

Butement's Woolshed and Shearers Quarters

I had a look at the sign near the ruins the other day. We actually know a great deal more about the woolshed and the other buildings that John Butement built on that site than the sign tells us.

The buildings were designed by Mr John Turner and built by Mr John Campbell in 1875. Built of stone with a corrugated iron roof, the woolshed measured 108ft long by 45ft wide and was capable of holding 1000 sheep under cover, 2000 if it looked like rain. There were stands for 16 shearers and chutes for the shorn sheep to go to counting out pens under the floor of the building. This was an innovation at the time. The wool press was split so that you filled both sides and when full one side was raised so as to fit on top of the other. A screw worked with levers then pressed the bale. The turret you can see in the photos was there to take the height of the screw. The turret itself was 12ft square and had four air ventilators. The bales of wool were then stored in front of the press, the floor being the same height as a dray deck. The woolshed was provided with excellent lighting from 13 large skylights.

The shearers quarters, a separate building, was a five-room building situated at the south end of the woolshed, a "stones throw away", 37ft long by 33ft wide. The largest room was the dining area/ bunkroom for the shearers, 37ft long and 20ft wide, with thirty bunks along three sides of the room. In the centre of the room was a long table with seating for thirty men. The ventilation was with windows that could be opened and ventilation in each gable. The kitchen was part of a lean-to attached to the building and measured 12ft by 12ft. In this was a large colonial oven, a bread oven, a dresser, a cupboard and a large table. The rest of the lean-to was made up of sleeping quarters for four shepherds, the wool classer and a storeroom. Water came from a well.

The total cost of the buildings was 1,800 pounds.

There was a five roomed house built for John Butement which Tom Kennett believed was sited about where the Glenorchy Cafe is now situated (the old Post office).

In November 1887, John Butement surrendered his leases to the Crown, a victim of the Long Depression, the rabbits and probable overstocking. His departure would have been welcomed by the other residents of the Head of the Lake. He had effectively prevented the ordinary resident from acquiring land during his time here and this caused a great deal of resentment as manifest in the numerous letters to the paper. The desire for land, and this was really a block of sufficient size to run a few sheep and a house cow rather than a farming operation, was

met by the Government. The land from the old Wyuna woolshed to the Kirkland property was subdivided into small blocks but were then put up for tender, Butement simply put in a very high price and the average miner could not match the amount he was prepared to pay. His behaviour towards the owner of stock reputedly trespassing on his land on one occasion was harsh and presumptuous, Lord of the Manor stuff, as recorded in the ensuing Court case. A photo of the building taken in 1890, shows all the roofing iron had been removed and, given that this was a valuable item, it is tempting to think that the first sheet was removed before the boat Butement boarded reached Queenstown, however in 1889 it is recorded that a function was held in his former house and a dance in the woolshed, so it was a respectable time before the spoils were divided up.

A photo taken in 1900 shows only the walls of the woolshed standing and then in 1925 the then owner, Jack Thornton allowed the stone walls to be used to build an approach to a new wharf. There must have been still a reasonable amount left for Doug Scott told me that he, Ferg Heffernan and others had used rock from the walls to fill in holes by the wharf at a later time. Doug paused after telling me this and asked: "What were we thinking?"

The shearers quarters was used as shelter for some time and in 1903 was gutted by a fire in which Peter Wilson died. The building was then rebuilt and used as the Glenorchy Store until many years later a fire destroyed the building.

Peter Wilson was an old age pensioner, aged 78 years, who was almost blind and very deaf. He had been residing in the Old Man's Home but left to return to live at the Head of the Lake. Born in Sweden, he saw much of the world as a sailor, tried his luck at the Victorian diggings, then moved to New Zealand. In Glenorchy he worked for thirty years as a miner, including at the Invincible Mine, and as a woodcutter. Harry Birley made his coffin and Percy Valpy took the burial service. He is buried in the Glenorchy Cemetery.