

# Community and Family

## Mcllwraith Family of Rhyll



### The second name to be drawn out of the land ballot

The Mcllwraith family were one of the earliest settlers on Phillip Island. Headed by James and Annie Mcllwraith (pictured left) they constructed their cottage in early 1869. It was originally a wattle and daub construction in the centre section and was subsequently extended with weatherboard additions to each side and the rear, which transformed it into a comfortable family home, without compromising its charm.

James and Annie were farmers in Melton before coming to the Island. In 1868, after James had made a visit to Phillip Island to inspect the quality of land which would be offered for sale by ballot later that year, he registered for the first round of selectors for Phillip Island.

He was fortunate enough to be the second name to be drawn out of the ballot at the Schnapper Point (now Mornington) Courthouse on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1868 at 9am, allowing him to have the pick of the land offered for sale.

James selected his property in Rhyll, which comprised 268 acres (108 ha), where he built his wattle and daub cottage which he named *Heath Hill*. In 1940, James' son Robert Allen Mcllwraith reminisced about the family's move from Melton to Phillip Island, when he was only a young lad. He mentioned, "*A succession of dry years rendered farming in Melton unprofitable, so that when, in 1868, the land at Phillip Island was thrown open for selection, my father decided, after a visit of inspection, to make the change.*"

He further described their journey from Melton to Phillip Island, including spending Christmas Day with friends at Merri Creek, travelling in covered drays, and crossing to the Island by punt. The challenges faced by these families, given the lack of facilities on the Island at the time, must have been immense.

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# “Only weeks after the family’s arrival James and Annie’s daughter Elizabeth died”

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Only weeks after the family’s arrival on the Island, James and Annie’s daughter Elizabeth Stirling McIlwraith, died of pneumonia at the age of 16 months, and as the Phillip Island Cemetery was not opened until 1870, she was buried on the family farm - *Heath Hill*. Her grave continued to be tended by the family for many years.

In the early days of settlement on Phillip Island the family home served as the nucleus of communal entertainment. The McIlwraith organ on display in the museum was one of the cherished instruments which became the soul of family gatherings and the source of joy for families and visitors alike.

James died on his farm of cancer in 1894. On his death, he left an estate valued at £ 1,553 to his widow Annie and two of his sons Allan Stirling and John. Annie died in 1900.



McIlwraith Farm - Heath Hill, Rhyll