



ALBANY: A PANORAMA  
OF THE SOUND  
FROM 1827.

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*For Judi, Robin and Richard*

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as building labourers and were responsible for the erection of many of Albany's early houses.<sup>10</sup>

November 1831 saw the *Sulphur* bring to the Sound one of the most important early settlers on the south coast of Western Australia. Thirty-five year-old George Cheyne (1796-1869) and his thirty-two year-old wife Grace arrived at Swan River from their native Scotland in the *Stirling* in June 1831. When they found all the good land long since granted, they too decided to move to the Sound. George Cheyne has become confused in the public mind with George Macartney Cheyne who lived in Albany 1834-5 and served for twelve months as the Government Auctioneer. Who he was, and his relationship with George Cheyne, is not known. That there were two men is conclusively demonstrated by the existence of a letter and a petition signed by both of them, and an account of a meeting which both attended.<sup>11</sup> It was George Cheyne who remained in the colony and whose name is perpetuated in the nomenclature of the south coast.

In the environment of early Western Australia, where mere survival was difficult, Cheyne proved to be one of the few who succeeded and prospered. He was able to do this because he possessed all the necessary ingredients for success - capital, the ability to work hard, and the perception to choose the correct fields into which to diversify his financial interests. Though described as a man of sterling probity, he also seems to have been willing to bend the law when its protectors were not looking. Cheyne came well prepared for life in the new colony. His possessions included considerable capital, stock, all the necessities for establishing himself as a merchant, and two prefabricated wooden Swedish houses. Putting his capital to work, Cheyne had acquired nine blocks along Stirling Terrace and three near Middleton Beach within eighteen months of arrival. From very early he seems to have lived on blocks on the eastern corner of Brunswick Road and Spencer Street, quite possibly in the small cottage behind the present Norman House. Cheyne also acquired land near the present Upper Kalgan bridge and 15 000 acres near Morley's block at Kendenup.

Cheyne's interests became numerous and varied. While still in Perth he had applied to rent Mistaken Island in the Sound

in order to release rabbits he had brought with him. Although initially unsuccessful, it may well be due to him that the island later came to be a rabbit warren and to be given Rabbit Island as a second name. On arrival at the Sound, Cheyne rented the former New South Wales camp gardens, and established himself as a merchant and licensed spirits dealer. In the latter role he is said to have made considerable profits, it being claimed in 1833 that he was selling rum which he had purchased at 5s per gallon for 25s per gallon. Perhaps the most important of Cheyne's activities, and the main tribute to his perception, was his realisation that his success, and Albany's, lay in the sea which washed her shores rather than in the broad acres of hinterland.<sup>12</sup>

There were others who came from Perth to inspect the potential of the Sound in these early years who were neither as impressed nor as successful. Many left after a brief visit, and others acquired land. One party who even attempted to settle the land were the Henty family who had been among the most wealthy and prominent to place their faith in Stirling's glowing reports of the Swan. Unable to acquire suitable land on the west coast, James Henty had decided that the family should move to Van Diemen's Land, but as a last chance decided to try the Sound. He even devised a plan which involved operating farms at both the Sound and Van Diemen's Land which would be connected by their own ship. Henty sent his eighteen year-old brother John to select the land at the Sound in November 1831. He chose a 300 acre block on the south-west point of land formed by the King River where it enters Oyster Harbour, but when James visited the district in February 1832 he was not impressed. Nevertheless John was left to struggle on carving a property out of the bush for a year or so before joining the rest of the family. The Hentys had found greater fortunes to be made in Van Diemen's Land and on the south coast of Victoria where they founded Portland.<sup>13</sup>

Following the first thirty months as a free settlement which had seen little growth or development, Albany from late 1833 experienced a three-year period of stimulus and optimism. A number of new settlers arrived, including some with capital, who intended acquiring land for agricultural and pastoral