the Japanese. He spent the remaining war years in various POW camps, including Changi and others in Malaya and Thailand. While there he earned the gratitude of his fellows by his innovative use of available plants to treat tropical diseases. After the war Geoffrey returned to Melbourne and worked as a pathologist at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital while living for part of the time at "Reaghill".

Seymour Davies died in October 1935 and his wife, Dora, in February 1945. Of their children, John died in 1976, Dora in 1985 and Geoffrey in 1986. In July 1968 Geoffrey moved to East Ringwood and the two acre house block and an adjacent one were sold to Dr James Hamilton Kelly, then of New York State, USA (Title Vol 8740 folio 991). As far as is known he never lived there. The house was let to a Mr and Mrs Ingamels for some years.

The relatively fertile lower slopes on the south side of the land were cleared and farmed by descendants of the Blood family. At the time of the 1957 subdivision there were clear signs of the ploughed area. It was said that they used to grow strawberries in those paddocks.

In about 1955 Dr Geoff Davies decided to sub-divide the property, he was unmarried and found it too large to maintain. Initially five of the seven normal house sized blocks fronting Bedford Road were sold and in about 1957 the remainder, was divided into 15 blocks (averaging nearly two acres) and put on the market.

These were sold for £1000 (\$2000) per acre. Homebush Court and Vista Court were formed to give access to these blocks.

The Homebush Court blocks have close access to Heathmont and the others to East Ringwood although all are lumped into East Ringwood by the municipal and postal authorities.

The name "Reaghill" possibly comes from the Davies family's Irish origins. Homebush Court was named by Geoff Davies from the Sydney suburb of that name where he had lived in the 1930s. It was originally the name of a property owned by one of the early NSW Governors. Vista was a reminder to Geoff Davies of the once-grand views he remembered seeing from the hilltop.

The earlier history in this article was recounted by my mother, a niece of Mr Seymour Davies, who remembered coming on a great outing to "Reaghill" as a child. Other recollections are from our own conversations with Geoff Davies.

Ian and Margaret McKellar.  
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