

The following notes are sourced from The West Eyreton School 125th reunion 1872-1997 booklet and from "The Early Canterbury Runs" 4th Edition, by L.G.D. Acland.

The "West Eyreton" name.

"Eyre" was Edward John Eyre 1815-190

He was appointed Lieutenant Governor of New Munster (1848 – 1853) under the control of Governor Chief George Grey. New Munster was the name given to the South Island at the time of political separation of New Zealand from the colony of New South Wales, in 1840.

Despite his short stay in New Zealand several places were named after him.

"Eyreton" was originally 'Eyretown' and was situated on the South Eyre Road, approximately 20 km east of West Eyreton. There was a school built there in 1866, serving the area as far west as the Eyrewell homestead.

West Eyreton was the name given to the school and district when the school opened in 1872. The school became known as Eyreton West but in September 1967 was renamed West Eyreton.

West Eyreton School "Houses"

As noted in the West Eyreton School 125th Reunion booklet, parts of five different grazing runs were included in the West Eyreton District, the first licences for these being issued by the Canterbury Association in the years 1851 to 1853. They were, north of the Eyre River, "Murphy's", and "Springbank"; and south of it, "Eyrewell", Worlingham", and "No 78"(No name for this has been discovered.)

The licences these runholders held were for grazing only, plus certain 'pre-emptive rights'. Apart from the rights they had no security of tenure whatever. Settlers and speculators could select land almost anywhere they desired, provided of course they had the necessary cash available. The price the provincial Council charged was two pounds per acre.

While the boundaries changed over subsequent years, and the land changed hands as people freeholded, these blocks of land formed the area we now know as West Eyreton. "Eyrewell", "Murphy", and "Worlingham" were, in recent years, adopted by the school as names for our 'houses'. "The Warren", another early pastoral run, further west towards Oxford, was chosen as the name for the fourth house. There was a school in this area for many years. It closed in 1992 and many of the children who live in that district now attend West Eyreton School.

Eyrewell

“Eyrewell” was the name given to the two runs acquired by Marmaduke Dixon in 1853. It was named after he had found the water he had long dug for. It was at his first homestead called ‘The Hermitage’ that Marmaduke Dixon apparently dug single-handed a well eighty feet deep, at first winching each bucketful of soil to the top and later inventing a tackle by which, without leaving the bottom, he could haul the bucket up and trip it at the top. He failed to find water and continued to sledge his supplies three miles from the Waimakariri. When he married in 1859 he built a homestead nearer the Eyre River and here he tapped a reliable water supply so that homestead was named ‘Eyrewell’.

In early years much of the land was covered in manuka scrub.

In 1890 Eyrewell Farm comprised 48,000 acres. It was enlarged by his son (also Marmaduke) in 1904 and again in 1907, by adding most of the Worlingham run. In 1927 another son added 2,330 acres of Wai-iti. The younger Marmaduke Dixon died in 1918 and Eyrewell was taken over by trustees. Blocks of it were sold off and a part was divided up among members of the family.

Eyrewell farm, comprising 1,200 acres, was owned, in recent years, by a previous chairman of the school Board of Trustees, Don Toshach. It had never changed hands except by inheritance, until 1961.

It is now owned by dairy farmers, has been renamed and its landscape changed. The Eyrewell homestead remains.

Murphy

“Murphy’s Run”, on the north side of the Eyre River, was about 14,000 acres, and extended from the Eyre River to The Cust River below Carleton. It was originally known by its management as “Ryder’s Flat” because a stockman, believed to be St George Ryder, had his camp beside the creek a few chains north of the school site. He was probably the first European to reside in the district. Murphy was a squatter in Australia and sent Robert Higgins with stock to lease the land and to act as his manager. Higgins built his hut at Tara. In the 1860s Murphy sent his son over to the run. He died aged 37 as a result of falls during a paperchase hunt, but his widow, who later married Reginald Blunden, lived at The Downs until her death in 1928.

Both the Murphys and Higgins bought much of the run. The partnership lasted until the late 1880s when the balance of Tara was cut up and sold. The Downs farm continued in the Blunden family until 1937 when William Henry Gillespie occupied it.

Worlingham

“Worlingham” was another early grazing run. It occupied land between the Waimakariri and Eyre Rivers and was adjacent to Eyrewell’s west boundary. Thomas Kestevan was the first holder of “Worlingham” and he freeholded two small sections of it in 1866. He named it after Worlingham village, near Beccles in England, where his mother was born. In the 1904, Major P. Johnson, the owner at the time, sold out - the Waimakariri Country going to M.J. Dixon of ‘Eyrewell’, and the rest of the run, on the Eyre River, to J. Tipping. In 1907 Tipping sold most of the latter to Dixon, but the homestead and a small part of the land went to Thomas Izard. Both parts have subsequently changed hands several times.

The Worlingham homestead was sited on Pestors Road just south of the Eyre River. Buildings still remain on this site. The old homestead had originally been on the bank of the Waimakariri but they moved it to the Eyre.

A new road in the district, running west off Poyntzs Road, has been named Worlingham Road.

The Warren

The Warren lay on the south bank of the Eyre River between Burnt Hill and Worlingham. It was first secured by Cookson and Bowler, who were speculators, and contained 12,000 acres. They sold it within a year and it was subsequently purchased in 1855 by Major Thomas Woolaston White, who named it and started it as a separate station with his brother. By 1858 he had 1800 sheep on it but he got into difficulties and the property was sold to G.W.H. Lee. Lee died in 1883, and the farm was managed until 1912, when Robert Chapman bought it as 5184 acres freehold. He cut it up and sold it soon afterwards.

The Warren School was situated on South Eyre Road and served the families of the district until 1992 when it closed.