



Allison, David and Peter Haydon are united in their love and passion for horses. Left: Peter Haydon and his winning horses at the 2018 Scone Polo Cup.

Of horses and men

The Haydon family's history at Bloomfield Homestead in the Upper Hunter stretches back to the 1830s – and in this family men and their horses have always been inseparable.

Story by Cornelia Schulze, photography courtesy of the Haydon family.

Ronald Reagan loved to use this phrase, initially popularised by Winston Churchill: "There is nothing better for the inside of a man than the outside of a horse." It's a sentiment that Peter Haydon, a 5th generation member of the Haydon family might wholeheartedly agree with. The Haydon family can trace their roots all the way back to the times of Oliver Cromwell and his Ironsides in 17th century England.

"Haydon is a little town in Southern England," says Peter. "My ancestors went to Ireland with Oliver Cromwell, then in 1828, Peter Haydon came to Australia. He lived with his wife Elizabeth at Tivoli, Rose Bay, in Sydney, running cattle and horses on the harbour foreshores.

It must have been a reasonably comfortable life on the waterfront with the amenities of a burgeoning colony, yet Peter had his sights set on a land grant near Scone in the Upper Hunter. He invited his siblings, Thomas and Matilda, to join them Down Under to help him run his rural enterprise at Blandford which he had called Bloomfield, after properties the family held in England and Ireland.

With Peter running a cattle-grazing business, Thomas was more of a horse man, purchasing Young Dover, a well-bred stallion who became the ancestor of a long list of Bloomfield's most successful mares and stallions.

"It goes all the way back to Thomas and Young Dover winning the Maitland Cup in 1843," Peter explains. "We play



polo, so we breed Australian stock horses that are good to work on our property and they are good sporting horses too."

For a stud that bred and trained Haydon Angel Jewel, one of the most decorated polo ponies in the history of the sport, that is quite an understatement... but more on that later.

Heritage and horses

Seven generations of Haydons have been living at Bloomfield Homestead, originally built by Thomas Haydon almost two centuries ago. Every generation had a special connection to an outstanding stallion or mare. It was Thomas Haydon's five sons Peter, Stuart, Bernard, Thomas and William who combined the family's horse breeding and cattle interests,

undertaking challenging droving journeys to the family's grazing properties in the Gulf of Carpentaria, coming back with cattle to be fattened at Bloomfield and then onto Homebush to be sold, a combined trip of over 2,600 kms, to feed the growing population of Sydney and surrounding areas.

Walers, the famously robust, hardy horses well adapted to the harsh conditions in New South Wales were bred and shipped as army remounts by the hundreds. Bernard was famous for his successes with undefeated stallion Haydon Tester, competing in Bridle Spurts, so named after the bridle that the winner would receive.

Horses Polo, Fred and the famous Midnight, all by Haydon Tester, went into the epic cavalry charge at Beersheeba in ▷



Peter and Alison respectfully renovated the original homestead and turned it into a comfortable family home.

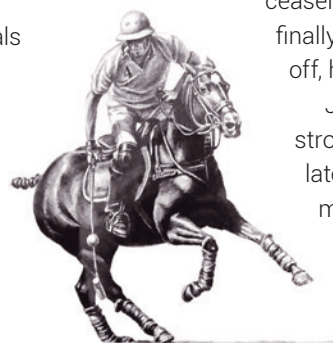


1917 – ridden by Bernard's sons Barney and Guy, and their neighbour Max Wright. With Midnight killed at Beersheba, Polo and Fred survived the entire Middle East campaign, yet Barney and Max had to take their beloved equine companions for a "last ride" into the desert as they were told by army command that horses could not be returned home.

Polo pitches to battlefields

Bernard's third son, Fred, by all accounts an exceptionally fine horseman, continued running Bloomfield, breeding station sires used all over Australia. He was integral to establishing the original Australian Bushman's carnivals and played in the Bloomfield Polo Team.

It was a tradition continued by Jim Haydon, one of Fred's two sons, who campdrafted in the NSW Team at the Sydney Royal Agricultural Show in the 1930s, won Champion Polo Pony at Sydney RAS



in 1967 and won the Australian Cutting Horse Championships in 1969. However, his was another generation of Haydons deeply affected by war. During ferocious fighting in the Middle East and later at Sanananda, New Guinea, near the infamous Kokoda Track, Jim drew detailed maps of the natural landmarks and the positions of various regiments just as Guy had done in the Sinai desert.

These maps, along with a treasure trove of letters and photos are kept at the Haydon Family Archives at Bloomfield.

"He once spent seven days and seven nights under ceaseless enemy fire," Peter recalls. "When they finally dug their way back out and he pulled his gear off, his skin came off with it."

Jim led his troops in to capture the Japanese stronghold of Lae in eastern New Guinea. He was later shot down at Balikpapan, Borneo, barely making it out of the plane wreck alive.



Clockwise from top left: Guy Haydon on Midnight. Haydon Tester, one of the stud's iconic stallions remained unbeaten in the popular Bridle Spurts. Guy Haydon playing polo on donkeys in the desert. A sketch of Bloomfield Homestead. Drawings at bottom of page: Angel Jewel in action played by the world's best polo player Adolfo Cambiasso, illustrations by Sarah Bishop.



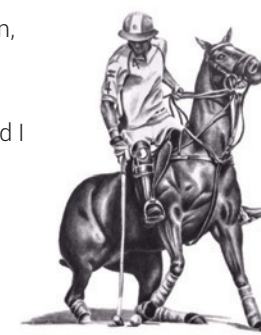
He was married during the war to Ethel Cay, who was stationed as a nurse at an army hospital at Koitaki, near the Kokoda Track's Golden Staircase.

"My mum is now 101 years old and still lives independently in Murrurundi and takes great interest in everything that is happening at Bloomfield," Peter says.

Royal appointment

Peter carried on the family tradition at the Blandford property, but took a royal detour, when he was invited to manage the polo stables of the Prince of Wales at Windsor in 1989. When Peter, a self-confessed republican, first heard about the offer, he didn't take the idea seriously.

"We had Bloomfield, and we had little kids and I just didn't think it was possible. But when I told my wife Alison about it, she made me go back



and find out more about it. And six months later we were all in England.

"It really was a fairy tale existence," remembers Peter. "We'd go inside Windsor Castle and at times our boys would play foot polo with William and Harry. We'd ride past the Queen and give her a wave and off we'd go."

"Not to say there weren't the occasional interesting discussions with the Queen on the finer details of what qualities are needed to breed champion horses for different kinds of races and sports like polo. She really loved her horses, was a keen breeder and gave them all their names."

"We saw a happy side of Prince Charles," continues Peter. "He was doing a lot of amazing stuff behind the scenes and often used polo tournaments to raise money for the Prince's Trust. Playing polo was his way of taking a break, of unwinding. He loved that, on the field, he would be treated like any other player." ▷



Clockwise from top left: Haydon Angel Jewel is one of the most decorated polo ponies in the history of the sport – she can even take the spotlight from royalty. Peter Haydon with Prince Charles at Cartier International Day in 1991. The lovely country kitchen at Bloomfield. Home is ... where you hang your hat.



This page: Today, Bloomfield Homestead is a beautifully rejuvenated property set amongst the much admired, magnificent gardens Alison Haydon has created.



A CHARGE FOR THE HISTORY BOOKS

After fighting at Gallipoli, Guy Haydon and the 12th and 4th Light Horse were selected for the Charge on Beersheba, which has gone down in history as 'the last successful mounted cavalry charge'.

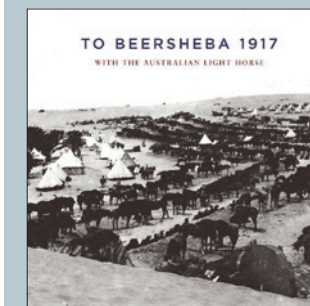


It was a significant battle, the first victory after the Gallipoli defeat, marking a turning point in the war and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

In a daring, some would say near-suicidal charge, 800 Australian mounted soldiers charged towards 4,000 Germans and Turks behind barbed wire and trenches, ferociously firing their machine guns; a desperate final attempt to get to the all-important water wells at Beersheba. As Guy and Midnight were jumping over a trench, a bullet hit Midnight, going through her stomach and through the back of the saddle, through Guy's buttocks and finally coming to a halt just a centimetre from his spine. Guy spent an agonising night on the battlefield with carnage all around him and his beloved mare lying dead beside him. He later called it the longest night of his life, but nevertheless requested that other soldiers be given priority as "they were worse off than I was." After the bullet had been surgically removed, Guy sent it home to his family in

a Queen Mary Christmas container, a rather small tin that had initially held the Christmas cake given out to each soldier.

'The Bullet' is a much sought-after item when people visit the family's extensive archives.



The family was initially based at The Royal Mews at Windsor Castle and Peter left his mark when the Royal Stables, for the first time ever, in 1991 won every single one of the Polo Pony Classes at the Royal Windsor Horse Show.

With Peter riding Australian mount Serene, supported by the grooms he'd enlisted from Down Under, it made for a complete Aussie victory. Yet, when Peter and Alison realised that there was a real chance their three sons Henry, Nick, and David might not come back to Australia if they attended secondary school in the UK, it was a wake-up call that triggered their return to Bloomfield, after six years.

"I was originally on a three-year contract, so we had a really good run. We had some pretty amazing privileges, like the right to park your car at Royal properties and attend the Buckingham Palace garden parties. But we decided it was time to go home."

In 1979 when they moved into the old homestead it had become "a bit overrun" as Peter describes it. He and Alison

went through some major renovations, moving the kitchen and family room to the front, adding bedrooms and a swimming pool and turning Bloomfield into a modern family home.

It's all about the mare

2021 has been a special year for the family as it marked the 50th anniversary of the Australian Stock Horse Society of which they are founding members, with Peter an early classifier. Even though, that half century is but a fraction of the Haydons' rich history at Bloomfield. Even the horses are grouped into families tracing back to the original foundation mares and famous stallions like Young Dover or Tester.

Haydon Angel Jewel, winner of the Argentine Triple Crown, the US Gold Cup, the British Open Gold Cup, the Queen's Cup and the Coronation Cup among many others and rated by the world's best polo player Adolfo Cambiasso as his "best horse to play outside Argentina," is the most recent example of the

Haydon's successful strategy to always select the best mares for breeding.

"We think the mare line makes for 80% of breeding success so we try to breed from the very best. Many people make the mistake and say, 'oh this mare is injured, we'll breed from her'. We would never do that. I have been told that we are the oldest stud in the world that has consistently been held by the same family. It's very hard to keep a consistent quality in your horses over such a long period of time. We think, it's all about the mares."

So, who will write the next chapter in Bloomfield's long history?

"Well, we are lucky to have acquired stallions from Kerry Packer's stud Ellerston, which we are really thrilled about and Ellerston Ruski in particular is showing a lot of promise." Without missing a beat, Peter moves from horses to men and adds: "But most importantly, we've got three sons and now eight grandchildren. I'm sure we'll work something out." ◇

MIDNIGHT THE STORY OF A LIGHT HORSE



Beautifully written and lovingly illustrated, this picture book captures the story of Midnight for younger readers.

By Mark Greenwood, with illustrations by Fran Lessac. Paperback, 32 pp, Walker Books Australia, RRP \$18.99.