



BIBRA LAKE

By Bill Thomas JP, MLA Member for Cockburn

ISSUE No. 4

PERSONAL NOTE

Last year I had great pleasure in launching the Cockburn Local History Project.

Since then I have had a great deal of support from residents who wish to know more about the history and environment of the district they live in.

Bibra Lake has developed from a pioneering agricultural district last century to a modern well serviced residential area.

Most people of Perth know of it for the lake itself and the associated recreational areas, including Adventure World.

The residential area on the eastern side of the lake is less well known. It is not intruded on by major roads but has convenient access to the rest of Perth through the nearby freeway system.

This booklet follows three earlier ones which dealt with the older areas of Hamilton Hill, Spearwood and Coolbellup.

BILL THOMAS, MLA



EARLY DAYS

The destiny of Bibra Lake seemed obvious shortly after the first European settlement of the State in 1829. As early as 1843, Benedict Von Bibra made a close inspection of the lake verge land district in his "leisurely summer days". It must have been the beauty or the tranquillity of the lake that encouraged the settlers to travel to the area in their spare time. This popularity resulted in the lake being reserved for recreation pur-

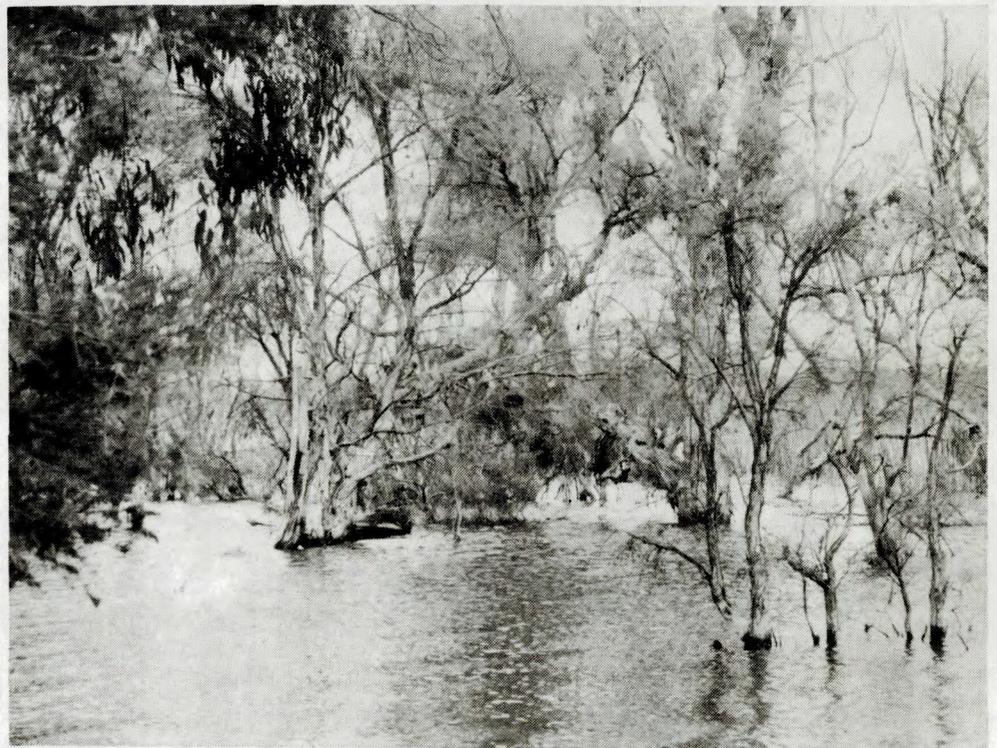
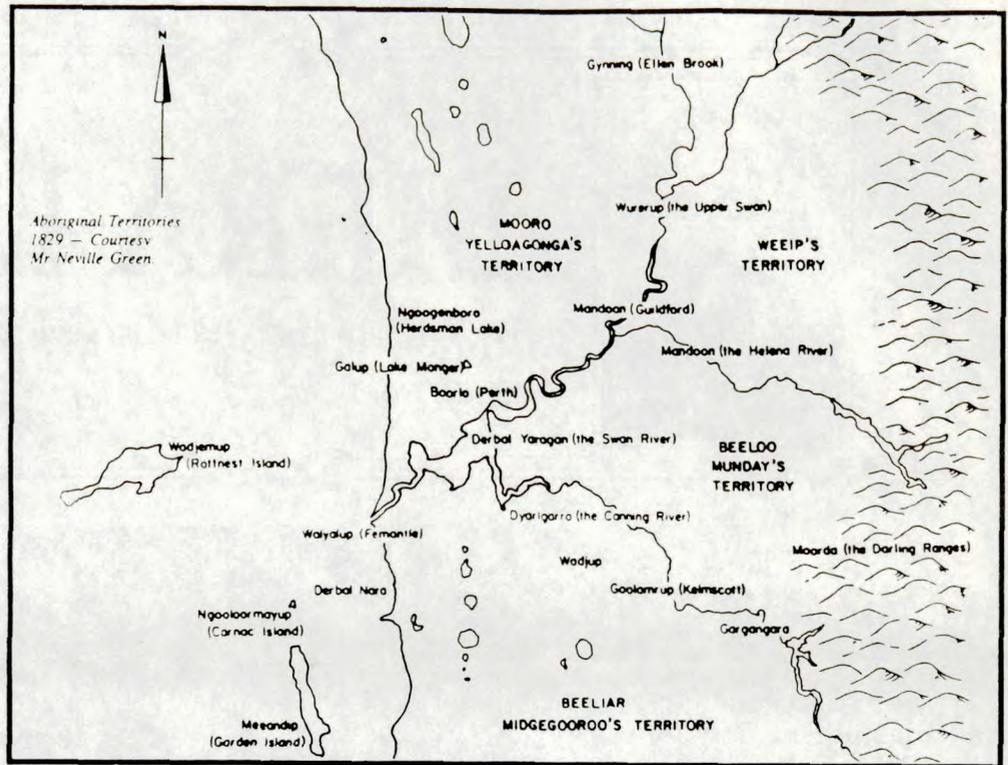
poses by the Fremantle District Roads Board in 1898. The Board opposed the lease for agriculture of land that fronted the lake in 1902 and developed a reserve and tea rooms on the western foreshore. Picnics, parties and social gatherings were common in the area around the turn of the century. Bibra Lake has never lost its appeal and has become a well known tourist attraction with the establishment of Adventure World Fun

The first to take interest in the land surrounding the lake was George Robb when in 1830, he acquired a 2000 acre grant which extended from Cockburn Road to North Lake. His grant included the northern part of the suburb's current boundaries along the north side of the lake.

In 1843 Benedict Von Bibra, a carpenter from Fremantle rode along the southern boundary of Robb's grant and selected 320 acres in a triangulation which extended almost a mile to the south. Maps of the period recorded the lake as pronounced by the Aboriginal Beelias tribe of the region as "Lake Walliabup". The lake was dry in summer but could reach a depth of 7 to 8 feet in winter and was a source of wildfowl and turtle for local Aborigines.

THE DECLINE OF LARGE ESTATES.

Between 1850 and 1870 steady development occurred at Bibra Lake with lots of 10-40 acres east of the lake being taken up. T A Cook held most of this land while to the south G F Moore acquired 320 acres of lake frontage land. Just south from Moore's 320 acres was John Healy's large estate, known as the Winterfold estate. It was one of the last remaining estates and comprised 1300 acres including 200 acres south of Bibra Lake.



Bibra Lake Swamplands

JOSEPH MELLER

In April 1887 Joseph Meller, who had recently arrived from Manchester, England, took a conditional purchase lease on 100 acres of land east of Bibra Lake which contained good swamp land. He built a mud brick home with mud from the lakes on today's Hope Road and established a market garden on the edge of the swamp that lay at the centre of his block. He paid two pounds and ten shillings a year for this lease which stipulated that within six months he had to reside on the land and fence one tenth of its boundaries. Providing these and other improvements had been met a Crown Grant could be issued after 5 years from the beginning of the lease. By 1900 Joseph Meller had 12 acres of market gardens and three acres of vineyards but in 1905 switched to dairy farming along with other settlers in the area. His Lakeview Dairy was as successful as all the others in the district, supplying milk to the many settlers in the surrounding areas.

Today, Joseph Meller's original home, directly on Homestead Road, has been lovingly converted into a practical family home by its present owner.



Joseph Meller's original home on present day Homestead Rd.

THE JANDAKOT AGRICULTURAL SCHEME

During the gold rushes the Lands and Surveys Department was put to the task of providing land in a size suitable for farming blocks for thousands of newcomers to Western Australia. On January 1, 1890, the land of the Jandakot Agricultural Area was open for selection. These lots threaded their way between early Crown Grants from Thomson's Lake, through Bibra Lake to North Lake and then met the original grants which extended south from the Swan River.

The early settlers in the scheme tried a wide variety of crops on their blocks. During winter the high grounds were planted with wheat or oats and during summer, as the swamps receded, maize or vegetables were planted in the lower lying areas. There was little access to water and many resorted to the back breaking job of digging deep drains to run water off from the swamp area. Drinking water came from the "white water" which bubbled up from springs in the swamp beds.

By 1899 almost all of the Jandakot agricultural blocks were taken up and room was made for new

settlers as selectors transferred or abandoned their leases.

Many of the new settlers came from the market gardening district of Brighton on the shores of Port Phillip Bay in Victoria. They brought with them the knowledge and experience of market gardening. With falling prices for their crops in Victoria and the rising cost of land many decided to try their luck in Western Australia. Many had been following the gold strikes to Western Australia. They found cheap land and soil identical to that in Brighton. In a short time, the Jandakot agricultural region was supplying 80% of vegetables sold to Fremantle markets and a large proportion sold in the Kalgoorlie market, providing Western Australia with one of its richest market gardening areas.

There was always the problem of transport - hauling their produce to market in heavy drays through the Jandakot sands. Some farmers were faced with three quarters of a mile of sand between their garden and the road and it could take three horses to pull a ton of produce through the stretch



A. Roche and W. Pearce with maize crop at Bibra Lake, 1904

of sand.

It became clear to the settlers that in order to fully develop their holdings the district would have to be serviced by a railway.

A number of Chinese gardeners established themselves in Bibra Lake. In 1897 John Cook ignored local prejudice and leased his 35 acre block to Ah Gong on reasonable terms. One of the largest market gardens at Bibra Lake was run by Quong Fad, a group of about thirty Chinese gardeners.

DAIRYING AT BIBRA LAKE

Many of the Victorian market gardeners, realising that high prices for their produce would not continue indefinitely, decided to try their hand at dairying. At that time

Western Australia was importing almost all its dairy products from Victoria and South Australia. The Currie brothers from Victoria bought 40 acres of Von Bibra's original land around the lake at the turn of the century and began dairying on their block. They called their dairy the Victoria Dairy presumably after their home state. They ran a herd of 104 cows with excellent grazing pastures. The swamp lands yielded abundant crops of lucerne and maize and they provided milk for as far afield as Fremantle. A later dairy farmer in the district was Ernest Meller, son of Joseph Meller, who ran a herd of 50 cows on his Bibra Lake property. He grazed his herd on a block on Forrest Road, Jandakot during winter. With the advent of motor vehicles, dairying at Bibra

Lake began to decline. While the distance of dairy farms from the metropolitan area was determined by the time it took a horse and trap to cart the milk in daily, dairy farmers had to make the best of poorer soils and pastures on the coastal plain around the city. With a motor truck farmers were able to move further south onto better soils and still get their milk into the city daily. From 1925 onwards many Bibra Lake dairy farmers began to leave the district.

RAIL SERVICE

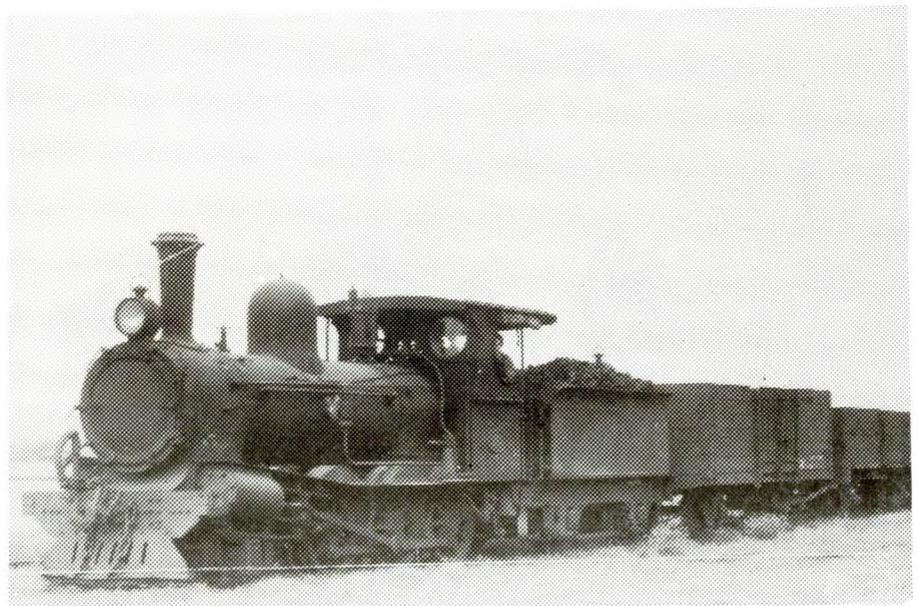
The South Western line had linked Bunbury to Perth in 1893 and the settlers urged the Government to build a link from this line to Fremantle. The Fremantle and Jandakot Districts Road Boards were at loggerheads as to the route of this rail link and finally, after a vigorous campaign by residents, the Jandakot Railway route was started in 1905 and completed in 1906 and extended to Armadale in 1908.

One immediate benefit of the rail link was that large quantities of animal manure from the south western agricultural districts were brought cheaply to the Jandakot District to maintain its intensive cultivation.



Above - Ernest Meller on milk delivery, 1916

Below - An A class coal fired steam locomotive on route to the South West



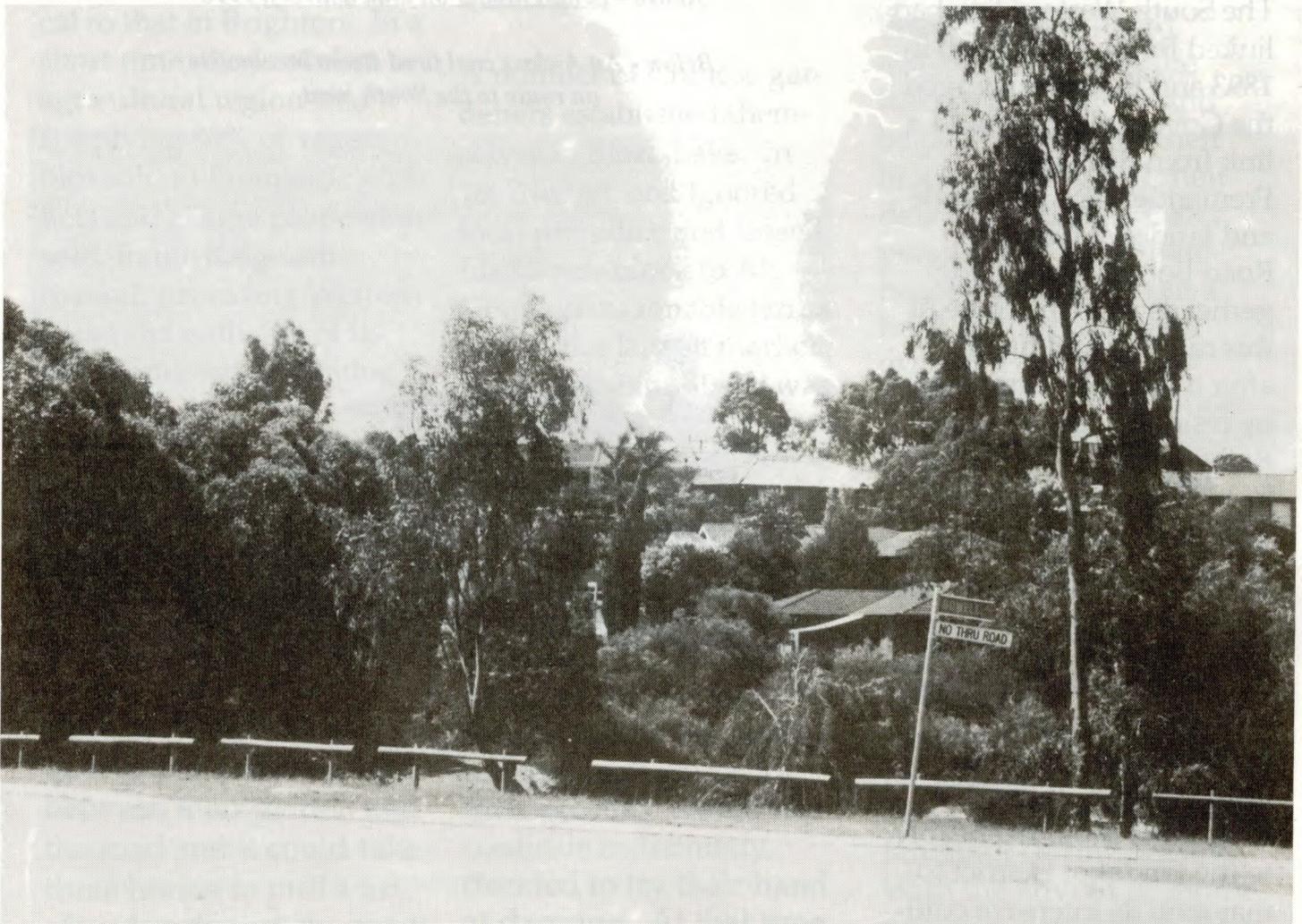
BIBRA LAKE : THE SUBURB

In October 1977 the then Minister for Urban Development and Town Planning, Mr E C Rushton, approved a development scheme that provided for the creation of about 1350 housing lots at Bibra Lake.

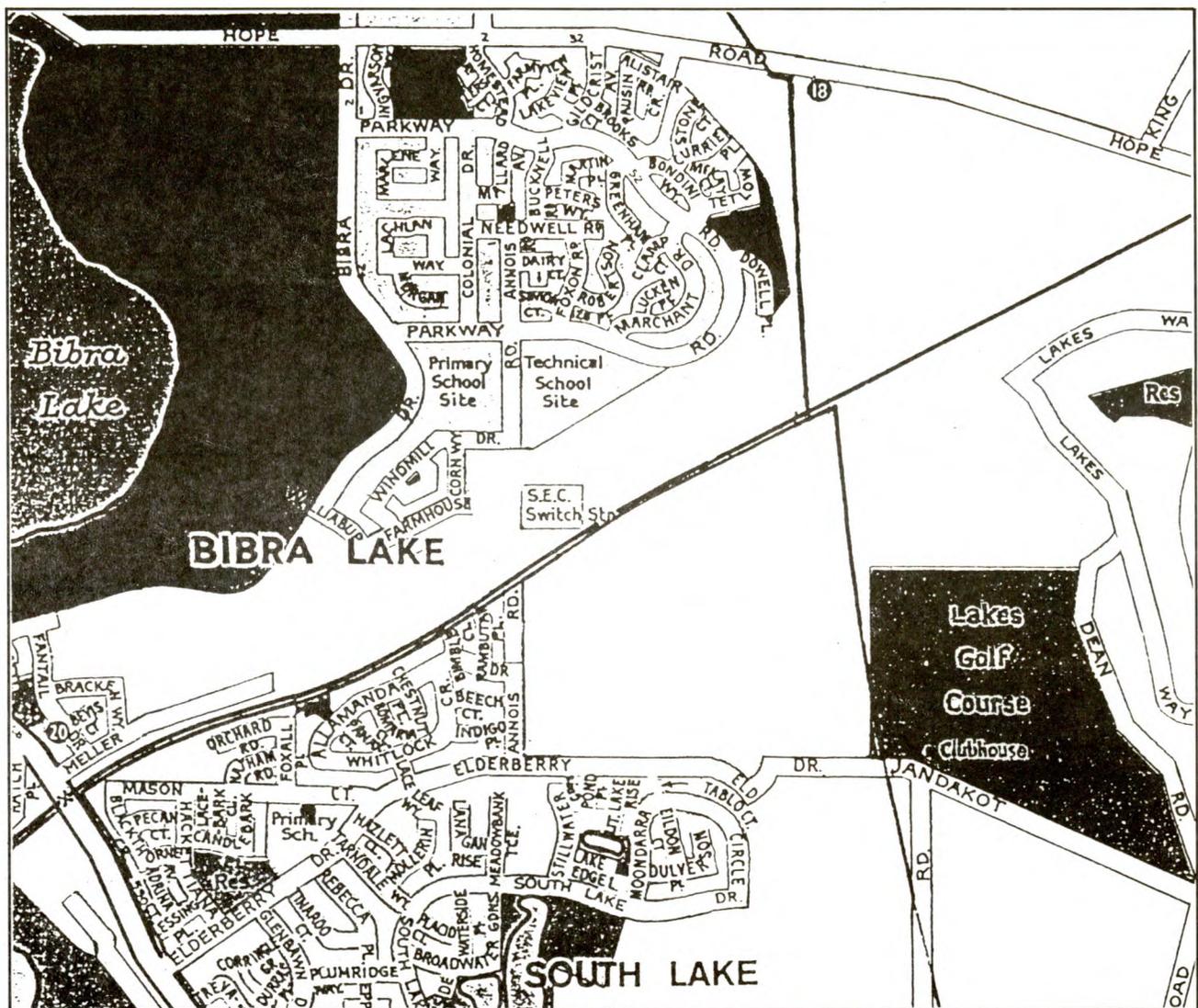
The development consisted of 162 hectares between the Bibra Lake parks and recreation regional reserve, the standard gauge railway and the proposed Roe and Kwinana Freeways.

It was envisaged that when completed the scheme area would function as a self contained neighbourhood. The scheme included provision for a primary school, a technical school, shopping centre, community facilities and public open spaces. Today most of this development has taken place but the proposal for a technical school has been abandoned in favour of a site on Murdoch Drive opposite the University.

The Cockburn district increased in population in the early seventies quite dramatically with industrial and business growth making the area around the lakes ideal for home building. The population had risen from 25,000 to 30,000 in six years to 1977 and has continued to rise ever since.



Auburn Park, off Parkway Road



This map is adapted from the metropolitan road directory published in 1985.

It shows that 7 years ago the suburb of Bibra Lake was little different to the suburb we know today. The major changes have been the construction of the Kwinana Freeway, which was a major development linking the south west corridor to the city, and the

completion of Bibra Drive. Street names in many cases are those of early settlers ie. Mellor, Ingvarson, Marchant and Currie.

Bibra Drive was a concern for residents when it was used as the arterial road by residents of other suburbs. The further extension of the freeway has largely solved this problem.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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