

'Parkwood' brought amenities to historic home (by Joan Pilgrim.)

WHEN the Countess of Albemarle was visiting Australia recently she expressed a wish to see some of our pioneering homes. So, accordingly, when she was in Canberra one of her visits was to historic "Parkwood " 12 miles out of the Federal Capital, home of the Kilbys. Sitting in the enclosed sun-porch of Mr's. Bruce Kilby's home the Countess examined the pretty printed linen curtains and covers on the cane lounge suite, and remarked:

"How strange, to come all the way from England out to this country home and find the same linen, in the same pattern, in your curtains. My sitting room curtains in my London home are exactly the same print only mine are pink and blue, and yours green and yellow."

Mrs. Kilby could have told her distinguished guest that not only was she visiting one of the pioneer homes of the district, but that the third generation of Kilbys on the property was still doing a spot of pioneering, and that it was that same spirit, as alive today as it was more than 100 year's ago when Mr. Thomas Southwell first brought his oxen team to rest on the ridge and selected the site for his home, that had brought such amenities and comforts as British prints to this outpost of civilisation.

In 1938, when the Southwells celebrated the centenary, of the family, 1,100 living descendants of Thomas Southwell gathered at "Parkwood" to honor the district's earliest pioneer.

Pioneer Families Unite

A daughter of the original settler on 'Parkwood' [Beatrice Southwell] married James Kinloch Kilby, father of the present owners of the property, which has been formed into a partnership of the three brothers.

Now, though the original pise homestead built of clay bricks burnt on the place still stands and is the very comfortable home of Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Kilby, two other homes have been added to the property, both in much the same pioneering spirit as when the first was built,

Back in 1939, when Mrs. Bruce Kilby gave up a flourishing real estate business in Sydney to marry young Bruce Kilby, she declared that she was not going to be without any of fine amenities of city life through going to live in the country. And she isn't—but she didn't get them overnight. There have been "pioneering years" behind the present development of her lovely home.

In the first place, they didn't have a home. They couldn't buy timber for the framework, they couldn't get bricks, and it was already becoming difficult to get labour on the job, though they had the builder teed up. Then the pioneering spirit of the late James and Beatrice asserted itself in their son Bruce. Part of "Parkwood" is on the Ginninderra Creek which runs into the Murrumbidgee. At one section, its steep banks, known as the Gorge, and a favourite' picnicking spot, are lined with native pines. Mr. Bruce Kilby took his axe and cut down 150 of the best and straightest he could select, hitched them onto chains and a team of horses, and dragged them out of the Gorge.

The timbers were cut and dressed on the property, and they form the framework and all the flooring, overmantels and doors, of their charming bungalow home, for which Mrs. Kilby drew the plan.

Since building it, front porch and side sunroom, enclosed against the cold westerlies, have been added with concrete bricks made on the property by the brothers, who recently turned out 12,000 bricks, the makings of the third homestead on 'Parkwood', for which they also put in the concrete foundations. This six-roomed home has only recently been completed.

The living room of the Bruce Kilby's house was recently re-lined, cream painted, and fully decorated by Mr. and Mrs. Kilby, working together, following the installation of electric light and power, 18 months ago from Canberra. This, too, was a pioneering job, six landholders in the district organising a petition to the Works and Housing Commission to get it.

The modern kitchen has hot and cold water, refrigeration, electric stove, cupboard space, and a walk-in pantry which bears evidence of the good housewifery of the ex-estate agent.

Holdings Consolidated

The original grant of land was 640 acres on Ginninderra Creek, but additional purchases over the years have increased it to 3,000 acres with a five-mile frontage to the Murrumbidgee River. On this highland country the Kilbys run Romney Marsh rams with Romney-Merino cross ewes for the fat lamb trade, with the market right at the front door, for Canberra butchers come out to 'Parkwood' and buy in the paddock. First lambings are usually in June and July, with a second lambing in September.

The original 'Parkwood' homestead, still in a wonderful state of preservation, due to the fact that it has never been allowed to fall into disrepair, has much of interest for the visitor. A tiny room at the back of the hall is still known as 'The Parson's Boom,' in which the visiting clergyman spent the night. Another room, with a single tiny window, is still preserved as 'mother's room' and in it the four-poster cedar bedstead in which all the Southwell children were born.

A tiny steep staircase, more like a ship's companionway than a stairway, leads to the attic where the daughters of the family used to sleep. 'Tis said that they had to sit down to brush and braid their long hair because the ceiling was too low to permit them to stretch, their arms over their heads to take out the hairpins. More recent generations of Kilbys have used the adjoining attic room as a schoolroom, and the tiny dormer window looks out onto a magnificent view across to the main Dividing Range, more often than not snow-capped in winter.

Also intact is the tiny granite church, erected by the late Thomas Southwell for the monthly church services conducted there by the rector who came from Queanbeyan on horseback. It also marked the christenings of the numerous Southwell children.

Since Canberra became the Federal Capital of Australia and brought 'Parkwood' within striking distance of a city, 'Parkwood' has lost its sense of isolation, but in the old days, when it was in the division of Hall, the nearest town was Queanbeyan, some 30 miles distant, with Yass an equal distance on the other side.

Even as recently as last year, the Kilbys of 'Parkwood' have had a taste of the isolation their forebears endured as a matter of course. When heavy rains caused the flooded Ginninderra Creek to rise, it surrounded the Kilby homes, all situated together on the one knoll, and for weeks, on more than one occasion, they were completely cut off from the road out.

Often times, too, in the winter months, when a heavy mantle of snow covers the landscape, isolation sets in again for the Kilbys, but nowadays telephones can keep them in touch with the world beyond their own boundary fences, and when the weather clears, it is only a matter of a half-hour's car trip to take them into the heart of the Federal Capital.

Nevertheless, despite every modern amenity that has come to the Kilbys of 'Parkwood', this self-contained family unit can still virtually "pull up the drawbridges" and enjoy the seclusion of their splendid isolation as completely as did great-grandfather Southwell in the early days of last century.

[The Land, Friday 20 July 1951, page 23]