

The history of the Houstons and the Wiradjuri on *'Budgewah'*



Written by Holly Ashcroft, Breanna Burns-Jarratt,
Amelia Everett, Jim Houston, Kirby Pingiaro,
Wil Sloan and Jonty Woods

Hay Public School



Creative Catchment Kids

Creative Catchment Kids is an initiative of Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre. It aims to improve engagement between our funding partners and school students by providing opportunities for positive, cooperative activities that encourage students to learn about and respond to, natural resource management and the importance of agricultural production.

wirraminna.org.au/petaurus/creative-catchment-kids/

Petaurus Education Group

Petaurus Education Group identifies, develops and delivers a range of learning and curriculum experiences, resources and initiatives for schools and community groups to connect with land, water, productive farming, sustainability and cultural issues at the local level. The group was established by Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre in late-2014 to support its operations and education activities.

wirraminna.org.au/petaurus

Enviro-Stories

Enviro-Stories is an innovative literacy education program that inspires learning about natural resource and catchment management issues. Developed by PeeKdesigns, this program provides students with an opportunity to publish their own stories that have been written for other kids to support learning about their local area.

envirostories.com.au

The history of the Houstons and the Wiradjuri on 'Budgewah'

Authors: Holly Ashcroft, Breanna Burns-Jarratt, Amelia Everett,
Jim Houston, Kirby Pingiaro, Wil Sloan and Jonty Woods

School: Hay Public School

Teacher support: Fleur Cullenward

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acclaimed artist Mr Chris McClelland for helping with artwork.



Budgewah is a property situated 25 kilometres west of Hay, on the Hay Plains. It lies in Wiradjuri Country. The Houston family have been custodians of the land for over 130 years.

The Wiradjuri people lived on the land for thousands of years. They moved between the river bend of Benduck and the Hay Plains country, known as Budgewah. Wiradjuri people had their own methods of farming. They would pull small saplings out of the river bend ground to encourage light into the river bends. The sunshine helped the grass to grow, and this would encourage animals to feed in those areas and make hunting easier.

The Wiradjuri would move in a cycle between their camps, depending on the season and availability of food. When the Wiradjuri people left a certain area to move to a new place, they would 'cool burn' the country behind them. Regular burning meant that there would not be a build-up of combustible material which would create an out of control fire danger.



As the Wiradjuri always returned to their camps in a cycle, they could leave some of their coolamons (dishes) and grinding stones behind as they were too heavy to carry. These items were then used again when they returned.

Life was hard for the Wiradjuri people, living in harsh land with dry and sparse conditions. They had many tribal laws that were created to maintain the lives of the people. One such law was that of intergenerational marriages, where people of the same age would not be allowed to marry. This was so that the younger person could look after and provide food for the older person.

Around the country of Benduck, where water would lie in wet years, there are many middens and earth oven mounds. Shell middens, where the shells from food were thrown at the end of a meal, grew bigger each year. When using the cooking mounds, there was a strong hierarchy of social standing with the Wiradjuri people. Where a family was in the hierarchy determined when you were allowed your turn to cook on a mound. On bigger mounds, at least three or four families would have cooked their food.

After meals, food needed to be disposed of carefully. No food would be allowed to be thrown in the cooking area. If food was thrown in the cooking area, the Wiradjuri believed that 'muck witches' would come out and take the person's soul and when they died, they would become a min-min light. Without a soul, they would not be able to enter the next world.

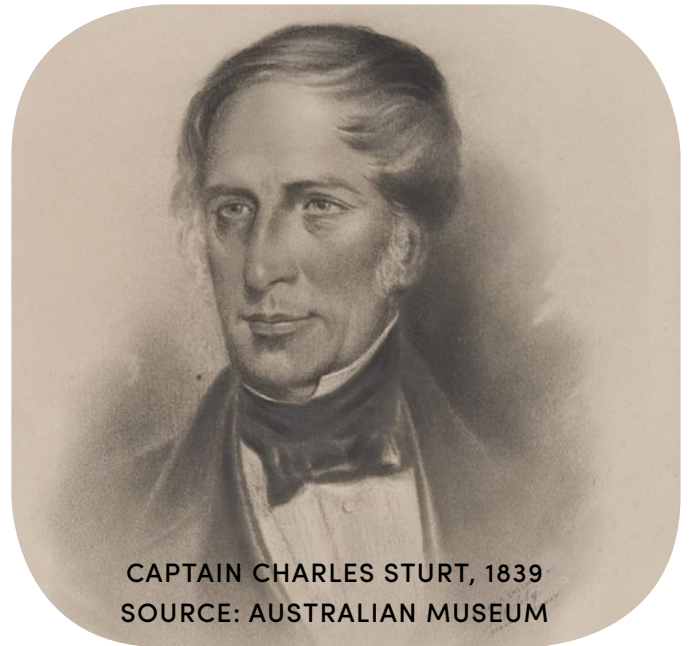




When an infant was buried, they were semi-cremated (flesh burnt and bones remained). These bones were wrapped and carried with the group between camps. Once an older person of stature died, the infant's bones would be wrapped with the adult's body, so that the baby could be taken with them into the next life, as the Wiradjuri believed the infant needed guidance to get to the next life.

The women's role was to look after the children and to find about 75% of the food. This food would be in the form of gathering berries, small lizards and insects. The men were the hunters. They would hunt animals like emus and kangaroos. After an animal was speared, the men would follow it until it eventually fell down from lack of blood and it would receive a final killing blow over the head. The men always gave the best bit of the kill to their wife's mother, although they were never allowed to look or speak to her.

In 1829, Captain Sturt came down the Murrumbidgee. It was after this time that the squatters arrived on the land along the river around Hay. Squatters were people looking for land to farm their animals. They took up the semi-arid land and grazed it - starting off with cattle and then moving to sheep and wool after they realised that they were much better suited to the harsh conditions. Squatters were not allowed claim land for themselves, it was illegal, but they did it anyway.



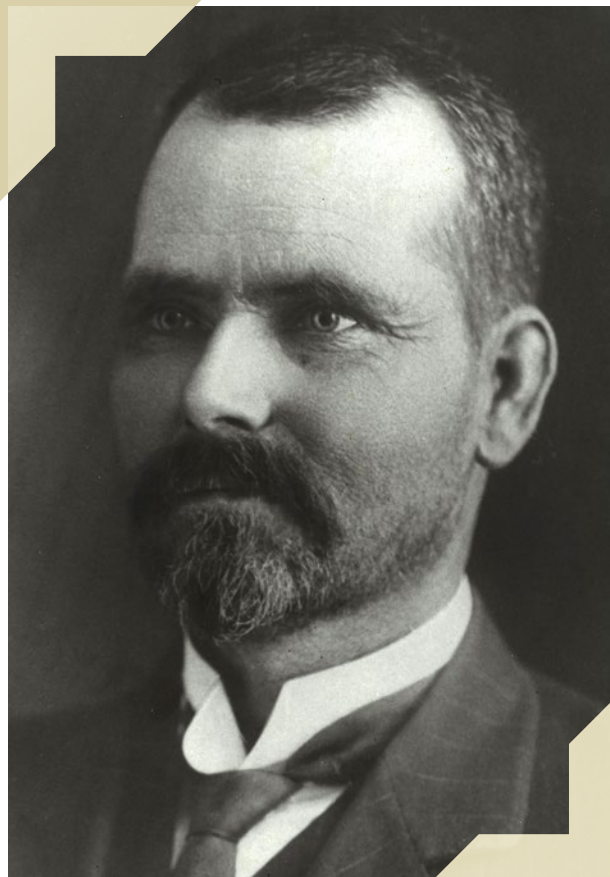
CAPTAIN CHARLES STURT, 1839
SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM



In 1854, the first Hay pub was built down in Bushy Bend. Soon afterward, in 1872, the municipality of Hay was proclaimed. The Robertson Land Act was introduced 1882 and gave rights to the squatters. The government then leased the land, on which they were living and working, back to the squatters. However, in return the squatters would have to give up some of their land for selection. Selectors were people who purchased a small parcel of land for a reasonable price from the government.

James Houston was a selector. James came from Ballymacillcur, County Derry in Ireland. He was one of six boys. James travelled out to Australia from Ireland in 1882 on one of the first powered sail ships, the 'Sabroan'. His two brothers and cousin Willie Kyle were already in Australia.

In 1884, James selected a portion of land near where the 'Benduck' homestead is situated today, about 15 kilometres west of Hay. The first portions available for selection were 60 acres. James however, realised that the river country was not usually good grazing country unless there was heavy rain or flood, it normally only grew feed like roly poly. So, in 1888, James selected 'Budgewah', out on the edge of the one tree plain. This time it was 640 acres, or a square mile in area.

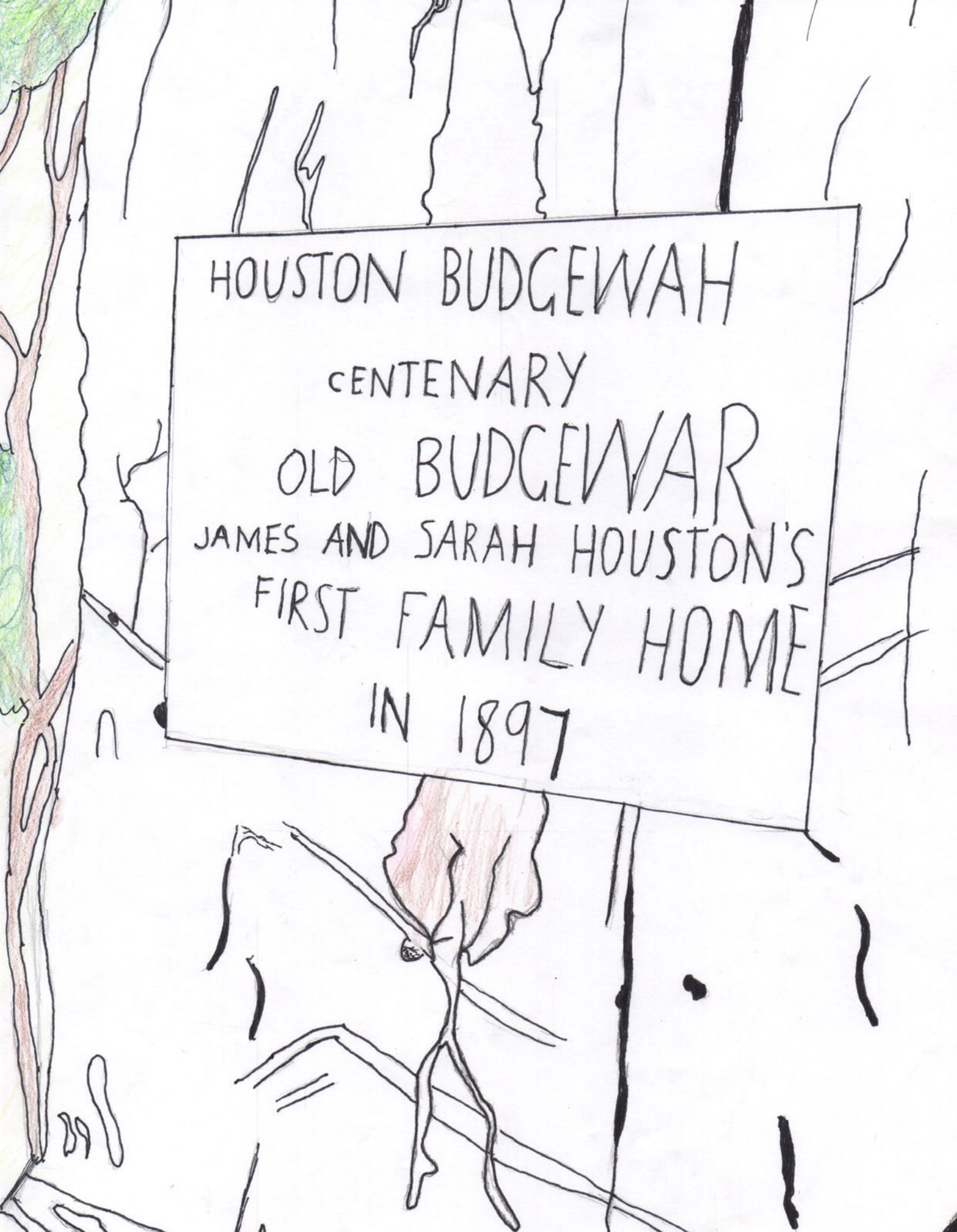


In order to obtain a selection, the government required that the selectors build a hut and dig a ground tank on the land. James built a hut in the paddock, now known as Hut Paddock. He would walk to another selector's place, 'Tolmie' that was located a mile away, for the evening meal.

Initially there were six selectors on 'Benduck'/'Budgewar' – Paynes, Websters, Tolmie, Cairns, Cain and James Houston. Over the years James bought out the other selectors.

In 1895, a bank collapse and a massive drought on 'Budgewar' occurred. The drought lasted until 1902, and even beyond. It was known as the Federation Drought. The effects of this drought, and the destruction on other farms by rabbits, as well as poor prices, had an enormous effect on landholders. Prior to that time, Hay and its surrounding area had been booming. Then, in the earlier years of the Federation drought, banks started to go broke and they foreclosed on landholders – they had to stop lending them money. The last selector on 'Budgewah', W.A. Tolmie, sold his portion to James Houston in 1907, including all his belongings and even his saddlery.

The original Tolmie selection and cottage became known as 'Budgewar', but changed to 'Budgewah' in 1945. There was a Houston family argument as to whether 'Budgewar' was Irish or 'Budgewah' was Wiradjuri.

A hand-drawn illustration of a rectangular sign in a wooded area. The sign is white with black text. The text on the sign reads: "HOUSTON BUDGEWAH", "CENTENARY", "OLD BUDGEWAR", "JAMES AND SARAH HOUSTON'S", "FIRST FAMILY HOME", and "IN 1897". The sign is supported by two black posts. The background shows several trees with simple line drawings and some colored areas (green and brown).

HOUSTON BUDGEWAH
CENTENARY
OLD BUDGEWAR
JAMES AND SARAH HOUSTON'S
FIRST FAMILY HOME
IN 1897

'OLD BUDGEWAR' WAS 11 KM NORTH OF THE MURRUMBIDGEE RIVER.

In 1884, James went to visit his cousin Willie Kyle at Toganmain. It was here that he first met Sarah Bradshaw. Sarah's father had been a migrant gold miner at Beechworth, Victoria, eventually settling on a wheat farm at Coolamon in NSW. Sarah was the first school teacher at Toganmain in 1884 and James' future bride. Sarah mentions in some of her writing that 'they were off to a dance at Carrathool and the 'New Chum', Irishman James Houston, would be there, which would be fun'. Sarah and James were married in 1897. It took over thirteen years for Sarah to marry James. During that time Sarah moved to Sydney, taught at the Burwood Superior Public School, sang in the Sydney Philharmonic Choir and joined the Ladies T.S. bicycling club.



James and Sarah had five children, four of the children were born when she was over 40 – very rare in those days. They lived on the selection known as Cairns.



There were 24 gates for James and Sarah to open along their way to and from Hay. One of the original gate posts still stands in the Payne's paddock today.

James, Sarah and their children used to travel in a horse-drawn buggy with the children. One particular time, one of the kids, Hillis, fell out of the buggy and the wheel ran over his head making him bleed from the nose, ears and mouth. They took him on the long buggy journey to the doctor in Hay. Hillis was okay and became a doctor in 1929.



JIM HOUSTON, KIRBY PINGIARO, WIL SLOAN, AMELIA EVERITT, HOLLY ASHCROFT, JONTY WOODS AND BREANNA BURNS-JARRATT IN THE OLD J. HOUSTON 'SELECTOR HUT'

James gradually purchased the other selections around him, building up 'Budgewah' into the property it is today. When he purchased Webster's selection, Welbourne Webster moved and opened a business in Hay in Moss Street. The Houston boys used to play in the old well on Webster's. Their mother, Sarah, constantly told them not to play in the well. One day, the boys climbed down into the well, but as they started to climb up the old ladder a brown snake came out of a crack in the wall. They had to wait down at the bottom of the well until the snake slithered back into the crack. Their mother was furious when they got home.



OLD WELL - 24M DEEP, GOOD WATER



REMNANTS OF THE OLD HOMESTEAD



REMNANTS OF THE OLD HOMESTEAD

The telephone came to Hay in 1907. Country people were given party lines, where a number of families had the same line. The phone would make a different number of rings for all the different families on the line. James and Sarah tried to explain what a phone was to their children and how someone's voice could travel along the telephone line, but they didn't quite understand. The boys used to go out into the paddock, find the telephone line and yell and swear at it thinking that they were upsetting all the people with telephones from Hay to Sydney, the United Kingdom and Ireland. The party line travelled all the way out to Corrong.

The track that James and Sarah drove along to Hay was also used by other squatters and selectors living in areas such as Thelangerin and Corrong. Along the track, a massive black box tree stands. It is so old that some of its limbs have actually grown downwards and touch the ground, giving the impression that the limbs are growing out of the ground.



This was a routine stop for the other landholders who lived further along the track. Many travellers stopped at the blackbox tree to have a sip of whiskey or more on their way to and from town, as evidenced by the many bottles under the tree that have been exposed by strong winds during droughts and dust storms.

James was able to purchase the property 'Kangaroo' from Walter Tyson's estate in 1907. James and Sarah eventually left 'Bush Park' and set up their new home at 'Kangaroo' so the Houston kids could go to school – first at Larmorna Public School, 4 km from Hay, then at school in Hay.



Hillis and John, James and Sarah's eldest boys, were the first two students to go to the Hay High School, established at the Hay Public School in 1914. Both boys went on to university in Sydney having done their matriculation exam around Armistice Day (11th November 1918). Hillis became a doctor.



Out of town students (1st sixty boys) - at Hay High School -^{This Year} Opened 21/1/1918 and Hay WM High School - 25/4/1923
1917

	DOA	Name	Surname	r	H	DOB	Parent/G	A/Town	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Previous	Left	rem
✓1	21.01.1918	Hillis Kyle	Houston	0		11.06.1899	James	Budgewar H	✓	✓	✓	1918	✓	Hay District	27.2.1919	S.Uni med
✓2	21.01.1918	John	Houston	0		26.11.1900	James	Budgewar H	✓	✓	✓	1918	✓	Hay District	27.2.1919	S.Uni vet
3	21.01.1918	Arthur	Skene	0		21.01.1902	John	Mulberrygong H			1918	1919	1921	Hay District	12.12.1921	
4	21.01.1918	Warwick	Skene	0		27.05.1899	John	Mulberrygong H		1918	1919			Hay District		
5	21.01.1918	Reynolds	Palmer	0		23.11.1900	William	Gunbar Road H			1918	1919	1920	Hay District	12.12.1920	
6	04.02.1918	Arthur	Leslie	0		17.12.1903	William Jas	Euston		1918	1920			Hay District	01.06.1920	
7	28.01.1918	Allan	Gibson	0		12.11.1904	James	Croydon, H		1918	1919	1921	1922	Hay District	12.12.1922	S.Uni eng
✓8	28.01.1918	James Bradshaw	Houston	0		13.09.1902	James	Budgewar H	✓	✓	✓	1919		Hay District	19.12.1919	
9	28.01.1918	John	Collins	1		09.12.1901	John	Oxley		1918	1919			Hay District	21.12.1919	
10	11.02.1918	Roy	Rutledge	1		22.01.1922	Michael	Mallow, H		1918	1919			Hay District	19.12.1919	

Hillis married Tempe Datson. On returning from their honeymoon they were in a plane accident – Hillis was the pilot. The accident was at Scone, where Hillis was working as a doctor. Hillis was killed. His wife was badly injured. She was put on a slow goods train wagon, lined with mattresses and taken to Sydney where she remained in Sydney Hospital for 13 months. She eventually recovered and remarried. Both of her other husbands died, which was a tragedy. Tempe has endowed a scholarship for women students in her name at Sydney University.

James Houston was a proactive member of the Hay community. He became the first Shire President for the Waradgery Shire in 1901. He also was one of eight benefactors who gave £250 (about \$20,288 today) to go towards the establishment appeal and setting up Hay War Memorial High School, which opened on ANZAC day, 1923. Lord Stonehaven (Governor General) declared that it was the finest War Memorial in the British Empire.

James bought a train load of cattle from Batlow as cattle prices fell after the 'World War One Boom' and drought conditions worsened. To fatten his cattle, rather than sell them for low prices, James also purchased 'Burrowye' in the Upper Murray, near Walwa.

James was always watching for rain and knew they were in for dry times. He always said "If there wasn't a green pick at 'Lamorna' (a small property he had purchased near Kangaroo, Hay) by Empire Day (24th of May each year), then watch out for drought!"

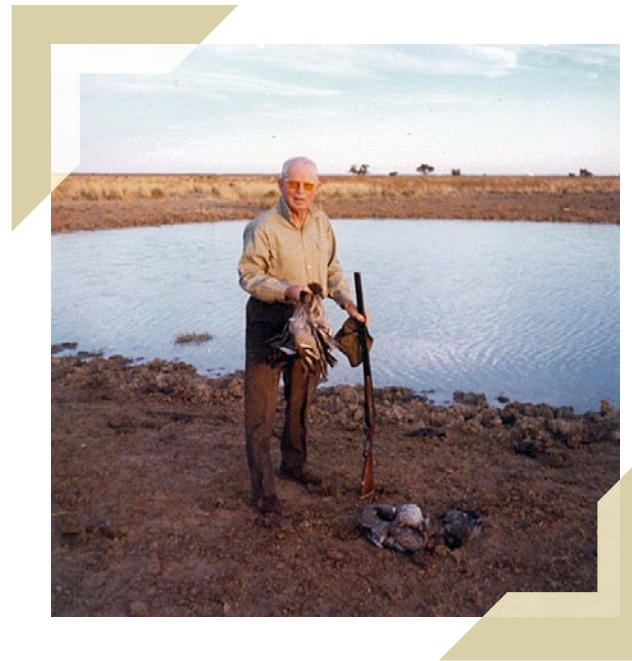
James asked John, his second eldest son also known as Jack, to leave university and go and help look after the cattle at 'Burrowye' until they fattened. After a stint in the Upper Murray, John became an overseer at 'Moira', near Echuca, and a fireman on the paddlesteamer 'Invincible'. Carrying his swag in the depression of 1929-1933, he and his mate, Torn Cook, ended up buying a truck and they carted gravel around the Echuca-Shepparton area. The gravel was used for building culverts in irrigation areas. John spent time camping and living in bush huts during these years.



John spent a lot of time away. One day he called in at the property 'Hughendon' near Alexandra, to see if he could camp in the rabbitier's hut to fish and shoot. The owner, Hugh Gilmore, agreed. He really enjoyed fishing and duck shooting at 'Thornton' and Eildon Weir on the Goulburn River.

John fell in love with Hugh's daughter, Dora Mabel Gilmore, who was 16 at the time. Dorothy didn't like being called Dora. Her aunt called her Dorothy when she was a baby, so that is what Dorothy called herself. She wouldn't marry him until she was 21. John and Dorothy were married on the 16th October 1934 in the town of Alexandra, Victoria, and then moved to Hay. John always had a great friendship with his father-in-law and mother-in-law.

In the depression, John purchased a house in Hay for £900 (about \$116,932 today). Opposite the house is now the Hay Centennial Olympic pool, which has since been renamed the John Houston Memorial Pool. John was President of the Hay Pool Committee for many years. He, and a dedicated committee, felt that there were too many young children around the district who had drowned in the river. With the river nearby and a warm climate there should be no reason why a child should not be taught how to swim in Hay. That is why the pool, even today, has free entry.



ABOVE: JOHN OUT DUCK SHOOTING.

BELOW (L-R): JOHN AND DORA ON THEIR WEDDING DAY, 1934 AND THEIR 50TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY, 1984



James Houston passed away in 1940.

After the long drought from 1940-1945, debts were high and land prices were low. John paid only 27 shillings per acre, which is roughly equivalent to \$2.70/acre in today's money. He bought 260 acres of 'Tongul' from Michael Rutledge, not long after the war.

Michael and John exchanged part of the blocks 'Woolloondool' and 'Tongul' for desired pump sites. John and Dorothy built a homestead in 1957 on Tongul. It was one of the first major homesteads that faced the river. Previously, most homesteads that faced the plains would hide their view of them behind English gardens. They also threw their rubbish in the river, which is the reason why homesteads didn't face the river either! How times have changed.

There was a village at Tongul, as well as a school. When the Tongul school and Gordon's Point school closed (situated on the four mile marker of Maude Road), James purchased the two classrooms and they became part of the 'Budgewah' homestead. One of the school rooms is still the kitchen at 'Budgewah' and the other was eaten away by white ants years ago.

In 1965, David Houston installed the new German Pleuger underwater pump at Tongul, on the site John had already previously selected. This pumped water down to 'Budgewah' for the 400 acres of irrigation. It is still pumping in 2018.



ABOVE: LANI AND ROWAN AT 'TONGUL' DURING THE 1973 FLOOD.



RIGHT: PROTECTING THE HOMESTEAD AT 'TONGUL' DURING THE 1973 FLOOD.

The Duckroola Creek runs through 'Budgewah' and most of the time is dry. On the Darcoola West, it is called 'Darcoola Creek'.

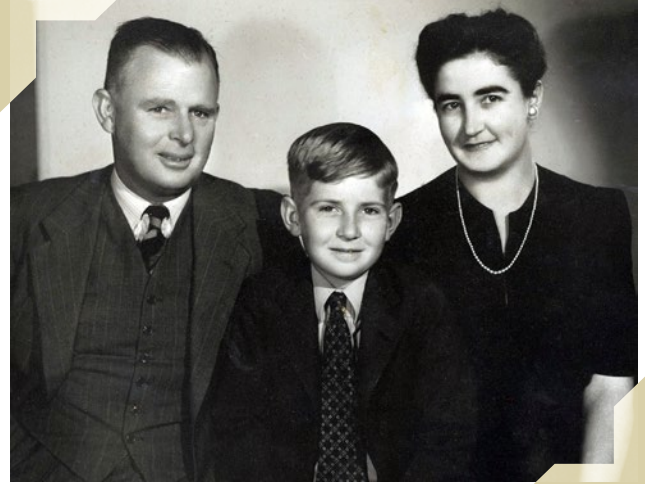
During World War Two, Hay had a Prisoner Of War camp. After the war finished, the POW camp was closed and some Japanese prisoners weren't able to return home due to a lack of ships. John Houston offered the Garrison the box trees for the Japanese to cut down at 'Budgewah'.

The Japanese worked by cutting the box trees down, leaving a stump of about one metre. The tree would then sprout from that stump, creating 5 or 6 new trunks. John hoped in the future to make use of the regrowth for fence posts. There are two very tall, uncut, box trees along the Duckroola Creek known as the Japanese 'POW smoko trees' – where the prisoners had smoko.

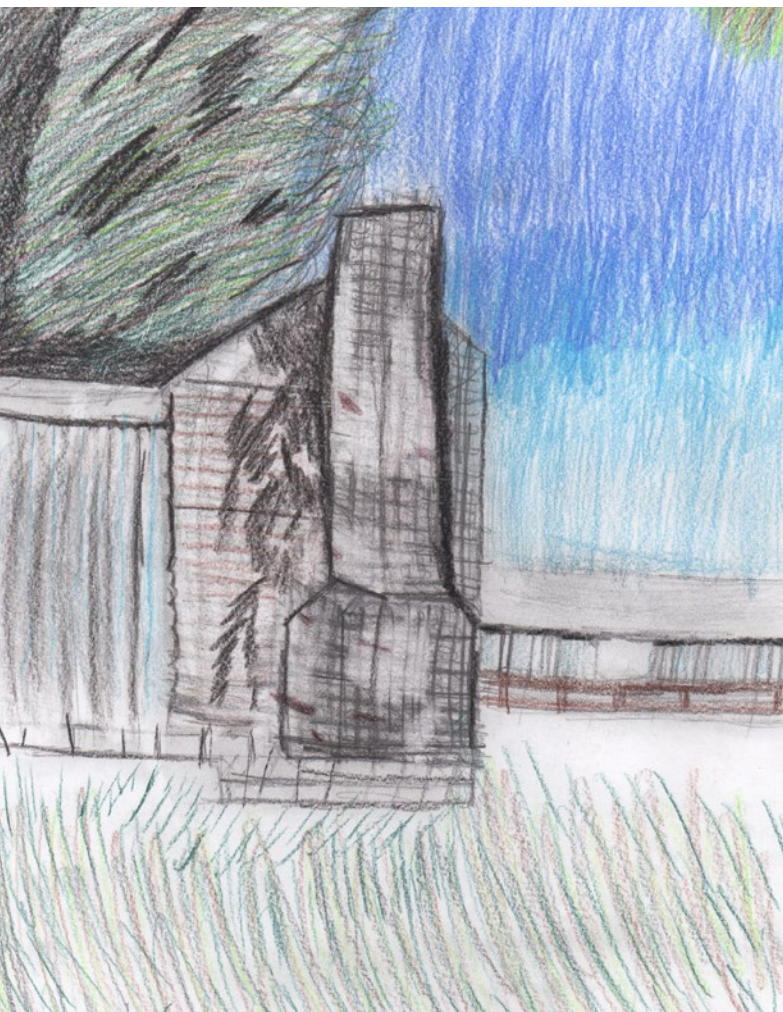


One day, when the Japanese were working out at 'Budgewah' cutting away at the box trees with their axes and machetes, John was driving his Chev Ute out to look at the sheep. He had his guns laid across the seat, driving quite slowly, when all of a sudden the Japanese prisoners came rushing at John, running and waving their axes and machetes. John thought that they had gone crazy and were going to kill him. His first intention was to grab his guns and bullets. Before he did, he saw a goanna running towards him and it went underneath his Ute, the only safe place for a goanna to hide out on the plains. It turned out that the Japanese men were trying to hunt down the goanna, which had come out of the hollow tree, catch it, kill it and then eat it!

In 1946, John, with the help of George Jarratt, relocated James' original hut back to the 'Budgewah' homestead where it still stands today.



David Houston was born in 1935, the only son of John and Dorothy. He attended Hay Public School in his primary years from 1941 to 1947 and then Hay War Memorial High School from 1948 to 1952. David repeated his last year of school at Knox Grammar School in Sydney in 1953.



David went to Sydney University from St. Andrew's College where he studied Agricultural Economics from 1954 to 1956. He then went to TAFE in North and East Sydney to study woolclassing.



David was a roustabout in shearing sheds during the TAFE years of 1957-1958 at Merryville Station near Yass. He also travelled overseas for 14 months in 1962 and 1963, including working in London at Australia House for four months. It was an amazing time to travel as it was during the time of the Cuban missile crisis and David was in North America when President J.F. Kennedy was assassinated. David recalls going into a barber on the corner of Houston and Elms Street, Dallas, six days after the President had been shot only 100 metres away. The flowers were still on the road.

After his travels, David returned home to 'Budgewah'. One night at dinner with his cousins at their property 'Kangaroo', David met Coleen McKinnon. Coleen was droving sheep and cattle with her brother. They had come down from Northern NSW to drive sheep around the Hay district during their northern drought years.



NEWLY MARRIED COLEEN AND DAVID HOUSTON IN 1968 BESIDE DROUGHT STRICKEN BUDGEWAH LAND ON LEFT AND BUDGEWAH IRRIGATION CHANNEL ON RIGHT HAND SIDE.



Coleen McKinnon was from a Narromine property. She was always an outside girl and loved the land. When she was five, Coleen recalls riding on the horse with her father going around the lambing ewes. She had her pet lambs that would always lead the mob.

She recalls her father being away to fight fires. When a large fire reached near to their property, she saddled up the horses and sulky, rounded up the sheep and brought them to a bare patch of land for safety. The smoke lifted up and her father, who raced back, saw them and they both got the sheep through a gate to safety. They also saved the woolshed and house.

In the late forties and early fifties, the skies would be blackened with swarms of locusts. They would land on one of the grain crops, they grew wheat or oats, and by morning only a few stalks would remain. Then the locusts would fly away.

Coleen had a younger brother Murray. They both did school-by-correspondence at home before a newly installed bus was able to take them to Narromine Public School. At the age of eleven, she attended Wellington Convent. Coleen became very homesick and ran away, after leaving a note behind for a friend. After walking five miles out of town she hitched a ride with a stock and station agent. He knew her father and returned her home. She never went back to that school but the following year Coleen went to the Presbyterian Ladies College, Croydon, which she really enjoyed.

During Coleen's intermediate year her beloved father had a stroke and a cardiac arrest. She returned home to help run the property until her brother came home. She drove tractors and did the cropping. One particular time she put the plough half-way up a tree! After being very annoyed and with much stamping of feet and tears of frustration, she became calm. She knew she had to become resourceful and depend upon herself to solve the problem as no other help would be forthcoming. After much backing and unhitching she finally detached the plough from the tree. A very good lesson in life – learning to become self-reliant.

To while away the time, Coleen would learn poetry or Shakespeare whilst riding behind mobs of sheep. Coleen's dad died when she was 25. Around that time there was a three-and-a-half year drought, with nothing for the stock to eat. She would climb the Kurrajong trees with an axe to chop the branches down, providing feed for the sheep.



**DORIS AND COLIN
MCKINNON WITH
MURRAY AND COLEEN**

Nanna McKinnon's Tea Cake Recipe

Coleen Houston's Mother.

I cook it in a convection microwave oven. Set it on preheat at 200° and then when heated change setting to convection, pressing 200° and then 20 minutes. Spray a 23cm (9inch) container with canola oil very thoroughly as it can stick.

Method Melt 1 tablespoon of butter. Separate 2 large eggs. Beat whites stiffly, add ½ cup of castor sugar, beat until stiff, add a dash of vanilla and egg yolks. More beating, then add ½ to 1 cup of milk. Brisk beating will aerate mixture (you can see the bubbles!) Then fold in melted butter and heaped cup of self raising flour. Pour into greased container and cook for 20 minutes. If using a normal oven cook for 30 minutes in a moderate oven.

Turn cake out upside down. Butter well all over surface and sprinkle with a mixture of cinnamon and sugar which you have already prepared.
Bon appetit!!



This is the recipe of the famous tea cake which is cooked by Coleen for the shearer's smoko. It is so delicious and we devoured two cakes for our morning tea (as you can see by our photo there is not a crumb left) and we still wanted more! Some of us didn't want to share the recipe with anyone as it was a secret! Jim even wanted it to be written in our book in a different language so no-one could decipher it easily!

During that drought Coleen and her brother decided to take the sheep on the road. They 'floated' (transported) them to 'Hillston'. The first night they set up the dogs to watch their sheep. Wearing only her pyjamas, Coleen was awoken by some men coming home from the movies. They informed her that her dogs had fallen asleep and the sheep had gone awry. It was the last night she slept in her pyjamas!

David and Coleen were married on the 30th April 1968 in Sydney, on the day the drought broke in Hay – over two inches of rain fell in Hay. Four months prior to this, their 'home to be' at 'Budgewah' had just been condemned by the Hut Inspector as unfit for shearers to have their meals or sleep in.

Their home consisted of the remains of the original selector's cottage and the 'condemned' shearer's huts. Coleen's mum came to look at the house and David was worried about what she would think about a 'new condemned home'. David was relieved when she said, "I think you'll both be very happy" as both she and her daughter were bush girls! David had ordered a 44 gallon drum of guide post white paint and got 60 pounds of putty for Scotty McPherson to fill in all the cracks and fix up the 'White House'. It now has a beautiful garden surrounding the house and they have been married for over 50 years.



DORIS MCKINNON WITH COLEEN DURING THE DROUGHT (ABOVE)
COLEEN WITH A LAMB (BELOW)



DAVID AND COLEEN IN FRONT OF THE 'BUDGEWAH' HOMESTEAD

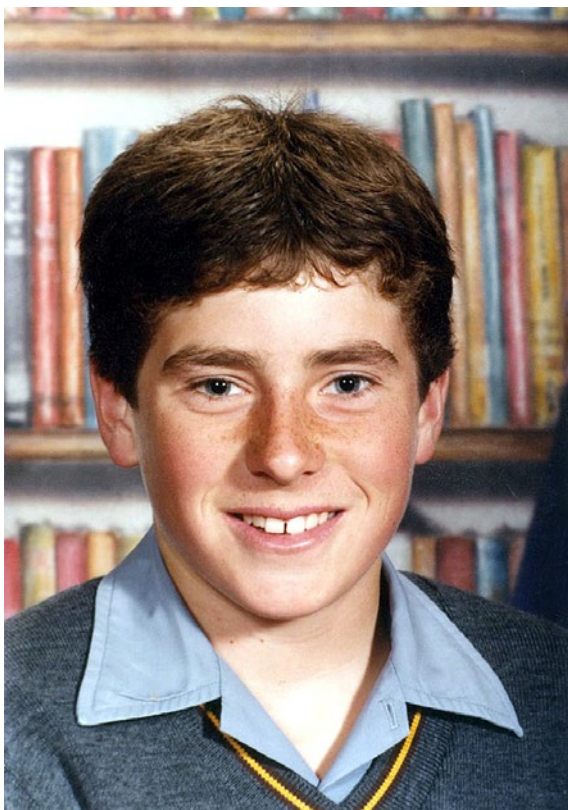


DAVID AND COLEEN

As 'Budgewah' is eight channel miles off the river, the trees are scarce and black box (*Eucalyptus largiflorens*) trees are the main species that survive on the saltbush plains. Gum trees die if there is a long drought, unlike black box trees. However, there is a lone weeping myall (*Acacia pendulata*) tree growing out in the middle of the plain, not far from the 'Budgewah' homestead. The tree has been there all of David's life, so it's well over 80 years old. When David was young, he used climb the tree and rob the crow's nest. His grandsons have recently done the same.



David and Coleen had two children, Lani (born in 1969) and Rowan (born in 1971). Both Lani and Rowan attended Hay Public School and Hay War Memorial High School before completing their last two years of schooling in Sydney. Lani attended Sydney University before commencing a teaching career and then a career in Community and Economic Development. She now lives in Hay. Rowan attended Marcus Oldham Agricultural College and completed his Diploma in Agribusiness Management.





After the drought broke in January 1973 with ten inches of rain, 'Budgewah' went into cattle agistment – 1973 and 1974 were the two wettest years in over a century. They were fantastic growing seasons and there was enough feed for around 3000 head of cattle on 'Budgewah' at one time. The 1973 growing season was so good that they were also able to bale the native trefoil clover and send it down to Victorian dairy farmers for feed.



In order to hold the agistment cattle in the paddocks, David undertook a program to electrify all the existing fences on the property with single wire outriggers. It took about four or five months to electrify the fences with the help of Bill Parker. This was a good time for Budgewah Pastoral Company, as the profit from agisting the cattle meant that they could get rid of a huge debt. It also meant that 'Budgewah' could profitably remove a huge bushfire hazard.



DROUGHT FEEDING AND NEW COVERED SHEEP YARDS



During David's time from 1967 to 2000, there were two major bushfires on 'Budgewah'. One fire was initially a mile away from David but the fire moved swiftly. As he was out grading firebreaks so the fire wouldn't spread there was a sudden 90 degree strong wind change and before long the fire swept over the top of the grader. David sustained 'second degree radiant heat burns' through one open door of the grader. During that fire only one sheep was lost but around 5000 acres was burnt all the way to the Maude Road.



In 1990, the wool floor price collapsed. At this time the Australian sheep flock was around 180 million. Having a set floor price meant that the minimum price for wool was guaranteed by the government for farmers. In hindsight, this was a false economy. This reliability for price had meant that lots of people were growing wool and that the flock, and the amount of wool, had built up. There was so much wool that Australia couldn't sell it all. There was a huge surplus of wool known as the stockpile.



Eventually the government had to take away the floor price and try to get rid of the stockpile of wool, which took several years. Prices for wool and sheep plummeted. Many farmers couldn't sell their sheep, especially if they were old.

Like many other farming families, the Houston's were caught up in the wool price collapse. They couldn't sell a lot of their older, less valuable sheep. David and Rowan had to humanely shoot 1400 sheep with .22 rifles. The sheep were carted in trucks to deep pits for burial. They froze 320 legs of the better sheep and there were 'legs to roast' in freezers all around Hay.

This saw the Australian sheep flock drop to around 60-70 million, where it remains today. The production of sheep and merino wool remains the mainstay of the semi-arid plains of Hay, with diversity into other industries where irrigation water is available, affordable and allowed to be used.



Rowan was made Managing Director of Budgewah Pastoral Company (the Houston Family Company) in 2000. David and the family agreed that Rowan was more than capable to manage 'Budgewah'.

Rowan married Sarah Glasson, a school teacher at Hay Public School, in 2000. Sarah had grown up at Dalgety, on a property called 'Jimenbuen' on the Monaro, in the mountains. Sarah is the second Sarah Houston. Sarah and Rowan have four boys: Jim, Archie, Harry and Bill.

In 2009, the new shearing shed was built after the old 1880's shed was starting to fall down. The old shed, of mainly rusty iron, was known as a 'selectors shed'. The new shed is a raised board six stand shed. The new shed also doubles up as a workshop. The sheep yards were roofed over in the 1990's. This serves a dual purpose. The shed itself can hold around 400 sheep and the covered yards can shed up to about 2000 sheep. This means that the sheep can be protected from rain during shearing time. The sheep can also be drafted and sorted under cover during shearing and other times. The other main advantage is that during the hot summer months, sheep work can be done undercover in the yards.

At 'Budgewah' today there are two main shearings: one in November, this is so the ewes can be joined without a big fleece; and the other is in July, after which the sheep are sold in the spring sales in Hay.





The management of the water from the river today causes great concern. The river areas are regularly 'yoyo' flooded artificially, which is creating a change to the natural ecosystem of the riverland by creating a rapidly growing river red gum jungle. The river country is building up with new and strangling dense saplings due to more frequent watering. The trees are not naturally thinning out and in many areas woodcutters and saw millers have been ejected. The river bends are choking and filling with feral pigs and deer. There is a lot of natural junk building up in the river bends, which is a concern for fire control. Also, mismanagement of the river system is causing blue-green algae to build up in stagnant water and has led to the death of thousands of native fish in the recent summer months.

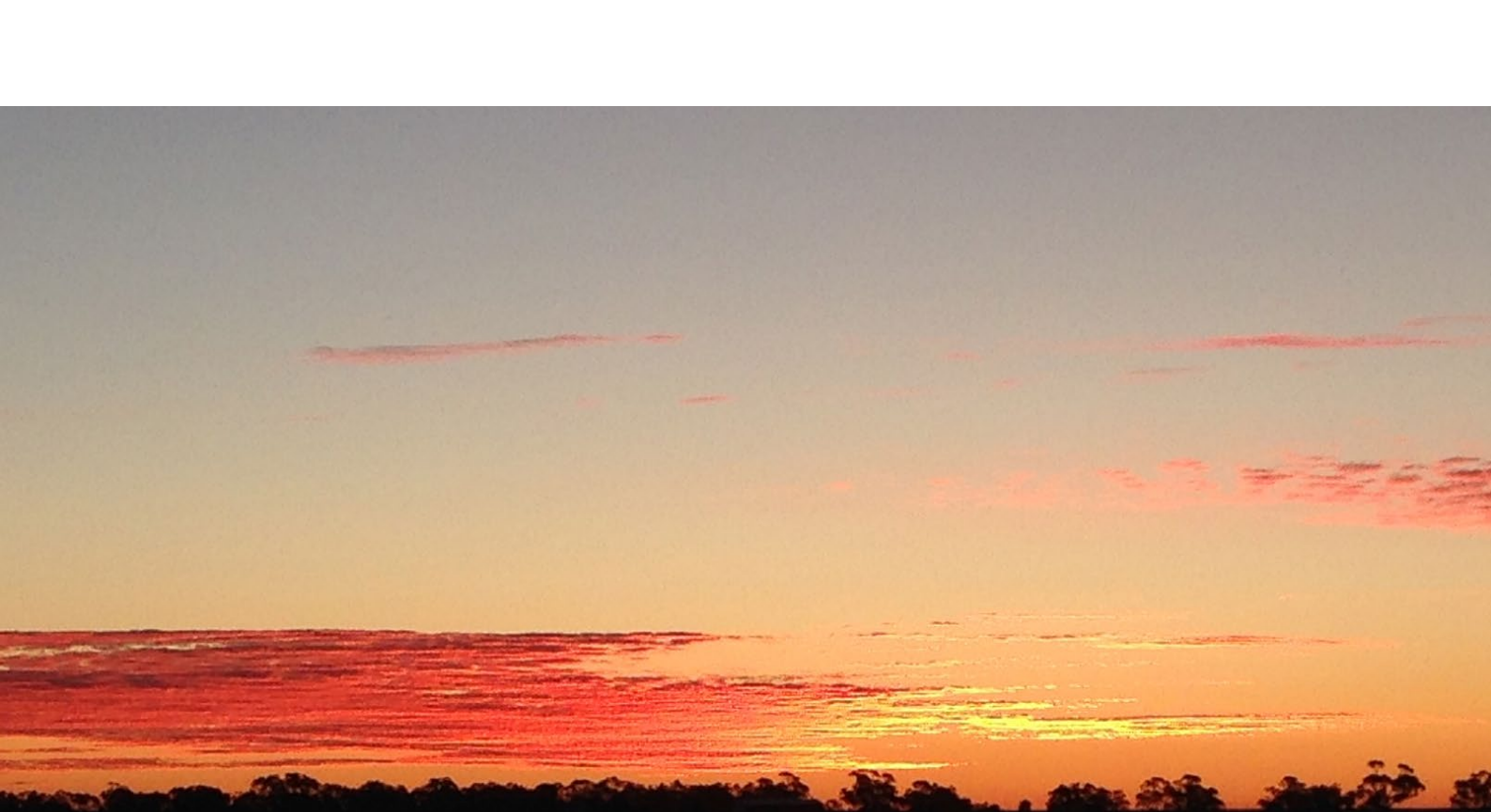
Rabbits haven't ever really been a problem on 'Budgewah' as the soil is predominantly a grey self-mulching clay, which the rabbits can't dig into easily and establish good burrows. There are a few sandy ridges/dry creeks where the rabbits do live, but the numbers are not a problem.

The sale of water for irrigation on 'Budgewah' allowed Budgewah Pastoral Company to purchase the original part of 'Benduck' in 2010. This was a very special occasion as the back station of 'Benduck' was part of the original selection of James Houston in the 1880's. Rowan and Sarah live adjacent to the original 1880's 'Benduck' homestead site with their family.

Gubba Woods is a proud Wiradjuri man and a proud drover's son. Gubba represents the Wiradjuri people who have lived on the land for thousands of years where 'Budgewah' and 'Benduck' now stand. Gubba has strong links with the current custodians of the land, the Houston family and there is great mutual respect between David, Rowan and Gubba.

David worries that the riverbends are becoming too choked with small river red gum saplings. He also worries about the build up of combustible material in the river bends that could create an out-of-control fire in extreme drought periods. The Houston's concern for the country and the practices used by the Wiradjuri people are very similar. Both the Houston family and Gubba believe they are custodians of a very special land and the history of those that came before them.





There's so much history on
'Budgewah'





Holly Ashcroft, Breanna Burns-Jarratt, Amelia Everett, Jim Houston,
Kirby Pingiaro, Wil Sloan and Jonty Woods

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