THE MILLETTS

of Sunbury

From 1964 - 1991, the dairy cattle crossed Vineyard Road every morning and night for milking.
George Millett was 13 years old when he arrived in Australia, a convict sentenced to 9 years imprisonment for stealing a handkerchief.

It was 1836, and the young boy served his time at Port Arthur, Tasmania. When he was finally released, George was a young adult with dreams of a better future. He moved to Melbourne where he met and married Susanna Fitzpatrick. Early records indicate they ran several business ventures, including the Elephant and Castle Hotel on Little Bourke Street.

After years of hard work, they purchased an acre of land in Sunbury and built the Bald Hill Hotel in 1853. It became the first staging stop out of Melbourne on the road to the Bendigo goldfields. When George passed on in 1890, Susanna continued to run and own hotels with her 12 children in Sunbury and surrounding areas.

George and Susanna’s son Thomas (born at the Bald Hill Hotel) was a butcher who ran his business on Station Street, next to the present Olive Tree Hotel. In 1910, he purchased land on the current Rosenthal site, acquiring 125 acres on the railway side of Vineyard Road where the Millett family still farms to this day.

Thomas also took over the lease of the Rupertswood Hotel from his brother George (Jr.), as well as the current Royal Hotel. He ran both establishments until his death in 1918.
Rosenthal, meaning Rose Valley in German, was named by Robert Frederick Kurrle, a German immigrant from Wertenburg who purchased the land in 1869 and developed the Rosenthal Winery. Vineyard Road was an important wine producing area at that time, boasting 8 flourishing vineyards along its route. The original Rosenthal Wine cellar still stands today.

After Thomas Millett’s death in 1918, his sons Frank (James Francis) and Ernest (Thomas Ernest), the third generation of Milletts, inherited their father’s 125 acres. They subsequently purchased more land on Vineyard Road from the Breen and Carlson families, growing their property to 530 acres.

Here, their family farm flourished, where dairy cows were hand-milked and crops were sowed and harvested with the help of horses.

In the 1940s, two Italian Prisoners of War worked on the Rosenthal farm.
After their deaths, the property was sold to Payne’s Properties in 1959. It was leased back to the Milletts, where the fourth generation, Frank’s son, Tom, and Ernest’s son, Vincent, continued to farm with their mothers Delia and Nora, as well as their sisters Eileen and Teresa. They were mostly farming dairy, sheep and hay.

During the ownership of Payne’s Properties, 75 acres of the original 530 acres were sold, which are now the Kingsley Park and Vineyard Rise Estates. A further 48 acres were transferred to the Shire of Bulla, where 16 of the 48 acres are now the Langama Park Sports Complex, while another 32 acres are now the McDougall Road industrial area. Today, the Sunbury community still enjoys sport and recreation activities, as well as employment opportunities, in these areas.

In 1963, just four years after it was sold, Tom Millett repurchased what was left of the property (407 acres). Tom has been farming here since. He married Angela Potts, another Sunbury local in 1964, and together they had 7 children – Garry, Brian, Catherine, Allison, Paul, Michelle, and Shaun.

Rosenthal was mostly a dairy farm until 1991, before Tom ventured into cattle, oats and fodder crops. He also planted a small vineyard in 1986, and continues to farm cattle and hay today.
The Rosenthal Residential development is the next chapter of this land’s rich history. While parcels of land are being developed in phases, Tom Millett is happy to work his farm for as long as there is farmland on the property.

Where one legacy ends, a new one begins. The Milletts tell a story of perseverance and hard work across several generations. A story we hope will inspire future generations to come.
During the 1960s and early 70s, sheep were taken from Rosenthal to Rupertswood every year for shearing, crutching and dipping. The sheep were herded from Vineyard Rd, up Mitchell’s Lane along Anderson Street and down Riddell Rd. Imagine trying to do that now!