

# RESERVOIR CREEK

## Historical Notes Following European Settlement



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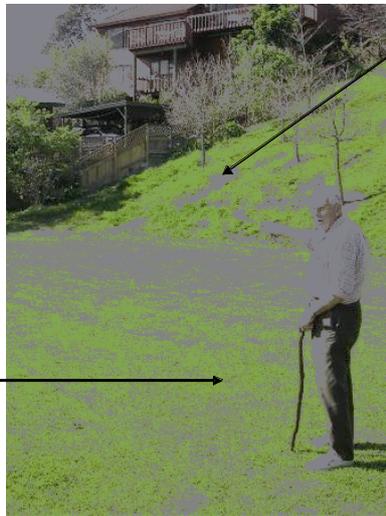
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## **Easby Park Below Cropp Place**



Yel Sutton on the Griffin Tennis Court  
Pointing at the Richmond Corps Rifle Range



Cambrian Coal Mine  
1862 -1880  
Upstream Easby Car park



### **Cover**

Photograph of Selbourne Homestead Hill St 1890 Courtesy of Mr. Yelvin Sutton

## RESERVOIR CREEK

### Historical Notes Following European Settlement

Initially we did not believe we would source a great deal of background history with specific relevance around the Reservoir Creek environment. For the most part the creek is close to the eastern boundary of the original Richmond village, well away from the early “mainstream” of development and commerce.

The information base changed drastically after locating three long-term Richmond residents who were born prior to 1920, who lived, worked and played along Reservoir Creek. Even now the task to report on these interviews seems overwhelming.

This report is by no means a complete assessment of European historical background as it relates to the Reservoir Creek environment. The time and the resources necessary for detail are not available through this SMF grant.

The European colonisation of Nelson (including Waimea East) was conceived and planned by the New Zealand Company in London at the beginning of the 1840's<sup>1</sup>. A copy of J W Barnicoats rough survey plan (Richmond)<sup>2</sup> of July 1842 is attached (Appendix 1). Reservoir Creek flows through sections 88, 90, 68, 69 and 79 to the Waimea Estuary.

Investigations have failed to determine a name for Reservoir Creek prior to the construction of the now defunct Reservoir in the early 1890's. A geological survey map dated October 1910 identifies the creek as “Reservoir Gully” (Appendix 2). Interviews with long-term residents that have historical ties with the creek would suggest the waterway was known simply as “The Creek”.

The first historical reference of note along the banks of Reservoir Creek occurs on section 88 that was land originally purchased by a Mr. Tollemache. In March 1862 a man named Roberts opened the Cambrian Coal Mine.<sup>3</sup> The mine itself is located just upstream of present day Marlborough Crescent above the Easby Park carpark on the true left of Reservoir Creek. The coal is in Tertiary (Eocene) coal measures caught up along the Waimea Fault. The coal dips steeply, is crushed and discontinuous and while of high volatile bituminous rank has high sulfur content.<sup>4</sup>

Roberts relinquished the claim after extracting 100 tons of coal that was used for steam engines and household heating. In 1872 Mr William Higgs, who now owned the property called Barrington Farm, reopened the mine and sold 30 tons to Symonds Flax Mill and some for use in Snowdens and Gappers traction engines.<sup>5</sup> An inspection of the mine in 1873 indicated that the workings were very unstable due to rotting and insufficient timber. Despite this a man named Weir in 1880 removed another 300 ton of coal. These workings were below Reservoir Creek level and water inflows soon brought the operation to conclusion.

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<sup>1</sup> Nelson A Regional History

<sup>2</sup> The name “Richmond” first appeared on 4-11-1845. From: How Richmond Grew

<sup>3</sup> How Richmond Grew

<sup>4</sup> Dr Mike Johnston

<sup>5</sup> How Richmond Grew

Almost immediately opposite of the Cambrian Coal Mine, on the true right of Reservoir Creek on section 90, is the site of a former rifle range. Following the Wairau Massacre settlers of the District were very uneasy “and held fears especially when the men were absent from home all day”.<sup>6</sup> This in addition to an incident at Happy Valley Wakapuaka resulted in the volunteering to form armed groups in their respective areas in 1845.

The rifle range on George Sutton’s property<sup>7</sup> was likely used by the Richmond Corps prior to 1868. This range was 500 yards long and volunteers would shoot from the bottom of present day Selbourne Street to targets just below “the butts” above Easby Park.<sup>8</sup> The targets are today located below Cropp Place, under a residential carport. Jean Sutton’s book “How Richmond Grew” reports that combined Nelson City Cadets and Richmond Corps held camps on the Sutton’s paddock in August 1875 and Easter 1879. In 1881 many of these participants were the first outside troops to arrive at the North Island uprising at Parihaka. It is not known when activities at the rifle range ceased. The last report was around the turn of the century when the Martini Henry rifles were replaced by Lee-Enfield magazine rifles.

As the Richmond Borough developed there was an increasing demand for water. This was especially true for the Volunteer Fire Brigade relying solely on wells, ditches and tanks.<sup>9</sup> A proposal to construct an earthen dam behind Richmond was rejected in 1880. However a second plan put to residents in September 1885 at a public meeting was “enthusiastically received”. A notice was sent to William Higgs (section 88) and John Sutton (section 90) to ask if they had objections to the proposed scheme as the stream from the gully to be dammed (Reservoir Creek) ran through their properties.<sup>10</sup> Pipes and ironwork, clearly visible today, was ordered from Scotland and arrived on the *S.S. Glenora* amounting to 120 tons.

Fencing, trenching and construction commenced in 1890. Olivier Sutton ploughed the pipeline from the Reservoir site to Hill Street with a pair of horses.<sup>11</sup> The original dam face was constructed with logs to contain a 12-foot head of water with an estimated storage of 1,200,000 gallons of water. Later the spillway was raised to 20 feet to enhance water storage. It appears the new Reservoir was operational in 1893. The Reservoir was a closed area for public access though a duck shooter drowned at this site near the turn of the century. By 1970 alternative sources of water supply resulted in the closure of the Reservoir. At 113 years of age Tasman District Council has concerns about the existing dam structure and related issues for public safety. Future management options are currently being considered.

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<sup>6</sup> How Richmond Grew

<sup>7</sup> The Sutton property “Selbourne” was purchased from the magistrate John Nixon in 1853

<sup>8</sup> Pers.com. Yelven Sutton

<sup>9</sup> How Richmond Grew

<sup>10</sup> W Higgs was not happy about the proposal and land had to be purchased for the water main passing through his land.

<sup>11</sup> Pers.com Yelven Sutton

As previously mentioned three surviving members of Richmond's original European pioneers took time to answer my numerous questions. This resulted in a snapshot of life along Reservoir Creek in the 1920-40's. My only regret is not having the time to report on the many fascinating and colourful stories. Age and beauty must be considered in the first instance...

### Phyllis Field (nee Griffin)

Phyllis was born on August 8<sup>th</sup> 1914 in a nursing home on Brougham Street in Nelson. Her father, George Griffin, manager of the Nelson Griffin biscuit factory, purchased Barrington Farm (section 88) following the death of William Higgs in 1918. The farmhouse was re-built and the property re-named "Dellside". The farm was run by two of Phyllis' brothers, Augustus and Harry. The name "Dellside" comes from a convalescence home located near South Hampton<sup>12</sup> where Gus recuperated during WW1.

The Griffin children played in Reservoir Creek catching "crawlers", eels and large kokopu. Cooking the koura was a great delicacy. The Griffin boys dammed a section of the creek and dug a swimming hole that can still be observed today at E2526970 N5983987. The swimming pool is located almost immediately across the creek from the former Cambrian Coalmine in Easby Park. Gus and Harry Griffin lost a horse in this mineshaft and Phyllis was instructed to stay away from this area. It is significant to note that a Maori adze was recovered from the swimming hole and Chris Hemi (Ngati Kuia) is investigating this further.

Approximately 60 metres upstream from the swimming hole was a large sheep dip built by William Higgs in the 1870's. It was a plunge and dip operation that was used by the Griffin and the Sutton families and later, until 1956, by the wider community.<sup>13</sup>

The Griffins had a tennis court at Easby Park and the level area of grass can still be observed today.<sup>14</sup> The tennis court is located below Cropp Place along the face of the former target range. Every Saturday carloads of friends and family turned up for tennis matches and picnic lunches. Below the tennis court where the present day footbridge crosses Reservoir Creek from the car park was the area where the Griffin family kept their pigs.

The Griffins ran a milking herd of pedigree Jersey cows and the cowshed was located at the present day Easby Park car park and playground area. Below this area to Hill Street the Griffins grew tobacco. In addition the Griffins grew new potatoes and green peas. There was also a plum orchard on the Dellside farm.

The original Griffin homestead survives today and is located on 28 Marlborough Crescent. Across the road along the base of the hill is an area recognised for a large number of fossils and Maori middens. Phyllis has written a book called *Families Matters* and a short extract is attached as Appendix 3.

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<sup>12</sup> Pers.com Tom Griffin

<sup>13</sup> TDC have now investigated this site and no contaminations (arsenic) have been identified

<sup>14</sup> This was shown to me by Phyllis and Yelven Sutton

## Yelven Oliver Sutton

Yelven was born in 1918 and lived at Selbourne until 1954. His great-grandfather George arrived to Nelson on board the *Bolton* in 1842. In 1853 George bought sections 68, 90 and part 66 and built the Selbourne homestead. "Selbourne" is named after the Sutton's home village in East Meon, below Somerset. The homestead was located on Hill Street almost opposite from present day Sutton Street. It was taken down in 1978 to make way for subdivision.

George Sutton initially planted hops on the property that he had brought over from England. The hop mill was located behind present day 167 Hill Street. Yelven's grandfather John Sutton took over the farm when George moved to upper Hill Street in 1896. In addition to 2 acres of tobacco at Easby Park opposite the Griffin pigsty the Sutton family had the largest herd of pedigree Jersey milking cows in the District.

Yelven's father, Oliver Charles, was next to take over the running of the farm. Olivier's sister, Mary, married William Higgs who had the neighbouring Barrington Farm approximately 500 metres uphill of the Selbourne homestead (this was to be the Griffin Dellside farm in 1918).

The Sutton's also had dug a large swimming hole in Reservoir Creek. This was located at the playground area of Easby Park.<sup>15</sup> As a boy Yelven can recall catching eels, kokopu ("native trout", bullies ("cockabullies") and koura ("yabbies") near the swimming hole but the creek often went dry for approximately 6 weeks every year.<sup>16</sup> Another boyhood activity was digging out lead bullets at the target range and melting them down to make sinkers for sea fishing. Yelven remembers large populations of native pigeons (kereru) on the farm in his younger years.

Yelven's uncle, Herbert Sutton, ran the farm on sections 66 and 68 below Hill Street. Reservoir Creek flows through this area now called Welsh Place and Alexandra Park. This was primarily a sheep farm that was sold to Putty Hurst who in turn sold the property to the Nelson Hospital Board in 1957. This area includes the present day location of the Alexandra Home for the elderly.<sup>17</sup> Herbert Sutton's home still stands today at 151 Hill Street.

Yelven's brother's John and Victor<sup>18</sup> (Sutton Bros.) farmed part section 79 below Salisbury Road where Reservoir Creek flows into the Waimea Estuary. This land (41 acres) was purchased from the Allport family in 1931.<sup>19</sup> The Sutton farm was called "Mayroyd" and in addition to a few pigs there was a large milking herd of pedigree Jersey cows. In 1960 John observed Reservoir Creek "turning black" and with one swipe of large milk can filled it with whitebait.<sup>20</sup> John Sutton's home still stands on

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<sup>15</sup> This area of the creek was put into pipes in 1970

<sup>16</sup> Yelven reports that his father mentioned the creek did not dry up so much until the Reservoir was commissioned in 1893. There was also an increasing demand for water as the Richmond population expanded.

<sup>17</sup> The original Alexandra Home was in existence in 1874 within the Taranaki Buildings

<sup>18</sup> Victor Sutton resided where Garin College is located today.

<sup>19</sup> Allports purchased this land from Thomas Holdaway in the early 1890's

<sup>20</sup> Pers.com Yelven Sutton

TDC land across the road from Raeward Fresh. The new ASB Aquatic Centre now occupies part of the Mayroyd farm site

### (Randall) George Cannon McMurtry

George is 87 years old and was born in Templemore Homestead that still stands today on Salisbury Road. His grandfather of Irish descent came to Nelson in 1907 at the invitation of Maoriland Copper Company. George McMurtry Sr. had much to do with the local copper mines at Aniseed Valley and the Champion Mine being General Manager at both.

In 1907 Georges Grandmother Annie purchased part section 69 from Henry Holdaway.<sup>21</sup> Annie supervised the erection of a spacious 14-room dwelling that was completed at Christmas 1907. The new home was given the name “Templemore”, a nostalgic reminder of a small Irish village west of Londonderry in County Donegal. The people of this village had treated George’s grandparents with kindness when they were on a family pilgrimage in the 1880’s.

McMurtry’s soon joined the orchard boom and planted 25 acres of apples, pears, peaches, nectarines, quince and plums. There was also a small herd of dairy cows. Georges father Lawrence was born in 1890 and George senior passed away in October 1918.

The names Reservoir Creek and Templemore Pond did not exist when George was a young boy. They were known simply as the pond and creek. The pond in particular was a favourite haunt for George and his friends. A lot of time was spent paddling around on rafts. The pond was located on the Huffams boundary<sup>22</sup> with McMurtry’s where two streams came together<sup>23</sup>. Near a large poplar tree at the pond George found a very large archaic flint adze which has been dated to 1200 AD. It is presumed that wakas were made at this site from former stands of local totara trees.

Catching eels, whitebait and koura were also popular activities on Reservoir Creek. George can remember taking home kerosene tins full of koura to cook up. At the estuary off John Suttons farm sizeable quantities of whitebait were taken. Beyond the mudflats flounders were plentiful.

In 1929 Lawrence experimented with plum wine and by 1933 major production of apple (and some pear) wine began. It wasn’t long before thousands of gallons of the popular wine were being produced annually, the income being twice that of the dairy cow production.

Following a tour of duty in WW2 with the British army George took over a town supply herd of dairy cows and grew peas and beans on Templemore farm while his

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<sup>21</sup> Henry’s father John Holdaway was a passenger on the *Whitby* arriving to Nelson in 1841. John owned 50 acres of land on the Salisbury/Champion Road corner.

<sup>22</sup> Huffams also purchased part of section 69 from Holdaway and owned the land on the Nelson side of Reservoir Creek. Mr.Huffams was a meat inspector (Pers. com Yelvan Sutton) but also ran dairy cows on his property.

<sup>23</sup> This is believed to be the Stillwater/Reservoir Creek confluence.

parents continued with the wine making. George left Templemore and moved to Cushendall Homestead (Upper Moutere) in 1951.

Templemore was bought by a local land agent following George McMurtry's departure and leased to Colin Bolitho who cropped barley from the property.<sup>24</sup> On 20 February 1961 Warwick Marshall took over the lease and he reports the property and plant was in a fairly run down state. At this time the Reservoir Creek riparian zone was covered in blackberry. Warwick reports that his two sons caught 10-12 inch kokopu in the creek during the early 1960's.

Trevor Ivory purchased the Templemore property from a syndicate in 1970. Again the property was run down. The land was mostly in gorse and dry ground. Some peas were still grown. The homestead was also in a sorry state with dead sheep in the kitchen. Fortunately however a decision was made to restore the original homestead rather than to tear it down.

Trevor built a very large dam on the property and connected this to a smaller one. By now the "pond" was nothing more than a ditch. The new ponds became irrigation water supply for strawberries and boysenberries. Trevor reports there were trout and a lot of ducks in the pond and his staff did some hunting.

Today the Templemore Pond lies within a new subdivision and is part of the Tasman District Council Reserve system. It is enjoyed by thousands of residents for their recreation and well being.

There are many more additions to the story of Reservoir Creek and a lot of individuals who are eager to provide additional pages to the story. We hope that this brief overview will be useful for any person who takes on the challenge.

*This report is part of a MfE/TDC supported Sustainable Management Fund Project: Reservoir Creek-Restoration of an Urban Stream*



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<sup>24</sup> Notes from Warwick Marshall