HERITAGE TRAIL

– MOUNT BARKER –

Settlement & Development of the
Mount Barker District

Mount Barker, the hub of the Shire of Plantagenet, is located 359km south of Perth (and 50km north of Albany) via Albany Highway (State Route 30). The drive from Perth takes about four hours.
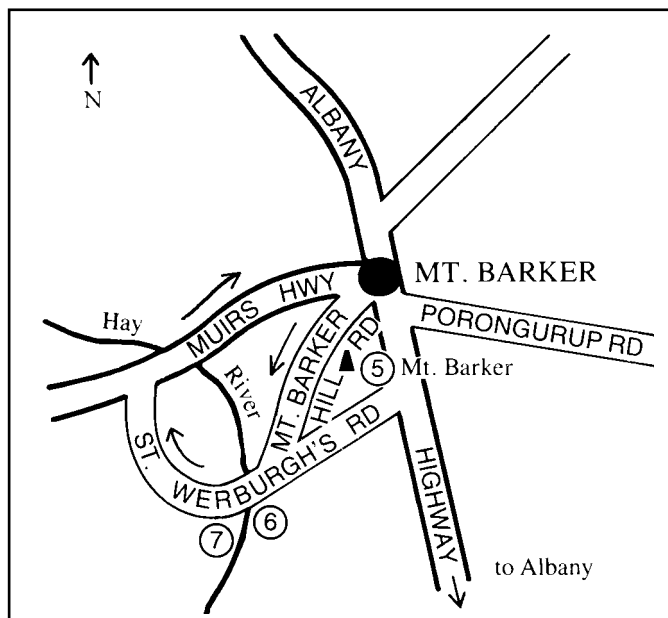
The **Mount Barker Heritage Trail** is a 30km drive tracing the development of the prosperous Mount Barker farming district. It features sites of historical interest within the Mount Barker townsite and immediate district, including the Mount Barker Lookout, the area's first bridge and St. Werburgh's Chapel - one of the few churches Western Australia built on private property by a landowner.

The trail offers a pleasant half-day's outing with opportunities for picnicking and walking.

Please note:

Persons using this Heritage Trail do so at their own risk.

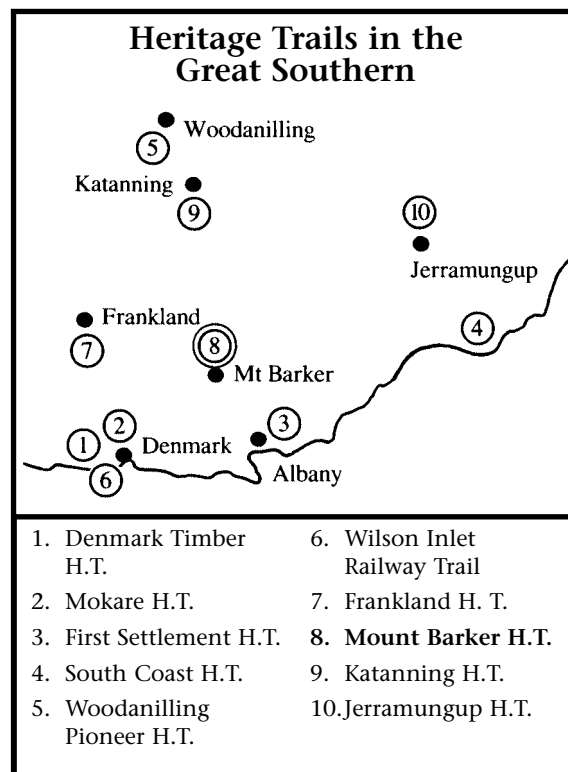*Front cover: An early view of the Mount Barker township, c. 1910 (courtesy Battye Library, 8381B/36).*

The **Mount Barker Heritage Trail** is part of the Heritage Trails Network, a project for community participation originally devised by the Western Australian Heritage Committee (now known as the Heritage Council of Western Australia) in commemoration of the 1988 Bicentenary.

The Heritage Trails Network which was jointly funded by the Commonwealth and Western Australian governments under the Commonwealth/State Bicentennial Commemorative Program was established to provide the Community with a Statewide network of "Heritage Trails" routes designed to enhance awareness and enjoyment of Western Australia's natural and cultural heritage.

The map below indicates Heritage Trails in the Great Southern region of Western Australia.

Heritage Trails in the Great Southern

1. Denmark Timber H.T.
2. Mokare H.T.
3. First Settlement H.T.
4. South Coast H.T.
5. Woodanilling Pioneer H.T.
6. Wilson Inlet Railway Trail
7. Frankland H. T.
8. **Mount Barker H.T.**
9. Katanning H.T.
10. Jerramungup H.T.

Mount Barker Townsite

KEY

- **i** Tourist Bureau
- (1) Plantagenet Wines
- (2) All Saints Church
- (3) Old Post Office
- (4) Park Hotel
- (5) Mount Barker
- (6) Hay River Bridge
- (7) St. Werburgh's Chapel
- (8) Ruins of the Old Bush Inn
- (9) Old Railway Station
- (10) Old Police Station
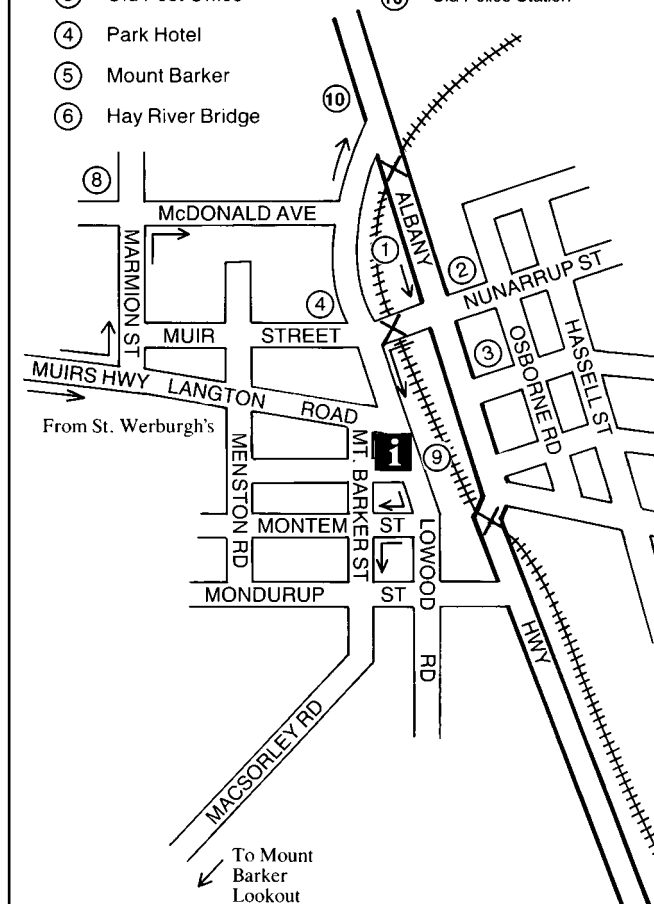
On Boxing Day 1826 Major Edmund Lockyer arrived at King George III Sound with orders to establish a settlement on the shores of The Princess Royal Harbour. In 1831 the settlement was named Albany.

Prior to European settlement the Great Southern region was inhabited by the Bibbulmun Aborigines of the larger Nyungar group. The Bibbulmun Aborigines themselves were divided into smaller tribal groups, such as the 'Minang' tribe of King George III Sound and the 'White Cockatoo' tribe, which occupied the land on and near Mount Barrow in the Mount Barker district. The Aboriginal name for Mount Barrow is 'Yakkerlip' meaning 'white cockatoo'.

The Bibbulmun tribes were nomadic people, moving from place to place within their own tribal territory according to the availability of food. The New South Wales settlement on the Sound developed a reasonably amiable relationship with these local tribes. However, their nomadic way of life was eventually destroyed by introduced European diseases and the inevitable dispossession of their tribal lands.

Aborigines in Mount Barker, c.1910 (courtesy Shire of Plantagenet).

From its beginning the King George III Sound Settlement was plagued with major stock losses; although gardens thrived and pigs and poultry did well, sheep and cattle either died or escaped. Despite the settlers' awareness of these problems, little exploration of the country surrounding Albany was undertaken until four years after the settlement's foundation.

*The **First Settlement Heritage Trail** has five sections which explore the development of Albany and its natural environment. Trail brochures are available at the City of Albany, and the Albany Tourist Bureau.*

In 1829 Surgeon Thomas Braidwood Wilson, Royal Navy, decided to lead an expedition to the west of King George III Sound while his ship was refitted at the Sound. Captain Collett Barker (1784 - 1831), the Sound's military commandant, provided the necessary equipment and provisions and on December 2nd, 1829 Dr Wilson, the Aboriginal guide Mokare, Mr Kent (the settlement's Commissariat Officer), a soldier named Gough and two convicts set off.

The journey followed a similar route to the present Albany Highway as far as Mount Barker, which Wilson named after Captain Barker. They then explored the area now known as Denmark, (Wilson Inlet was named after Dr Wilson) and returned to the Settlement via Torbay.

*The **Denmark Heritage Trails** are three trails exploring the development of the timber industry, railway and Group Settlement Scheme in the Denmark region. Trail brochures are available at the Shire of Denmark and the Denmark Tourist Bureau.*

During his explorations Wilson kept a detailed journal and commented on the suitability of various areas for agricultural development. Wilson was impressed with the Mount Barker area and while camping on the banks of Rivett Creek (Crystal Brook), near the present St. Werburgh's Farm, he wrote:

> ... we observed that its banks were covered with luxuriant grass, sprinkled with yellow buttercups which put us in mind of home ... The alluvial soil, however, extends no great distance; but gently swelling lightly wooded adjacent hills are well adapted for sheep walks....

Encouraged by Wilson's favourable reports of the Hay River country, the Lieutenant Governor of the Colony of Western Australia, Captain James Stirling R.N. decided that his own grant of 100,000 acres should be taken up in this area.

Despite Stirling's action the area remained unsettled until 1835, when Captain Sir Richard Spencer R.N. the Government Resident at Albany, sought fertile land near a river. Deeply

concerned by continuing stock losses at Strawberry Hill (the first farm in the Albany area), Spencer decided a second property was necessary to secure future production. The location he chose was part of Captain Stirling's grant, so Sir Richard bought 1,940 acres from Stirling and established the first farm on the Hay River. The venture was an immediate success.

The first homestead on the Hay River, built by Sir Richard Spencer in 1835 (courtesy Shire of Plantagenet).

Sir Richard Spencer died in July 1839 and Lady Spencer continued to successfully manage the properties at Strawberry Hill and Hay River until her death in 1855.

Although the original Spencer farmhouse is no longer standing, its site is marked by a cairn on the road reserve at Spencer Road, west of the Narrikup townsite.

A second Hay River farm was established by Lieutenant George Egerton-Warburton after his marriage to Augusta Spencer in 1842. This property, located 8.5km upstream from the Spencers' 'Hay Farm', is still run by the Egerton-Warburton family.

As the success of these early farming enterprises became known, several more families - the Herberts, Hassells and Muirs - took up farming at Hay River. Many local sites and roads are named after these early settlers.

The construction of a road connecting Perth and Albany had begun in the early 1830's and reached the Mount Barker district in 1835. This track remained in very poor condition for many years, but gradually the travellers increased and in 1860 William Cooper purchased land in the Mount Barker plains. Cooper established the Bush Inn and was the first to settle in what is now the town of Mount Barker, which was declared a township in 1893.

With the improvement of the road and the opening of the Great Southern Railway in 1889 development of the area continued. Mixed farming was the primary industry for many years, but gradually more orchards were established. By 1910 there were 75 commercial orchards in and around Mount Barker, and in 1913 the exporting of apples, and to a lesser extent peas, had become a major source of income in the area. In 1917 the Mount Barker Fruit growers Cool Storage Co-operative was formed, which established its own packing shed and cold store the following year.

Vehicles carrying apples packed for cool storage awaiting their turn to unload, c.1925 (courtesy Shire of Plantagenet).

From the 1960s onwards fruit production steadily declined and the packing shed was closed in 1975. However, a thriving wine industry has emerged in recent years, and many vineyards and wineries operate throughout the Mount Barker region.

Picking apples, Mount Barker Estate, c. 1925 (courtesy Shire of Plantagenet).

1. Plantagenet District Wines

It appears that winemaking was part of the district's agricultural pursuits as early as 1859, when original settler George Egerton-Warburton planted grape vines on his St. Werburgh's property and bottled the first vintage two years later. In 1902 another Mr Warburton (no doubt one of George's sons) "won all prizes" in the section for wines at the Mount Barker Agricultural Show. However, it was not until 1965-66 that the first large-scale attempt at wine production began when the Department of Agriculture experimented with 2,023 hectares of grapes on Mr Tony Pearse's Forest Hill property, west of Mount Barker.

The first commercial vineyard was planted around this time a few kilometres further south at Denbarker by Mr E.C. Mead, who planted 3.2 hectares, and two years later Mr A.F. Smith planted 2 hectares. In 1972 the first wine was made from the Department of Agriculture's block and in 1973 a Rhine Riesling from that vineyard won medals in several Australian shows.

The first wine actually made for commercial purposes in the district was in 1975 by Plantagenet Wines. Plantagenet had bought what is now the only surviving apple shed in the district in 1974 and the following year it was operating as a winery.

Plantagenet's first success was a gold medal for a 1976 Malbec, and the most successful wine since then was a 1977 Cabernet which won a medal in each of the six shows in which it was entered. This wine was categorised as one of the best four Cabernets in Australia in 1978. Since then Plantagenet have continued to produce fine wines and the wine industry in the Great Southern region has expanded to 27 vineyards and 19 wine cellar outlets.

2. All Saints Anglican Church

Comer of Albany Highway and Nunarrup Road
Open to the public

All Saints Church, 1915 (courtesy Battye Library, 23490P).

The first stone church (now the chancel) was built in 1900 and consecrated on the 15th December that year by the Lord Bishop of Perth.

In 1906 the Reverend J.E. Stansfield was appointed the district priest and the first rector of Mount Barker. In 1912, a rectory (now the Old Rectory) was built and in 1926 a brick nave was added to the church and this addition was consecrated by the Lord Bishop of the Diocese in 1927. The interior of All Saints is pleasantly and correctly arranged for the celebration of the liturgy and its fine stained glass windows should be noted.

3. Old Post Office

Corner of Albany Highway and Ormond Road

The Mount Barker Post and Telegraph Station and quarters was one of six stations built in the Great Southern between 1892 and 1893. Designed by the distinguished architect George Temple-Poole, this post office cost £933.

This building was last used as a post office in the early 1960s, when a new post office was built in Lowood Road. It continued to accommodate the town's postmasters and their families until 1986, when it was purchased by the Shire of Plantagenet. It is presently occupied by the Plantagenet Arts Council and is a thriving Arts and Crafts Centre.

As you return to Muir Street note the cairn outside the Seventh Day Adventist Church commemorating the district's first school. Built in 1893 at a cost of £300, it was closed when the present school was constructed on Oatlands Road in 1934. Throughout the Plantagenet Shire cairns may be found marking the location of former rural one-teacher schools, which started closing down in 1924 after the first school bus service to Mount Barker was established.

4. Park Hotel (Plantagenet Hotel)

Corner of Muir Street and Lowood Road

This fine hotel was built by prominent orchardist and farmer William Sounness sometime between 1912 and 1914. Constructed at the height of Mount Barker's apple industry and incorporated in the hotel's impressive verandah can be seen clever apple motifs.

After turning left onto Lowood Road you will note, on the right, the former English, Scottish and Australian Bank building and Bank Manager's residence. The E.S. & A. Bank eventually merged to form the Australian and New Zealand Bank. This building has been restored and is a fine example of the re-cycling of an outdated building so that it can still be used effectively after it is no longer needed for its original purposes. Currently the building is a coffee shop.

Opposite the former bank is the site of the Mount Barker Co-operative's packing sheds and cold store, which featured so prominently during the district's fruit growing era. The site is now occupied by a modern supermarket.

Before turning right on to Montem Street in order to pick up the road to the Mount Barker lookout you will pass Wilson Park (named after Dr Thomas Braidwood Wilson) and the Bicentennial Hedge Maze. The road leading up to Mount Barker passes several of the old apple orchards, one of which, "Omrah", is now a winery.

5. Mount Barker Summit

When Dr Wilson and his party climbed this hill, 404 metres above sea level, they were able to view much of the surrounding countryside and determine the general route of the next stage of their exploration. These views can be appreciated from the observation stand or the directional marker on the Captain Collett Barker Memorial Stone in the parking lot. On clear days there are good views of the vast rural areas, the Stirlings and Porongurups, and Wilson Inlet at Denmark.

On the top of Mount Barker, Telstra has erected a 167 metre telecommunications tower.

6. Hay River Bridge

St.Werburgh's Road

Please note: *The present concrete crossing is difficult to cross in wet winters.*

After the establishment of the Convict Hiring Depot in Albany the demand for meat and fresh vegetables increased greatly, and the round trip by dray or wagon to the Albany port from inland farms became more frequent. However, transport was severely hampered during the winter rains which swelled the rivers and creeks, isolating farms and interrupting business transactions between Hay River farmers and merchants at the port. In 1855 and again the following year the farmers petitioned the Colonial Secretary for a bridge across the Hay River.

> All the settlers in the district, except one (Mr Joseph Spencer) are obliged to cross the Hay River in order to reach Albany with produce. The Hay River during the winter months and sometimes as

late as the end of October, often runs with sufficient violence to render it difficult and inconvenient to cross with a cart and when the river has ceased running the banks are so steep at the present crossing place and the hills so severe as to render transport laborious and expensive.

A copy of this petition, dated January 4th, 1856, can be viewed at the Mount Barker Police Station Museum, the trail's finishing point.

The Royal Engineer attached to the Convict Establishment in Albany selected a site and designed the bridge. It was constructed under the direction of carpenter Edgar Metcalfe, a young American who had jumped ship in Albany in 1851. For two years Treasury was unable to find the funds necessary for the bridge, but it was finally completed on May 18th, 1858. The Hay River Bridge was used for more than a hundred years before being abandoned in 1968.

The remains of the bridge, with its pit-sawn and hewn timber pillars, can still be examined but care is needed, not only to prevent further damage to the remains, but also for the safety of trail users.

After leaving the bridge look out for the red steeply-pitched roof at St.Werburgh's Chapel on the left.

7. St. Werburgh's Chapel

St. Werburgh's Road

St. Werburgh's Chapel, 1915 (courtesy Battye Library, 23491P).

When George Edward Egerton-Warburton first began developing his St. Werburgh's property he continued to maintain a residence in Albany, primarily for the schooling of his children and so they could attend St. John's Church there. Gradually, however, the family spent more time at St. Werburgh's and this increased after Mrs Egerton-Warburton (formerly Augusta Spencer) died in 1871.

In 1872 George Egerton-Warburton's eldest brother - Squire of Arley Hall and rector of Northwich in Cheshire, England - sent £500 to St. Werburgh's so a chapel could be constructed for the local settlers. George chose to build the chapel himself and use his brother's gift to furnish and decorate the interior.

In early 1872 the walls of the chapel were built by Samuel Swift using timber cut by sawyers Jennings and Jones. In October that year carpenter David Brown began the woodwork for the roof from a design by George Egerton-Warburton, who also did all the plastering himself. Although still completely bare inside, the chapel was consecrated by the Lord Bishop of Perth and dedicated to St. Werburgh on the 21st of June 1874. St. Werburgh was a female Saxon saint who died in 690. For many years the chapel was the only place of worship in the district and was visited by Anglican priests from Albany until 1900 when the Parish of All Saints was established.

Much of the interior woodwork was completed by Thomas Rodgers, while the ironwork was made by George Egerton-Warburton and his sons in the family forge. According to George's granddaughter, the late Miss Kitty Egerton-Warburton, "the font had been the family mortar (a vessel for grinding) which had probably been used to try and make the coarse ground flour finer for cakes and pastries".

Though built by the Egerton-Warburton family on their property, the chapel is one of the few church buildings in Western Australia built by a landowner on his estate. The chapel and all its endowments were vested in the Diocese of Bunbury in 1904.

The graveyard in the church grounds is of particular interest, containing the impressive graves of the Egerton-Warburton family and other graves identified initially only by numbered wooden markers. Subsequently metal names were added giving details of some of the people buried there, including members of well-known families in the area (such as the Sounness and Cooper families). It is possible that other graves are those of people who worked for the Egerton-Warburtons. George Egerton-Warburton employed many workers on his property and some of these were convicts. Convict relics from his property are on display in the museum.

Egerton-Warburton's homestead and orchard at St. Werburgh's, 1907 (courtesy Battye Library, 20721P).

Leaving St. Werburgh's Chapel you can catch glimpses of the St. Werburgh's homestead and property to the south-west. The original homestead was built by George Egerton-Warburton using earth from his property to create his own 'mud-walling' or 'Devonshire Cob' method of construction.

Proceeding to Muirs Highway you will pass various vineyards and the remains of the house of Kitty Egerton-Warburton, the grand-daughter of George Egerton-Warburton. Located behind a large stand of pines, the cottage has been empty since her death in 1982.

8. Old Bush Inn Ruins

Marmion Street, Mount Barker, west of the Agricultural Showgrounds.

Cooper's Old Bush Inn, 1907 (courtesy Battye Library, 20682P).

The Old Bush Inn was established in 1860 by early settler William C. Cooper. On April 13th, 1860 Mr Arthur Trimmer, Justice of the Peace for the District of Plantagenet, reported to the Government Resident in Albany:

> I have the honour to inform you that Cooper requested me to inspect his premises as he was anxious to obtain his licence. He has a nice cottage of three rooms fit to inhabit in a week, and is prepared with a good stock of hay and corn, and is otherwise prepared to commence business as a Publican ... I should think his licence might be granted immediately.

Five days later, William Cooper was issued a licence for a roadside inn. The Bush Inn, as it was commonly known, became a place for Royal Mail coaches to change horses and a welcome resting place between Albany and the next post house in Kojonup. For the few other settlers, shepherds and ticket-of- leave men employed on the farms, the inn provided a diversion from the daily hardships of pioneer life.

For many years the Bush Inn was the only building in what is now the township of Mount Barker. By 1869 Cooper had enlarged his premises and the inn became

well-patronised. In April 1871 the first meeting of the Plantagenet Road Board was held there and on December 13th, 1871, Governor Frederick Weld and his Vice-Regal party stayed overnight at the inn.

Business at the Bush Inn was further boosted in 1880 when a regular Royal Mail passenger coach service commenced between Albany and Perth when it became an important coach depot. However, the opening of the railway in 1899 relocated the town's activities closer to the railway station, and rail transport soon replaced the Royal Mail passenger coach service. After the Park Hotel was opened in 1914, the Old Bush Inn was delicenced. Today all that remains of the once busy wayside inn are crumbling ruins.

9. Old Police Station

One of the most important heritage buildings in Mt Barker. At the time of construction in 1923-24 it was considered the most imposing and up to date station outside Perth, the building is noteworthy for its high quality brickwork, excellent trimberwork and a roof of terracotta tiles.

The aesthetic value of the station is important to the local community as a prominent and unusual example of a Federation Queen Anne style railway station. It is the only known station of its style and size in the region.

It had excellent facilities for travellers (refreshment room/bar/dining room/fruit stall etc which came to be used by the local people as it was an accepted social outing to meet the trains. Few major brick and tile railway stations remain and refreshment rooms and bar facilities of such quality are scarce and not common in Western Australia.

10. Old Police Station Museum

Albany Highway

The Old Police Station Museum is the lively home of the Plantagenet Historical Society, with many old buildings from the district housing a number of outdoor exhibits. Three rooms and the entrance hall are furnished in the style of the colonial peril. Run by voluntary staff, the museum is open daily at varying times - look for the 'open' sign on Albany Highway.

Old Mount Barker Police Station in 1981, prior to restoration (courtesy Mr F.A. Sharr).

This police station was built by convicts in 1867 as living quarters for Mount Barker's first policeman, Constable Daniel O'Connell. Its walls are made of local ironstone blocks cemented with mud, the roof of jarrah shingles, and the bearers for roof and floor are pitsawn timber. At the same time another ironstone building plastered with mud and roofed with shingles was built at the rear of the station as a coach-house and stables. The Police Station was officially opened on March 6th, 1868.

Before a lock-up was added to the side of the stables in 1887 the constable tied his prisoner to a log in front of the Station during the day. If a prisoner was in custody at night, the constable's family was moved out of the kitchen and the detainee was secured to the leg of the kitchen table during the hours of darkness. In the morning the prisoner would be transported to Albany.

*This completes the **Mount Barker Heritage Trail**.*

St. Werburgh's Chapel, 1907 (courtesy Battye Library, 20738P).

Crabb, Dawn   **The Way to St. Werburgh**
                     (Albany, 1974)

Garden, Donald S.   **Albany: A Panorama of the
                     Sound from 1827**
                     (Thomas Nelson Ltd,
                     Melbourne, 1977)

Glover, Rhoda   **Plantagenet: 'Rich and
                     Beautiful...' A History of the
                     Shire of Plantagenet W.A.**
                     (U.W.A. Press, 1979)

IFFLA, H.A.H.   **Plantagenet - Past and Present.
                     Plantagenet Historical Society
                     Publications**

Mount Barker   **Back to Mount Barker School.
Primary School.   A History of Incorporated
                     Small Schools.** 1983

N. Jellicoe.   **What We Were.
                     All Saints Anglican
                     Ladies Guild.** 1979.

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