

INTRODUCTION

The Cox family is one of considerable historical importance in both Mulgoa and Mudgee, for they pioneered both districts and contributed much to their development. George Cox, along with his brothers Henry and Edward, established noted Mulgoa district estates: George was at Winbourne, Henry at Glenmore and Edward at Fernhill. They were the sons of Lieutenant William Cox who constructed the first road from Emu Plains over the Blue Mountains to Bathurst in 1814–1815; all four men played significant roles in settling the Bathurst, Mudgee and Rylstone districts, albeit as absentee landlords. George Cox's Winbourne estate and mansion in particular played a significant role in the agricultural and social life of the Mulgoa district in the nineteenth century.

GEORGE COX

George Cox was born on 18 February 1795 at Devizes, Wiltshire, the fourth son of William Cox and Rebecca, nee Upjohn. William Cox, born at Wimbourne Minster, Dorset, England, 19 December 1764, became a Lieutenant in the NSW Corps and arrived in Sydney on 11 January 1800 per *Minerva*, accompanied by his wife and four of their sons: James, aged 10; Charles, 7; George, 5½; and Henry, 4. After an unsuccessful start at Brush Farm at Pennant Hills, the Cox family settled at Clarendon, Windsor, in 1804.

William and his sons became interested in land in the Mulgoa district, and in 1810 Edward, at the age of four, received the first grant in the area, of 300 acres, which ultimately became Fernhill. George Cox's grant of 600 acres, the future site of Winbourne, spelt originally without the 'e', was made on 8 October 1816. Evidently the date '1809', subsequently engraved on a sundial in the grounds of Winbourne, was an error. Henry Cox's grant developed into the property which came to be called Glenmore, where he built his homestead circa 1825. In February 1822 George and Henry, who had been managing their father's properties at Mulgoa and Bathurst, also took up land in the Mudgee district at Menah and Burrundulla, and Edward took up land at Rylstone. George's Mudgee holdings were later managed by his eldest son, George Henry, but George visited two or three times a year. Nevertheless, he maintained extensive correspondence with his sons at Mudgee, and many of these letters in the period 1846–1849 have been published by his descendants. There was a good deal of movement of stock between Mulgoa and Mudgee and often employees were also moved.

On 22 June 1822 George married Eliza Bell, daughter of Lieutenant Archibald Bell, of Belmont, Richmond. They lived first at The Cottage – the Cox family's Mulgoa outstation, situated near the present Saint Thomas's church – and there the first son, George Henry, was born in 1824.¹ Later that year George and Eliza took up residence on their grant.

¹ This house still stands and is owned by architectural historian James Broadbent.

To George and Eliza Cox were born seven sons and four daughters: Georgina (1823), George Henry (1824), Archibald Bell (1825), Rebecca (1827), Charles Clarendon (1831), Sophia (1832), James Dalrymple (1834), Frederick Savage (1836), Alexander Hassall (1837), Albert Tarleton (1840) and Amelia Una (1842). The eldest son, George Henry, subsequently distinguished himself as member of Parliament for the County of Wellington, and in 1863 he was appointed a member of the Legislative Council. He was also the first Mayor of Mudgee, and became famous as a sheep-breeder in that district. All the sons were noted sheepbreeders in the Mudgee district: Charles Clarendon established the Broombee stud, James Clarendon established Cullenbone stud, and Frederick Savage and Alexander Hassall established Wallinga stud.

In 1838 George Cox gave considerable financial donations for the erection of Saint Thomas's Anglican church at Mulgoa, and he donated 40 acres of his land adjoining Mulgoa Creek for the rectory and glebe.



St Thomas's Anglican Church, Mulgoa (John Broadley)

On Winbourne George ran the famous flock of sheep which his father had bought from Captain Waterhouse when the latter left Australia. In 1830 he moved the Waterhouse flock, which had improved under his judicious management, to Burrundulla, keeping Winbourne as his home.

George developed Winbourne into a showplace. At home, George radiated kindness; he was a good master, and even Donohue and Walmsley, the bushrangers, refused to rob him when they discovered who he was. He loved his garden, and it is recorded that he often appeared at Saint Thomas's with an armful of flowers, which he would arrange beautifully in the church. Winbourne was a hospitable and happy home, and so popular with its people that during the gold-rush, when everyone's servants disappeared, it is said that not one of the Winbourne staff deserted.

George Cox was a considerate man, concerned for the welfare of his employees. The Cox brothers had the reputation of being fair-minded and generous to convicts employed there and quite often the convicts returned to work on

Winbourne after being freed. In his will George requested that any old servants who were at Winbourne at the time of his death should remain there as long as they wished and were to be 'treated with kindness for my sake'.



George Cox (Mudgee Historical Society)

A family man, George Cox was a tolerant and affectionate father. It was his large family of eleven which necessitated expansion of the house in 1840, when, according to George:

I am now at heavy expense adding another storey to my present house. My former friends will understand it is no trifling task but my family became so large that I found it absolutely necessary.

When George Cox died on 20th August 1868, he was mourned not only by his family and friends in the Mulgoa valley, but by the Sydney community, as evidenced by this tribute in the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

Although long well known as a sheep owner and landed proprietor as well as the kind and generous dispenser of hospitality at his spacious house at Winbourne, Mulgoa, resembling an English mansion, and though in consequence of his high character and standing he was invited by Sir William Denzil to take seat in the upper house under its first formation under our present constitution, an honour which he at once declined, his retiring and unassuming disposition prevented him from ever being in any sense of the word a public character. Nevertheless few men in the colony have gone to the grave leaving a name so generally honoured as a landlord, a master, a friend, as well as a liberal hearted Christian and one of the best and most single hearted of men. He attracted to himself a love and respect which it is the lot of few men to win in so large a measure.

George Cox's wife, Eliza, died in 1876; both are buried at St. Thomas's, Mulgoa. On George Cox's death, Winbourne passed to George Henry, the eldest son.

GEORGE HENRY COX

George Henry Cox, eldest son of George and Eliza Cox, was a noted pastoralist and sheepbreeder. He was born on 18 October 1824 at Mulgoa. After three years at The Kings School and several terms under the Reverend T.C. Makinson, George Henry became manager of his father's grant at Burrundulla, Mudgee, in 1845. When gold was discovered west of Mudgee in 1851, George Henry decided to lease the fertile Burrundulla flats on the Cudgegong River in forty-acre farms at rents of about £100 a year. By the 1860s he had over thirty tenants, whose wheat, vegetables and dairy produce mostly went to the goldfields. In the 1850s and 1860s he also expanded his interests in the Liverpool Plains and on the Warrego in south-western Queensland, where he held extensive sheep and cattle runs in partnership with Vincent Dowling. By 1876 most of these leases had been sold but the last, Pine Ridge, north-west of Dubbo, he retained till 1899. On all his properties he experimented in the breeding of the Australian merino and did much to develop the fine, dense and elastic qualities for which Mudgee wool is famous. For many years he was a councillor of the Agricultural Society of New South Wales and president of the Sheepbreeders' Association. In 1862 his greasy merino fleeces won Thomas Mort's gold medal and he later won awards in Amsterdam and Calcutta.

A landlord who tried to introduce a squirearchy on the English model, Cox publicly maintained that the ownership of land carried social and political obligations. In Mudgee he was on every committee and local government body which appealed for public subscriptions; as member of parliament he obtained government grants toward the hospital, Mechanics' Institute and other organizations, and for many years before 1884 he led the agitation for the extension of the railway from Wallerawang to Mudgee. Through his influence Cudgegong was in July 1860 declared the first rural municipality in New South Wales and he became its first mayor. He was generally looked on as the patron of Mudgee and one of its 'most useful citizens'.

At thirty-two he entered politics as member for the County of Wellington in the first Legislative Assembly, and was returned unopposed in January 1858. With the reallocation of seats in the new parliament under manhood suffrage, Cox did not seek re-election but in June 1863 Charles Cowper appointed him to the Legislative Council where he sat continuously until his death, being then its longest standing member. He never held ministerial rank because he gave his vote where he chose and not always in the interests of conservative landowners. His consistent principles were free trade and the abolition of state aid to religion and Church schools. As a member of the Public Schools League in the 1870s he loudly proclaimed the benefits of public education, and would gladly show visitors over the model public school conducted at Burrundulla for his tenants' children. In 1856 he had favoured the extension of agriculture and small-scale farming and the opening of public lands to private settlement. Later he championed the cause of the farmers' and settlers' associations, even touring the colony on their behalf. His first speech in the council had been in support of legislation to abolish entail and primogeniture, and he continually advocated reform of the Legislative Council by the election of at least some of its members. In the late 1880s he strenuously supported Sir Alfred Stephen's divorce

extension bill and drew up the report of the royal commission into tanks and wells, based on his own observation of artesian water supplies in Pacific North America. But his last political ambition was never realized: despite his age he stood for the senate of the first Commonwealth parliament but was defeated, largely because he refused to stand as a party man.



George Henry Cox, circa 1885 (Cox family)

Cox was an active member of the Church of England. In 1841 his father had given land for the church glebe and cemetery of Saint John the Baptist, Mudgee, and his son continued as its most generous pew-holder and trustee. Two of his sisters had married clergymen, Canon Alfred Stephen and Archdeacon William White of Muswellbrook. He held a seat on the diocesan synod of Sydney from 1866 and of Bathurst from 1873. As chairman of committees of the Bathurst synod he was its most influential layman, taking special interest in financial matters. As trustee of the diocesan endowment he securely invested its funds in mortgages to the Cudgegong municipality. As the Bathurst representative to provincial and general synods he often found himself in opposition to most of the clergy, particularly in his support of public education. On questions of doctrine he met with strong episcopal censure both in Sydney and Bathurst when in 1888-89 he tried to revive the English debates on revision of the Prayer Book by a 'clipping and cutting process' intended to bring in the Nonconformists. But in temporal affairs his influence remained valuable. His last act on behalf of the Bathurst diocese was in a dispute over the cathedral finances in 1901, when he rose from his sick bed to lead a synod delegation to the Bathurst parishioners.

On 21 June 1853 he married his cousin Henrietta Jane, daughter of Henry Cox; they had five sons and seven daughters: Frances (1854), Henrietta Una (1855), George Henry Frederick (1858), Herbert Alexander (1860), Amy (1861), Lucy (1863), Alice (1866), Ada (1867), Reginald Belmore (1869), Florence (1871), Alan Mackenzie (1873) and Vincent Dowling (1875). The eldest son, George

Henry Frederick, was often at odds with his father and was virtually disinherited. Circa 1910 he is alleged to have compiled an unpublished manuscript which is a useful guide to the history of Mudgee and district.²

In 1864, George Henry completed a substantial two-storeyed house on Burrundulla at Mudgee to replace the old homestead. Its main staircase was lit by a stained glass window bearing the Cox crest and monograms and its living rooms adorned with prints, collected in Europe, of the Italian renaissance masters and paintings of more familiar subjects by Conrad Martens. George Henry died at Burrundulla on 28 November 1901. Burrundulla was inherited by the fifth and youngest son, Vincent Dowling, and it is still owned and occupied by his descendants.



Burrundulla homestead at Mudgee, circa 1900 (Mudgee Historical Society)

As a landowner and public figure in Mudgee Cox was widely respected, especially among his tenants, even though his manner was sometimes arbitrary. In politics he was one of the councillors who prided themselves on personal integrity and family name rather than party affiliations. Although his tenant farming and religion might suggest the pattern of English society he took pride in his colonial birth and stock and fostered colonial enterprise in everything from public education to the development of the outback by artesian wells and the better breeding of the Australian merino.

George Henry obtained considerable wealth from his pastoral pursuits and entertained lavishly at Winbourne, with guests often including vice-regal parties. He improved the estate and over the years increased the holding greatly. He divided his time between Winbourne, Burrundulla at Mudgee, and a summer house, Beowang, now Withycombe, which he built at Mount Wilson, of which he was one of the founding settlers. He built up his reputation as one of the great sheep breeders of the Western District. His flock of Gordon merinos

² Evidence which came to light at Burrundulla in the early 2000s suggests that his sister Lucy may have been the true author of this manuscript.

were brought to Mulgoa before being taken to Mudgee. Wool from these Mulgoa sheep brought the highest international recognition.

In the 1890s depression George Henry lost heavily, primarily from being over-extended on pastoral holdings in Queensland. He leased Winbourne and returned to Mudgee. In 1901 he was forced to sell Winbourne which was purchased by Peter Charles Hewitt. George Henry died soon afterwards; according to his grand daughter, Edna Hickson, daughter of Vincent Dowling Cox, it was alleged that he died of a broken heart at the loss of Winbourne. Henrietta Cox died in Mudgee in 1911.

Obituaries of George Henry Cox

The death of Mr. G. H. Cox occurred at his residence, Burrundulla, Mudgee, on Thursday last. In the passing of George Henry Cox, New South Wales loses a valued citizen whose long and active and honorable career has been peculiarly bound up with the political and social development of this State. The father of a New South Wales Parliament, a pathetic interest attaches to the fact that in him died the last of the group who constituted the first Legislative House under responsible Government in 1856. The deceased gentleman was born at Mulgoa on 18th October, 1824, being the son of Mr Georg Cox. of "Winbourne", and grandson of Captain Cox, of the New South Wales Corps, who came to Australia on service in 1800, and at one time lived at Bathurst. Having received his education partly at King's School, Parramatta, and partly under the Rev. Thomas Makinson, of Mulgoa, Mr. Cox early in life established himself at Mulgoa where, in connection with his brother, he became actively involved in agricultural and grazing pursuits. As a wool grower, Mr. Cox takes high place. Wool from his flocks has in years past averaged as high as 4s 0½d per lb. His house at Burrundulla was full of the wool trophies he had won. They number three gold medals – one given in 1862 by Messrs. Mort and Co. for the best six fleeces of wool in the grease; another awarded at the Amsterdam Exhibition of the some year; and again in 1883 at Calcutta. In 1878 he won the Grand Prix at Paris for the best wool in the world. An Anglican, Mr. Cox found time to devote much of his energy to the work of his church. He was a member of the synod for the dioceses of both Bathurst and Goulburn. In 1853 Mr. Cox married the eldest daughter of the late Henry Cox, of Broombee, by whom he had family of five sons and seven daughters.

DEATH OF THE HON. G. H. COX, M.L.C. THE PASSING OF A HERO

The end came on Thursday night last, and the grand old man passed over. Our readers have known that the end was coming, for he was fading gently away, but it comes as a shock, after all. He was in his 78th year, and he would like to have lived till he was 80; but, as he said himself, he had had a "good innings", and he was ready to go out without a murmur.

He was the "Father" of the Legislative Council; he was the president of the Sheep-breeders' Association; he was scores of things. But what he will be best remembered for was his goodness. He was a good man, and there is no better word to be said for anybody. He never spoke ill of his neighbours, but he helped every deserving case, and lots of undeserving ones. There is no man living who is no more easily taken down than was G. H. Cox. He couldn't believe that men were liars or knaves. His mind was so pure and clean and child-like. Today we count it to his honour. It was often to his loss.

But the best thing about him was not his skill as a sheep-breeder, nor his power as a statesman, but his deep love for his fellows. He was a squatter and the son of a squatter, and the grandson of the William Cox who cut the road across the Blue Mountains for Governor Macquarie; but he was a member of the Farmers and Settlers' Association. He was not only a member, but he was a worker. He was one of the council of the association, and a man who was a power in their midst. His voice was listened to with respect always, and his influence was for peace and progress all the time. He had no patience for the idea of "big men" and "little men". He held that the interest of all the men on the land were alike, and for that he lived and worked. His life was sweet and pure, and his influence was always on the side of good. Whatever else he accomplished during his long and busy life, it is certain that the work that he did for the Farmers and Settlers' has been the most far-reaching and effective.

He was also a member of the committee of the Farmers and Settlers' Co-operative Association, for he was always ready to give his money, time and labour for whatever he held to be for the good of his fellow men.

When other people were quarrelling and saying evil things about each other, his was always the voice that said "Peace be still", and many a breach he has healed. He was a friend to mankind always, and his death is a sore loss to the community.

He had a family of five sons and seven daughters, and his home was at Burrundulla (sic), Mudgee. His widow is a sweet and pleasant lady, and the sympathy of all the pastoral world will go out to her in this day of her great tribulation.

In his death the Farmers and Settlers' have lost a trusted leader, the Church of England has lost a pillar, the poor have lost a friend, and the State has lost a noble citizen. He was a good man!

My Personal Thoughts on George Henry Cox

George Henry Cox was the most significant personality in Mudgee's history. No other person has impacted as much or been associated with the development of the district as much as him. Yet, he probably spent little time in the district. He was a wanderer, often travelling around his extensive pastoral holdings in the district at Mudgee and at Leadville, between Coolah and Dunedoo, his Winbourne estate at Mulgoa, his mountain retreat at Mount Wilson, and attending to his parliamentary duties, which he took very seriously, in Sydney.

He was a man of contrasts. A harsh taskmaster, yet benevolent, strict with and remote from his sons as he was affectionate and indulgent to his daughters, a staunch Anglican while non sectarian. He encouraged his workers to become landowners, yet was infuriated when ever his landowning privileges were encroached upon. One of his descendants described him to me as 'a cranky old man' which is not wholly fair. An independent character who answered to no one, except perhaps to God, he would have probably been nominated for a knighthood if he had been affiliated with a particular group or political party; many lesser men of the times received knighthoods in dubious circumstances.

George Henry was associated with the establishment of numerous organizations in Mudgee town and district. He came to the district in 1845, when the town was only a fledgling settlement, became a prominent pastoralist in his own right, represented the district in the State's first Legislative Assembly before moving to the Upper House in the early 1860s and where he served until his death in 1901, an unrivalled parliamentary record even today. In the early 1860s he was closely associated with the establishment of Mudgee's Mechanic's Institute which aimed to educate the working man whose welfare genuinely concerned him.

George Henry Cox and Diana Mudgee Rayner

While autocratic, George Henry was also paternalistic and benevolent, and this may explain any assistance which he may have given to Diana Mudgee Rayner, a contemporary, whom he had obviously known from her early days at Mulgoa. It is significant that all of the portions in the Parish of Wiadere which were taken up by Diana and her family from the 1880s onwards were in the vicinity of George Henry's own landholdings. It should be pointed out, however, that often 'dummies' took up land grants in key areas on behalf of major landowners to avoid alienation of significant portions. Was this the case with George Henry and Diana, or was he genuinely assisting her and her family? Numerous letters from George Henry to one of his sons-in-law, George Stewart, whom he seemed to favour over his own five sons, have survived and remain in the archives of the Cox family at Burrundulla. A familiar theme which runs through George Henry's letter is his obsession with the encroachment of selectors upon his extensive landholdings. An examination of the length of land ownership history of the

portions taken up by Diana Mudgee Rayner and her family may well reveal the true intent of George Henry's assistance.

John Broadley, President of Mudgee Historical Society, 21 February 2006