

**accent** edited by nancy dexter

# Delatite has had names —and owners—galore

LIVING WITH  
HISTORY  
ANNE LATREILLE



The cluster of buildings that is Delatite home-stand stands in the shadow of Mt. Buller, just above a lazy bend in the Delatite River.

You can't see the river from the main house — even though it's literally at the bottom of the garden — as it is obscured by huge cork elms, pear trees, basket willows planted over the years by different owners.

But the musical sound of

rushing, tumbling water is always in the air.

Delatite has had almost as many names as it has owners.

The overlanders, Watson and the six Hunter brothers, called it the Head Station Run when they claimed it in 1828 as part of a mammoth holding of about 1000 square miles in the area. They also called it Borolite. Soon after, it was christened Loyola.

It became Delatite after being purchased in 1853 by Alfred and George Chenery. These brothers transferred the name from their earlier holding on the other side of the river.

Little but a crumbled brick chimney remains of Alick Watson and James Hudson's first dwelling, on a hill facing the present complex.

Geoffrey Ritchie, who with his brother Robert now runs the property for his father, Mr. R. G. Ritchie, suspects this must have been a slab hut.

"There are slabs in our shearing shed which I am pretty sure came from it," he says.

Watson and Hudson weren't around for long. Investments they'd made elsewhere for fellow Scot, the Marquis of Ailsa, had already fizzled. Then in the mid 1840s their own firm struck trouble and the authorities ordered subdivision of their vast tract.

## Home made

The Chenery brothers put up Delatite's oldest extant building some time after 1853.

It's a delightfully simple house of hand-made bricks, with a steep pitched roof whose timber shingles are still intact under corrugated iron, and a generous verandah supported on sturdy timber posts round all four sides.

It was originally three rooms of identical size, all entered from the verandah. The Ritchies have installed some partitions and now use it as office, spare bedroom, storeroom &c.

Shouldering up against it is the "new" house, an assertive but graceful single-storeyed, late Victorian homestead.

This was built in the late 1880s by Henry Ricketson (who had bought Delatite from the Chenerys) for his manager, Edward Macartney.

Ricketson hailed from Canada and is described in Peck's *Memoirs of a Stockman* as "a speculator born and bold". He owned land all over the place.

It is thought he came to

Delatite only for visits. His daughter Amy left permanent evidence of these, scratching her name with a diamond on the glass of a bedroom window.

Manager Macartney was the son of the first Anglican dean of Melbourne — and, coincidentally, the great-uncle of Kay Ritchie, daughter-in-law of Delatite's present owners.

He was said to be a firm disciplinarian and, says Peck, "too to the stockman or groom who left anything, even a strap, out of place".

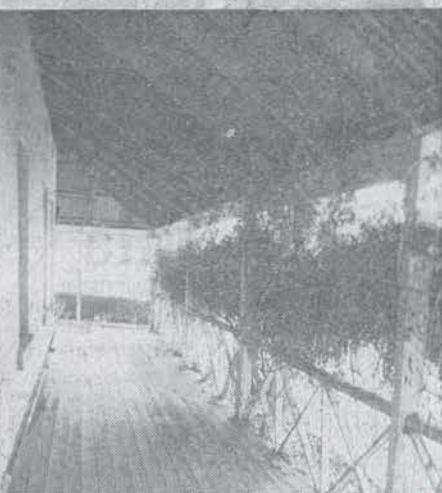
Kay Ritchie recalls: "He couldn't stand anyone who didn't pull their weight. And he was fiery."

"There's a story that once, during harvesting, some men were playing Solo behind a hayshed during working hours. One got a good hand and called out 'I'll go alone'. My great-uncle appeared round the corner of the shed and said: 'No, you won't. You'll all go together.'"

## Bay windows

Geoffrey Ritchie's grandfather acquired Delatite in 1902.

He made some alterations, notably bay windows, to the "new" house and walled in some sections of the lace-fringed verandah which runs right round it.



Verandah of the 1850s house at Delatite, with delicate creeper-encrusted railing.

(This has a novel U-shaped channel into the back, complete with trellised roof, cast iron fringe and posts.)

It is most interesting — and unusual — to see early colonial, Victorian and Edwardian architecture all in the space of 100 yards.

Behind the "new" house there's a cool store of the same vintage as the Chenery house. It has a sunken floor and is now used for hanging meat and storing apples.

Nearby, marooned in a sea of bluebells, is an ancient wheeled shepherd's hut which used to be dragged round by a team of horses at lambing time.

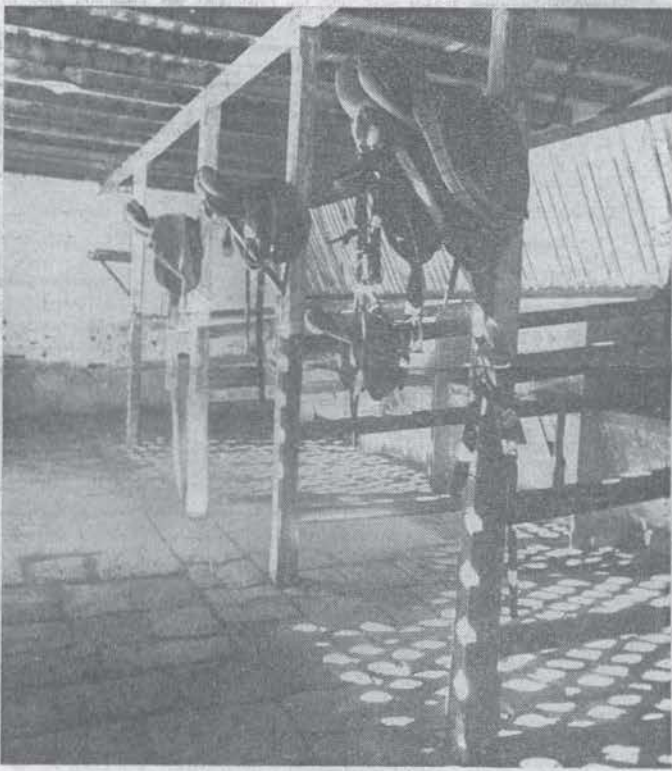
Delatite has magnificent stables, too, classified by the National Trust.

They're inscribed 1891, but some internal walls of local stone could perhaps be older.

The old store, where farm workers came to get supplies, is in the front of the stable block. Its lining board counter, and ceiling with hooks from which once hung flour bins, sugar and tea, are in good condition.

The stables themselves have cool flagged floors and rows of dusty, fragrant feed boxes.

They are still in use but not to the same extent as when Geoffrey Ritchie remembers them "full of horses", with eight riding horses, and about six draught horses being brought in every day.



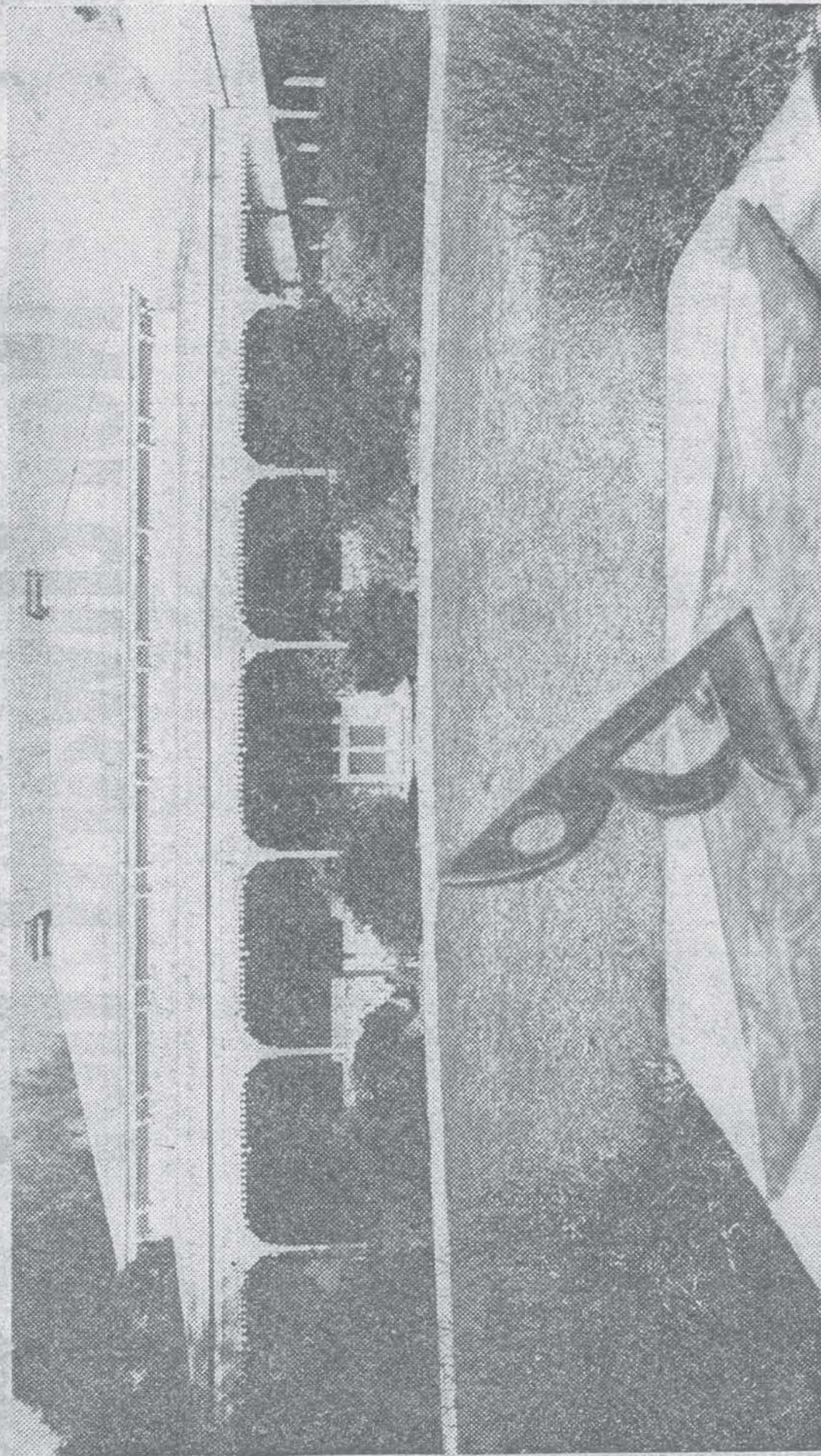
Stable interior at Delatite, Mansfield.

the 1850s.



THE AGE, Friday, July 20, 1973

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The "new" Delatite homestead, flanked on the right by the older house built in the 1850s.



# In Retrospect

MANSFIELD COURIER

December 14th 1889

## SHEARING AT DELATILL STATION

The shearing this year has been done for the first time by the Wolsely Sheep Shearing machine.

Many visitors have been to the shed to see the machine at work. Mr. Lewell, the manager of the shed, and Mr. Barrow have been most patient in trying to explain the why and wherefore of everything. On the side of the wall of a small compartment was erected an emery wheel revolving at very fast speed upon which were sharpened the blades of the shears. The shears are worked on the same principle with regard to the cutters as a horse-clipper, a set of fingers fixed about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches long, on the top of these three short blades. When they are forced through the wool it is severed from the sheep. Each shearer has a brake handle on his machine.

The most sheep shorn in a day by one man was 114, and they were big crossbred wethers. The average is about 95 sheep a day.