

Melton Family History Group Inc

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Registered 6th Dec 1994

March – May 2026

Meeting Times:	1:00pm on the second Thursday of every other month starting in February
Venue:	Melton Library – McKenzie Street, Melton
Membership Fee:	\$25 per year payable July each year prior to August A.G.M.
Correspondence:	17 Sutherland Ave, Melton Sth, Vic, 3338.
President:	Pauline Stotten
Vice President	Cheryl Graham
Secretary:	Ian Bowey
Treasurer:	Deborah Slattery
Email:	sec.meltonfhg@outlook.com
Web site	www.meltonfamilyhistory.org
Committee Member:	Sue Morton

2026 Monthly Meetings at Melton Library in McKenzie Street.

9 th April	
11 th June	
13 th August	Annual General Meeting
8 th October	
10 th December	End of year break up.

All dates and times are subject to change

Update: Regular work:

The group has decided to participate in this year's Heritage Festival. The details to be finalised but agreed upon holding a nocturnal cemetery tour in the Melton Cemetery. The tour date will be on the 5th of May, starting at 7:00pm. Any members who are willing to participate are more than welcome.

We are also looking at holding a display in the library display cabinet. Any suggestions are welcome.

The first part of following article is taken from a copy of the Somerset and Dorset Family history Society magazine, 'The Greenwood Tree, published in the year 2000. The remainder of the article is freely available on the internet.

Who Says Crime Never Pays

James **AUSTIN** was born in 1776, the second son of John and Sarah AUSTIN at Church Thatch Farm, Baltonsborough, near Glastonbury. Since he was not the eldest son, he would not inherit the tenancy of the farm. So his prospects were not good, he would probably remain an "ag lab" all his life. But he was of an adventurous spirit, and since he had not got the price of a fare to Australia (the first settlement in Sydney was only 15 years before) he decided on a scheme to get a free passage. And so the well researched family story has it that he, with his cousin and friend John **EARLE**, aided and abetted by the family, stole six straw beehives and a quantity of honey from his uncle Peter **HIGGENS**. He duly ran them in, and they were tried in January 1802 in the Quarter Sessions in Wells Town Hall and sentenced to transportation to Australia for seven years.

They were lucky to sail out in a naval ship., HMS *Calcutta*, arriving in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania), in October 1803. Having served their time, they started a ferry business across the River Derwent near Hobart, with an inn on either shore. The venture prospered and James persuaded several of his nephews to come out and thus the family fortunes were established both in Australia and in England where some of them returned.

GLASTONBURY CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Convicted Baltonsborough boy makes good in Australia

— result: his family in Somerset ends up owning the Abbey.

Owen Mace, a descendant of Austins who emigrated from Baltonsborough to Australia a century ago, provided an outline of the family story in an illustrated talk on October 9 [2014]. He spoke to about 35 people in Abbey House, an appropriate venue because the Austins were its last private owners.

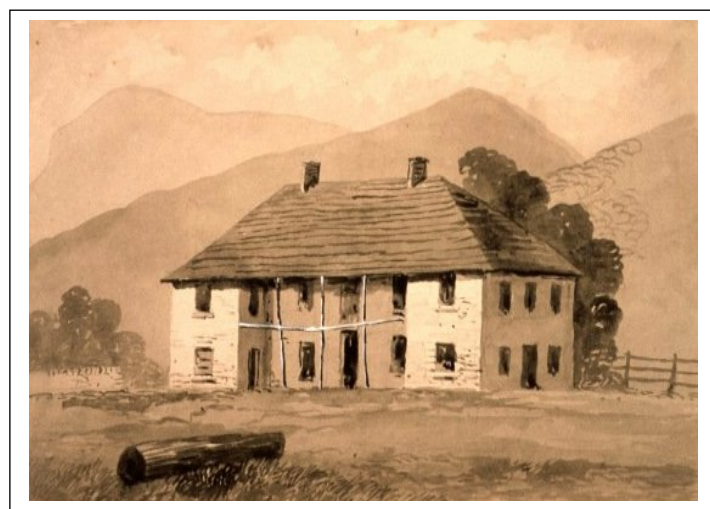
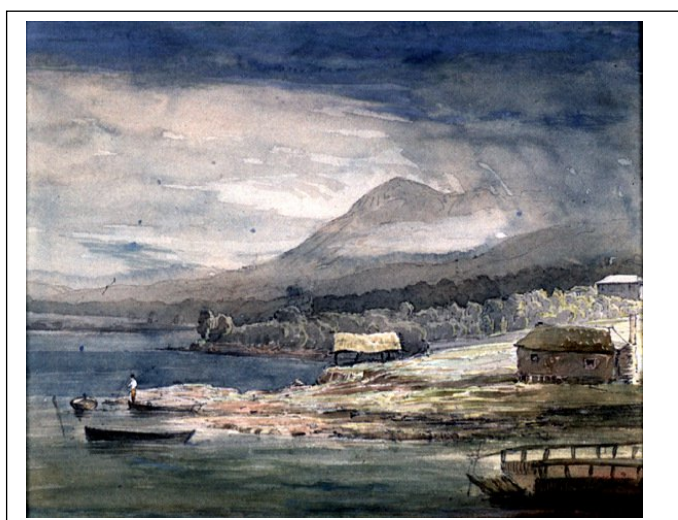
“Australia’s prosperity rode on the sheep’s back” — for decades, school histories taught this aphorism about the wool business. The statement certainly applied to the Australian Austins.

James Austin was baptized at Baltonsborough on August 13 in 1776, the second son of John Austin, a farmer, and his wife Sarah (née Higgens*). As a second son, his prospects in this locality were poor. Australia thus was an attractive promise to him. But his father could not afford the fare.

So James and his friend John Earle organized free passage. In 1802 they stole six straw beehives and 100 pounds of honey from James’s uncle Peter Higgens. The Wells Assizes sentenced them to seven years’ transportation. According to family lore, the judge was none other than Peter Higgens.

Thus they arrived at Hobart in Tasmania (at that time called Van Diemen's Land), after first landing at Port Phillip in Victoria, which had proved unsuitable. James worked off his sentence by 1809, and he and John Earle established a ferry across the River Derwent at Hobart, rowing 20 cattle at a time across 600 yards of water. From this modest beginning, James set up a 300-acre farm called Roseneath. By 1823 he claimed to have the largest orchard in the colony and much livestock. He died in prosperity in 1831, and John Earle in 1840.

The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* says James was almost illiterate and “wealthy but eccentric”; he never married and never returned to England.



The place where James Austin and John Earle rowed cattle across the River Derwent to Hobart in Tasmania is called Austins Ferry to this day.

At Austins Ferry the two transported convicts astutely established an inn on each side of the river.

Back at Baltonsborough, the Austin family by then owned Tilham Street Farm: the purchase was probably enabled by money James sent home.

Four of James’s Austin nephews — Solomon, Josiah, another James (1809–96, the speaker’s great-great-grandfather) and Thomas — left Baltonsborough and sailed out to Australia with their uncle’s help, arriving shortly after he died. They established Tor Hill Farm of 10,000 acres in sheep country.

James and Thomas took 500 sheep over to western Victoria and drove them up the Barwon River into some of the best land in the state. Nearby, James established an estate he called Avalon and expanded to 30,000 acres. He was the second mayor of Geelong, in 1850–51.

In 1854 James returned to Glastonbury with members of his family and lived in Somerset House in Magdalene Street, which he renamed Australia House for a time. He was mayor of Glastonbury five times between 1858 and 1887. He bought Abbey House and the ruins in 1864.

His son Stanley (the founder of Austin & Bath, as the solicitors in Chilkwell Street were called for generations) sold Abbey House at auction in 1907. By this time the Austins had married into locally prominent families: James's daughter Annie married Reginald Porch.

Back in Australia, Thomas Austin, who loved shooting, asked a cousin in 1859 to send him 20 wild rabbits from England. He could find only six pairs, so also sent some domestic rabbits. The resulting hybrid was apparently ideal for the Australian climate. They escaped and rapidly spread across the continent as a devastating pest.



Thomas Austin helped to introduce many English animals to Australia, including hares, blackbirds and partridges. People at the time praised his efforts, but today Thomas bears the brunt of blame for bringing rabbits. The picture from the Illustrated Sydney News in 1869 shows Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, in a shooting party at Barwon Park.

His niece Mary, James's eldest living daughter, married William Hose Bullivant. He became hugely successful with sheep, using a breeding strategy to double the wool take. Bullivant and the Austin family were major prizewinners in various aspects of the industry. Wool remained the foundation of the Australian economy until the 1950s. The families were also noted for thoroughbred racing horses.

And recent generations? By email the speaker said his father, Norman Mace, born in Nottingham, went as a surveyor to Sarawak. Escaping the Japanese, he worked for the Australian Joint Intelligence Bureau ("i.e., he was a spy") until his death in 1968.

Owen Mace studied electronic engineering, gained a PhD in physics and was an academic at Melbourne University for 17 years and then Adelaide. Later he travelled the world for British Aerospace Australia, then ran an IT company and now researches the Austin history.

During my visit to Somerset and Sussex last year, I was determined to visit the abandoned village of Tyneham, in Dorset. I had heard about this village, so decided a visit would be on the agenda.

My thoughts were that if I visited on Good Friday, then hopefully there would not be hordes of obnoxious children running around. Although this was partly true, the weather on that day was just about the worst of my whole trip. This village is rather difficult to find, as there is no postcode for a car sat nav to find. Road signs are far and few in-between. The weather was such that driving visibility was little more than a few yards in front, with the roads just about wide enough for a single vehicle. Thankfully many passing spots are located on the road, which happens to be at the bottom of a steep valley. The wind was bitterly cold, with extremely heavy rain showers during the most of my visit. Most of the photos are ones that I took while I was visiting. I found the following newspaper article recently, which explains why the village is abandoned. (Ian)

Here's why you should visit Tyneham village in Dorset

By Hollie Carr Senior Reporter of the Dorset Echo newspaper 28th September 2025

More than 80 years ago, the residents of a tiny Dorset village were forced to abandon their homes by Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

The village of Tyneham and its surrounding hamlets were cleared before Christmas 1943 to allow allied forces to prepare for the D-Day landings.

Despite the promises of Prime Minister Winston Churchill, the residents never returned to the village and surrounding areas.

The place was evacuated to make way for US troops practising for the D-Day landings, with tank firing ranges also set up.

An official letter stated: "The Government appreciate that this is no small sacrifice which you are asked to make, but they are sure that you will give this further help towards winning the war with a good heart."

More than 200 residents packed up their belongings and left the village.

Ever since then, Tyneham village has been the source of fascination for several decades and has become a popular tourist spot.

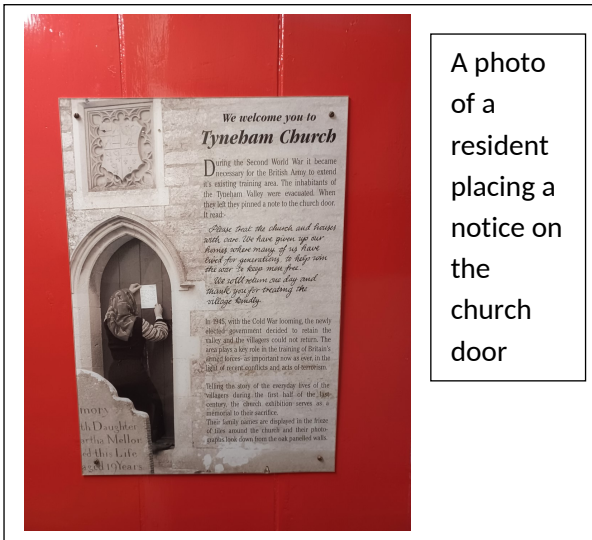
The Village, Worbarrow Bay and Lulworth Ranges continue to be managed by the Ministry of Defence and therefore the village is only accessible on weekends and public holidays.

Tyneham is based in East Lulworth, near Wareham and lies between the two ridges of the Purbeck Hills.

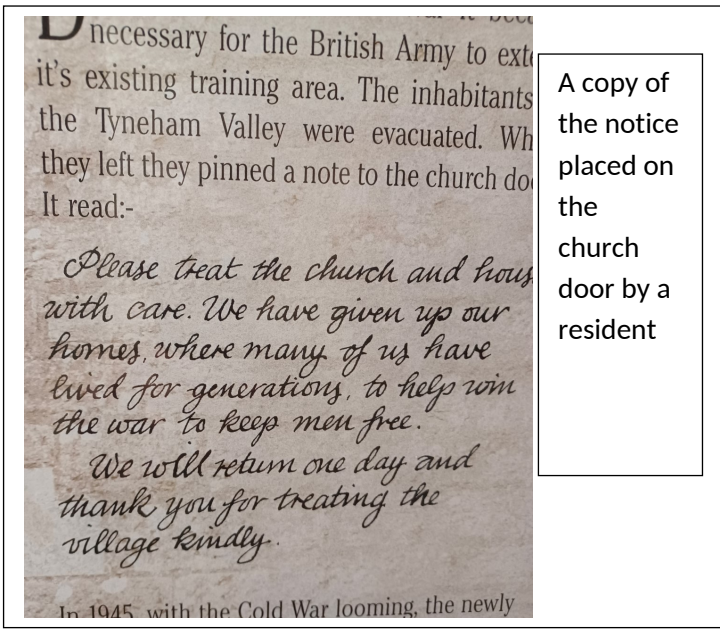
It can be accessed off the B3070 where motorists must then follow the signs for the village on the rural road.

A one mile walk from the village leads to Worbarrow Bay (sometimes known as Tyneham Beach), part of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site.

Villagers always thought one day they would be able to return home, as promised by the Government.



A photo of a resident placing a notice on the church door



A copy of the notice placed on the church door by a resident

Sadly, after the war, Tyneham became the permanent property of the Ministry of Defence and continued to be used as part of the Lulworth ranges.

While the village was maintained by the military after residents left, the village felt into a state of disarray.

Rodney Legg, a local historian, launched a popular campaign in 1967 to have the village returned, but was unsuccessful. Other locals wrote to the Government in a desperate plea for the village to be returned but were also unsuccessful.

Following Mr Legg's campaign, the military worked with residents to improve access to the site.

In 1975, a compromise was reached whereby the public were given access to the village at weekends, but the Ministry of Defence would retain the ranges.

Tyneham church was re-opened in 1979 and is used for carol concerts and remembrance services.

The village's schoolroom was re-opened as the venue for an exhibition in April 1982. Margaret Bond, who had lived in the village from 1892 to 1935, unveiled a plaque there and revisited the tree she had planted in 1911 for the coronation of George V.

Earlier this year, the last resident of Tyneham, Peter Wellman, died aged 100.



This photo of Peter Wellman was taken from the Dorset Echo online article. The photo shows Peter inside the village school. Only the school and church have been fully restored

Mr Wellman who was born in the village made a final visit last year to see the place where he was brought up.

On his last visit to Tyneham, Peter recalled his childhood: "We had no electricity, no mains gas and no running water – we had to pump that from near the church. There's a tap there now.

"I remember going to the beach and fishing and we often had mackerel. We were happy until we got moved out."

Since then, the rural village has become almost like a museum where tourists can visit the church, school, and derelict properties and learn about its past and villagers.

At Tyneham Farm, some of the outbuildings have been restored and there is a picnic area to enjoy.



Tyneham Farm entrance



Photo of ordnance in Tyneham Farmyard



Picnic area.

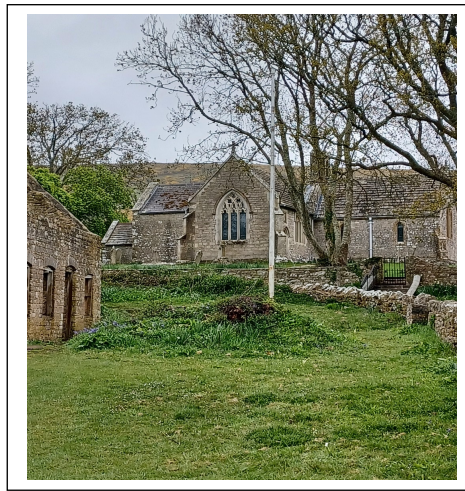


More exhibits are inside the barn.

Although there very may be a picnic area, unless the weather is decent, a visitor would not find it worthwhile. On the day of my visit, a mobile coffee van was parked near the car cark. As there is no permanent food and drink facilities available, presumably the coffee van owners think it is beneficial to serve visitors during the day. Visitors are encouraged to take their own food and drink.



Church nave



Looking at the church from a row of buildings.



Drinking water outside the church grounds. Laundry. This was the only village building with running water.



View towards the car park showing a row of houses. Note the telephone box outside the post office building.



This notice is self-explanatory.