

**Dorothea Mackellar, 'My Country', her Links to *Kurrumbede*
and its Influence on her Writing**



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The woolshed paddock of *Kurrumbede* depicted as 'The Woolshed Plain, *Burburgate*' in an 1867 watercolour, now in the National Library. [NLA: Pic-an5263711]

by

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For

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Introduction

Isobel Marion Dorothea Mackellar was born on 1 July 1885 at *Dunara*, Point Piper, the daughter of Dr Charles Kinnaird Mackellar and his wife Marion Isobel (nee Buckland).¹ She had two older brothers, Keith Kinnaird (b. 1880) and Eric Buckland (b.1882) and a younger brother Malcolm (b.1889). Her father was a highly respected physician, businessman and politician. As an MLC he focussed on medical and hospital reforms and campaigned for the improved protection of the rights of women and children. He was knighted in 1912 and made Knight Commander of St Michael and St George in 1916.² Surviving correspondence between her brothers and 'Shuey' as she was called in the family,³ testifies that it was a close and affectionate family that was devastated when Keith was killed in action in the Boer War in 1900.⁴

She was educated at home and with the daughters of the NSW Governor at Government House. As a child, she read early, and later studied languages becoming fluent in French, Spanish, German and Italian. She learnt to ride, dance, swim, draw and fence. Private tutors were often engaged. As a very young girl in the early 1890s, Dorothea holidayed in the southern highlands and in the late 1890s she spent time at *Torryburn*, in the Paterson district. It was leased in 1898 by Charles Mackellar with an option to purchase, which he later took up.⁵ Early evidence of her interest in nature, which later found expression in her rhymes can be found in a 1899 scrapbook in which she compiled a list of birds and animals to be found at *Torryburn*.⁶ The family's ownership coincided with a period of extended and severe drought, which Dorothea witnessed breaking; an event that was memorialised in the fifth stanza of 'My Country'.

The family travelled together extensively both overseas and in Australia, at times as part of Charles Mackellar's study tours, to inform reform in NSW, with Dorothea acting as interpreter. In Sydney, Dorothea and her parents were frequently mentioned in the social pages of the press, attending balls, dances, 'at homes' and vice-regal functions. Raised in 'highly protected and highly civilized circumstances' ... she 'moved easily between the society of Sydney's intellectual and administrative elite, life on her family's country properties, and among their friends in London.'⁷

¹ Beverley Kingston, 'Mackellar, Isobel Dorothea (1885 - 1968)' *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 10, Melbourne University Press, 1986, pp.298-299.

² Ann M. Mitchell, 'Mackellar, Sir Charles Kinnaird (1844-1926)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 10, Melbourne University Press, 1986.

³ Letter from Malcolm, 26 November 1927 in MLSLSNW: Gordon H. Williamson Papers MLMSS 5132.

⁴ MLSLSNW: Mackellar Family, IV Sir Charles Kinnaird Mackellar, Dr. Papers, A. Correspondence, 1871-1921, i, ii, iii, iv, v, vi in Boxes ML MSS 1959/1-2.

⁵ Mackellar Family, Dorothea Mackellar Papers, 1783 -1968 MLMSS1959 8(22).

⁶ Mackellar Family, Dorothea Mackellar Papers, 1783 -1968 MLMSS1959 11.

⁷ Beverley Kingston, 'Mackellar, Isobel Dorothea (1885 - 1968)' *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 10, Melbourne University Press, 1986, pp.298-299.

Collections of her verse in manuscript, survive from 1902, but it was the publication of 'Core of My Heart' in the London *Spectator* magazine on 5 September 1908 that set her on a trajectory to be identified in Australia with the poem's nationalistic expression of love of country rooted in the extremes of both terrain and climate, and the tension of the beauty and terror to be found in them. It was popularly embraced and 'My Country', as the poem was renamed, is held in similar regard as 'Waltzing Matilda' in the Australian literary canon. As Beverley Kingston has observed:

It became a kind of unofficial Australian anthem, frequently included in collections for use in schools, and regularly recited by homesick Australians abroad. With its clear and simple statement of what Australia meant to them, it was immensely popular with Australian troops in Europe during World War I. The idea that it had been written by a young Sydney girl certainly added to its appeal ...⁸

Dorothea went on to publish several collections of poetry: *The Closed Door* (Melbourne, 1911); *The Witch-Maid* (London, 1914); *Dreamharbour* (London, 1923) and *Fancy Dress* (Sydney, 1926). Many of the poems had been previously separately published in the United Kingdom's *Spectator*, *Sunday Times* and *Sunday Mail*; the American *Harper's Magazine*, *Appleton's Magazine* and *Poetry*; in Australia in *Bush Brother*; *Southern Sphere*; *Art in Australia*, the *Australasian*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *Melbourne Punch*, *Spinner*, *Woman's Mirror*, *Bulletin*, *Birth* and *Forum*.⁹ Dorothea also co-authored two novels with her friend Ruth Bedford, *Little Blue Devil* (1912) and *Two's Company* (1914) and alone, *The Outlaws Luck* published by Mills & Boon, London in 1913.¹⁰ The dialogue of the 1918 film, *The Lure of the Bush*, which was partly filmed at *Kurrumbede*, was rewritten by her. Dorothea's most productive period as a writer roughly coincides with her association with *Kurrumbede* from c.1908 tapering off in the first half of the 1920s.

Her literary legacy, most particularly 'My Country' has inspired the national Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards and the formation of the Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society. Mackellar High School on Sydney's northern beaches has been named in her honour. There has been debate however, as to the origins of 'My Country', where it was written and its inspiration. There is also a debate about the extent and importance of Dorothea's connection with *Kurrumbede* and its influence on her later writing.

⁸ *Dorothea Mackellar: A Poet's Journey*, Forward by Beverley Kingston, The Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society, Gunnedah, 2002.

⁹ *The Poems of Dorothea Mackellar*, Rigby, 1971.

¹⁰ *Dorothea Mackellar: A Poet's Journey*, Forward by Beverley Kingston, The Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society, Gunnedah, 2002.

The Mackellar family property in 1900, *Torryburn* has since the mid 1950s been accepted as, in part, the inspiration, for 'My Country' with the location of its writing occurring at her Sydney home.¹¹ Since the early 1980s, *Kurrumbede*, near Gunnedah has been put forward with a competing claim to having both an inspirational role in the formation of the poem and as a site for its writing.¹²

This report sets out to shed some light on these issues and to examine Dorothea's connection to *Kurrumbede*, which has been recently purchased by Vickery South Mining Company. They plan to establish an open cut coal mine on the property. The report was commissioned by Vickery South's Coalworks through R.W Corkery & Co, Geological and Environmental Consultants. It was commissioned as independent advice and was not subject to editorial interference. In undertaking the work the property was visited and locals with an interest or connection with Dorothea were contacted. These include Bob and Don Ewing, Michael Baxter, Pip Murray, Micky Maas, Anne Maree and Lennox Waugh, Peter, Frank and Arthur McIlveen, Don McDonagh, Robin Rasmussen and Mila Stone. The files of the Gunnedah historical society were examined. The existing published literature was reviewed; land title, newspaper, and passenger shipping lists were searched. Records held in the State Library of NSW (including the Mackellar Family Papers for which permission was received to view but not copy), the National Library of Australia and the National Film and Sound Archive were examined. Where relied on, they are indicated in the footnotes throughout the text. Professor Beverley Kingston, a Dorothea Mackellar expert, reviewed and commented on the draft report.

The Mackellar Acquisition of Gunnedah properties, *Kurrumbede*, 1906 and the *Rampadells*, 1909

Kurrumbede and *The Rampadells*, the Mackellar family properties at Gunnedah were formed on the former *Burbugate* pastoral holding. These acquisitions are the earliest documented association of the Mackellars with Gunnedah. This 47,000 acre property was initially offered for closer settlement purposes by the Namoi Pastoral Company, but when the offer was not taken up by government, *Burbugate* was purchased by a syndicate that cut it into blocks suitable for dairy farms, wheat cultivation and grazing.¹³ On 25 October 1905, they were put up for auction. The event was featured in *The Sydney Morning Herald* of Monday 30 October, where it attracted the following commentary under the heading, 'The Cry For Land':

¹¹ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 July 1955, Women's Section, p.4.

¹² *The Australian Women's Weekly*, Dec 31 1980 /Jan 7 1981, pp.10-11.

¹³ *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 29 August 1906, p.26.

A striking object-lesson as to the right way of setting about securing closer settlement was given at Gunnedah last week, when nearly 40,000 acres of what has been known during a long term of the history of this State as Burburgate were sold at public auction to private purchasers. It is a portion of the Liverpool Plains, where they are traversed by the northwest branch of the railway from Werris Creek junction. For many years these rich flats have lain idle, given up to the depasturing of sheep. To borrow an expressive American phrase, the "get-rich-quick" methods of the old days cared nothing for closer settlement or the steady returns from farming. But land laws showed the small man a way to raise money by blackmailing the squatter, who in his turn protected his run in the only manner open to him short of out-and-put purchase. But all this was fatal to closer settlement, and the Liverpool Plains remained a sheep-walk, like so many other rich districts in the State. But times have changed. A quarter of a century ago Burburgate was the scene of a typical land fight between "dummies" and blackmailers. On Wednesday it was sold in lots of varying sizes for dairy farms, wheat lands, and grazing areas- in other words, for closer settlement. Over £120,000 was realised, the blocks sold ranging down to two hundred acres. But the interesting fact about this sale, as illustrating the demand for suitable land, and the notice attracted outside our own State by our closer settlement movement, is that it was attended by buyers and inquirers from all parts of the Commonwealth, who eagerly competed with the local people at the sale.

The success of this experiment on the banks of the Namoi should encourage the closer settlement scheme...

The *Burburgate* auction blocks purchased by Charles Mackellar were described in advertisements for the auction in the following terms: **[See Figure 1 for block identification]**

Block 50 - Part of Currumbede paddock, as shown in illustration. Undulating country timbered with box, ironbark, pine, oak and rosewood (ringbarked), on the river flats, gum and apple. Reddish soil inclined to be gravelly on ridge. Water from Namoi River. Fenced on north and on east boundaries. Fourteen miles from Gunnedah.

Block 51 - The remainder of Currumbede paddock. Gently undulating country timbered with box and rosewood, ringbarked, and about 300 acres of plain. Water from dam and from Namoi River. Fenced on east boundary. Thirteen miles from Gunnedah.

Block 52 – Of this block about 400 acres are in open rich black soil plain, the remainder is open forest of box and gum and apple, reddish soil. Fenced on east boundary. Water from Namoi River and a small dam in the middle of the block Cross fences adaptable for making small paddocks. Rich flats on river suitable for dairying. Twelve miles from Gunnedah.

Block 53 – About 700 acres of this block open plain, balance open forest of box, box and apple on rich flats on river front Cross fences could be advantageously used in making paddocks. Fenced on eastern boundary. Water from Namoi River. Eleven miles from Gunnedah.¹⁴

The name Kurrumbede (spelt Currumbede in the auction notices) originates then, not with the Mackellars but with *Burburgate* and most probably with the original Aboriginal owners and occupiers of the country.

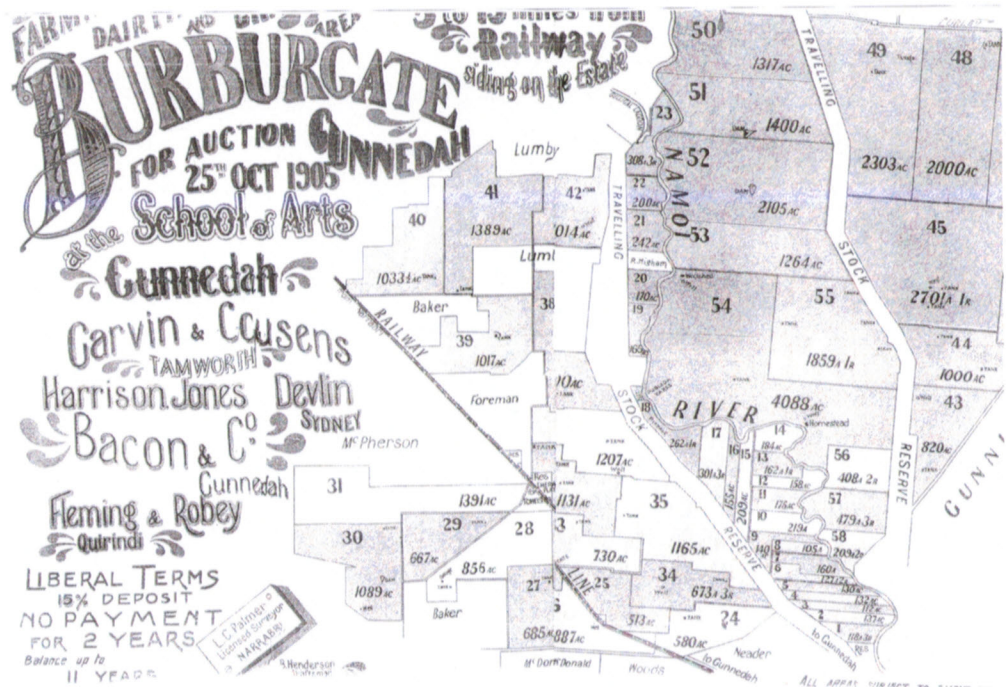


Figure 1 A fragmentary remnant of a flyer advertising the auction of Burburgate, 25 October 1905.[Gunnedah Historical Society]

¹⁴ Gunnedah Historical Society Research Files – News clippings

The terms of the auction were a 15 per cent deposit with the balance to be paid in instalments, the first of which was not due for two years. All blocks sold at auction or shortly after at good prices of between £2 and £8 per acre. At the time it was 'considered to be 'the best sale ever held in Australia'.¹⁵ Sir William Broun was one of the purchasers along with Dr Mackellar, Reg and Alice (Tot) Broun who took up residence on *Coulston* became close friends of the Mackellars, with Alice and the children travelling with Dorothea and visiting her in Sydney, dining and socialising.¹⁶

Land tenure records indicate that Charles Mackellar's first purchases of the former *Burbugate* (Portion 101 Parish of Burbugate and Portion 3 Parish of Dubbleda) were dated April 1906.¹⁷ In June 1906 Charles purchased the 80-acre, Portion 96 Parish of Burbugate and some 31 separate portions totalling approximately 7915 acres, combining numerous lots from the Parish of Burbugate and Parish of Brentry, County of Nandewar.¹⁸ Aside from the purchase of the properties, evidence of the Mackellar's interest in the area from mid 1906 can be found in incidental newspaper reports, for example, the attendance by Dr Mackellar and Dorothea at a polo tournament in Kensington between the Sydney and Narromine teams on 30 June 1906.¹⁹

By late August 1906, many homesteads had been built on the former *Burbugate*, but there had been no rain and settlers were disheartened as crops failed and there was no feed for stock. *Rampadells*, described in the *Australian Town and Country Journal* as one of the best dairying blocks on the *Burbugate* subdivision, was owned by Joseph Clonan who had built:

... a splendid residence, and has made all preparation for dairying on a big scale, the bails being cemented, and laid out with the intention of installing in the near future Laurence-Kennedy-Gillies milking machines. Messers P.J. and J. Mahony are working the dairy on the shares system, and are milking 40 cows, of mixed breeds.²⁰

The journalist describes a tour of the former *Burbugate* noting that adjoining *Rampadells* was Mr James Dilworth's 11-acre farm on Gulligal Lagoon on which Dilworth had an orchard, grew vegetables and kept bees, it had not been part of the subdivision. [Dilworth is mentioned in Dorothea's diary in 1910] 'Going through the woolshed paddock [former block 54], one of Mr Mackellar's hands was met, riding round, skinning dead sheep ...'.²¹ **[See cover illustration]**

¹⁵ *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 29 August 1906, p.26.

¹⁶ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 August 1907, p.4; ML SLNSW: Mackellar Family, VII Isobel Marion Dorothea Mackellar, Papers, 1886-1868, A. personal papers, iv Diaries, 1910-1955, in Boxes ML MSS 1959/9 & 10, various entries.

¹⁷ Portion 3 was only held until October 1910 when it was transferred to Harriet Wallace of Gunnedah. LTO: Land Grant, Vol. 1687 Fol. 138; Land Grant Vol. 1685 Fol 106. A mortgage associated with the 473 acre portion 101 is dated 24 February 1906.

¹⁸ LTO: Land Grant Vol. 1796 Fol. 233; CT Vol. 1700 Fol. 165.

¹⁹ *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 4 July 1906, p.43.

²⁰ *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 29 August 1906, p.26.

²¹ *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 29 August 1906, p.26.

Hares were further depleting pasture, considered more troublesome than rabbits, weekly drives were organised on various properties to eliminate them. Some 800 were 'secured' on the Mackellar property.²² This must have achieved the desired outcome as in November the property received 3500 sheep moved from Goondiwindi by drover Nelson.²³ Nelson is mentioned in Dorothea's diary for 27 October 1910 when she records sitting on the verandah in the evening listening to his stories, he was still working on the property in September 1911 when she recorded riding with him around the property as he showed her natural curiosities, a crow's nest and fox's nest, '... he is a jewel'. She made notes and began to write a 'Nelson story'.²⁴ In May 1907 Eric, who was c.25 years old, was playing polo at Gunnedah for the Dindemah team.²⁵

The preceding references suggest that Eric was living in the area, probably from at least mid 1906. It is not known where he resided in this period. We know from Charles Mackellar's accounts that construction at *Kurrumbede* was still underway in November 1907. Surviving chequebook stubs indicate the following expenditure related to Gunnedah:

18 October 1907 to EB Mackellar – Trust of Gunnedah £350-5-6
 15 November 1907 to EB Mackellar – Trust of Gunnedah £500-5-0
 21 November 1907 to Stuart Brothers - timber & window sashes for K'bede £15-14-6
 25 November 1907 to Burburgate Syndicate £783-7-9
 25 November 1907 to Bacon & Co Gunnedah on app of HS Edwards & HH Shaddock £366-12-3
 18 Dec 1907 to EB Mackellar – Trust a/c Gunnedah £200-2-0
 7 April 1908 to EB Mackellar – Trust a/c Gunnedah £1000-0-0.²⁶

The next property acquisition was in December 1907 when Charles purchased portions 198 and 211 of the Parish of Dumbleda, a total of 200 acres.²⁷ This was the first purchase of lots that he integrated into *Rampadells*. In June 1909 he purchased an additional 308 acres, portions 1, 2, 3, 38, 39, 120 and 249 of the Parish of Gulligal from Joseph Clonan of Gunnedah, including the area on which the existing *Rampadells* homestead stands.²⁸

²² *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 22 August 1906, p.19.

²³ *Queenslander*, 3 November 1906, pp.31-32.

²⁴ MLNSLNSW: Mackellar Family, VII Isobel Marion Dorothea Mackellar, Papers, 1886-1868, A. personal papers, iv Diaries, 1910-1955, a. Collins Handy Diary 1910, entry for 27 October 1910, b. Collins Handy Diary 1911, entries for 4, 6, 8, 9 and 11 September 1911 in Box ML MSS 1959/9.

²⁵ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 May 1907, p.10.

²⁶ MLNSLNSW: Mackellar Family, IV Sir Charles Kinnaid Mackellar, Dr. Papers, C. Financial and legal papers, 1872-1921, i and ii, in Box ML MSS 1959/3.

²⁷ LTO: CT: Vol 1840 Fol 104

²⁸ LTO: CT Vol 1751 Fol 66; CT Vol 1225 fol 196 and Vol 1225 Fol 197.

Dorothea's authorised biographer, Adrienne Howley in *My Heart, My Country: The Story of Dorothea Mackellar* in which Dorothea's 'family history and life's memories' are recounted, refers to the purchase of the Gunnedah properties. Reliant on Dorothea's late life recall, she states:

In 1907 when Dorothea returned to Sydney [from New Zealand and Fiji] there was Kurrumbede to absorb some of her interest and much of her love. Mr Charles Binnie had purchased, in 1905, at auction for Dr Mackellar, four blocks of land totally [sic] 6,086 acres in the Gunnedah district and the Doctor added to this 300 acres known as the Rampadells. A house was built at the Rampadells until the main homestead, of local stone, brick and slate, with deep verandahs, was built on Kurrumbede Station.²⁹

Dorothea returned to Sydney from Fiji in mid July 1907.³⁰ Typically, sources from the period call into question some aspects of Howley's account, and reinforce others. In this instance, as indicated in the *Australian Town and Country Journal*, the Mackellars did not build the *Rampadells* homestead and land title searches under both the Mackellar and Binnie names from 1900 to 1910 indicate that the *Kurrumbede* lots were acquired in April and June 1906 and that *The Rampadells* homestead site was not purchased until June 1909. On the other hand, Charles Mackellar's expenditure records indicate in the later part of 1907, when Dorothea returned from her New Zealand trip, that *Kurrumbede* homestead was likely to have been under construction. It is also clear that Eric was living in the area from at least mid 1906 and knew Clonan, the owner of the *Rampadells* as they both played for the Dindemah polo team.³¹

A report on Gunnedah published in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on 1 August 1907, had the following to say of the district and its inhabitants:

Gunnedah on the northwest line between Werris Creek and Moree, is developing rapidly. A few years ago it was a very humble township: now there are substantial business premises on every hand. Closer settlement is responsible for this, and the subdivision of the famous Burburgate Estate has done much in changing the district into a small man's paradise. There are some really fine homesteads around, and the farmers and settlers are prospering, and with a few good seasons should have fine properties, with substantial improvements on them. Amongst those in the district are Mr. R.F. Ritchie, Mr Eric Mackellar (son of Dr. Mackellar, M.L.C.). Mr C.G. Robey and Mr Joseph Clonan.

²⁹ Adrienne Howley, *My Heart, My Country The Story of Dorothea Mackellar*, Queensland University Press, 1989, p.90.

³⁰ *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 24 July 1907, p.42.

³¹ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 May 1907, p.10

Sir William Broun, who has a particularly fine property in the Tamworth-Manilla district, owns a slice of the Burburgate Estate, and his methods of operation have aroused considerable interest locally. He is now finishing ploughing operations. He uses two traction engines, each pulling two 10-disc ploughs, and behind come the harrows. The same engines cleared the ground at a cost of about 6s, which under ordinary circumstance would have cost considerably more.³²

By November and December 1907 *Kurrumbede* was showing signs of productivity; sheep and lamb were sold at Homebush from the property in names of Eric Mackellar and Charles, separately.³³

Dorothea at Kurrumbede

The first reference to Dorothea at *Kurrumbede* is at an undefined time in early 1908 and also at Easter of that year in Howley.³⁴ In seeking corroboration of this, given concerns related to the dating of events in Howley newspaper searches have provided some tenuous support for the claim. By early 1908, construction of the homestead had the potential to have been completed, and Dorothea's visit, had the potential to correspond with the entry of 'Core of My Heart' in her 1907-08 Verse Book, just prior to her despatching it to the UK for publication.

The very earliest entries in her verse book for 1909 are 'Calgai'³⁵ and 'Pink', which refers to cattle drinking in the river and to Calgai. They are also the first direct references to *Kurrumbede* in her poetry and are clearly based on her experiences there. They date prior to January 1909.³⁶

Pink

Fish solemnly in the weeds,
Today, when the cattle come down to drink
And push through the whispering reeds:

I stand there and watch
Then, in Calgai too
And they do not heed or fear.
There is not one lark
In this radiant blue
Whose carol I do not hear....³⁷

³² *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 August 1907, p.4

³³ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 November 1907, p.9 and 6 December, 1907, p.9

³⁴ Howley, *My Heart* ..., pp.98; 101-102.

³⁵ published in 1911 as 'Calgai Paddock'

³⁶ ML SLNSW: Mackellar Family, VII Isobel Marion Dorothea Mackellar, Papers, 1886-1868, A. Personal Papers, iv Verse Books, 1901-1943, d. 'Isobel and Other verses' in Box ML MSS 1959/16.

³⁷ MSLNSW: Mackellar Family, VII Isobel Marion Dorothea Mackellar, Papers, 1886-1868, A. Personal Papers, iv Verse Books, 1901-1943, d. 'Isobel and Other verses' in Box ML MSS 1959/16.

The 'Fair Hills of Nandewah' was also written about this time. 'Burning Off [at the Rampadells]' and 'Spring on the Plains' are recorded in her verse book in July 1909.³⁸ Others written in mid 1909 that have a strong Gunnedah/*Kurrumbede* influence include 'Nature Notes near Gunnedah', written in June 1909:

Nature Notes near Gunnedah

The wild swans in triangles fly,
The cranes in single file
The ibis string out like a kite
That stretches for a mile

The Wild swan of Australian lakes,
He wails but never sings ...
They pass so close that we can hear
the beating of their wings.

The Ibis is the Drought Bird called,
And now beloved this season.
He never comes by any chance
But in a splendid season ...³⁹

'Colour', a work Dorothea considered to be her best, was written some time after July of that year along with 'Settlers' and 'Morning'.⁴⁰

Howley refers to Dorothea's return in 1909 from a trip to Brisbane where, amongst other things, she attended the handing over of the Government House to the fledgling University of Queensland, which occurred in December 1909. The account is also conflated with a visit by officers of the Great White Fleet and the supposed breaking of a 1908 marriage engagement between Dorothea and an unnamed person. After the trip, it is claimed that Dorothea sought refuge from the scandal of the broken engagement at *Kurrumbede*, where:

She worked at a collection of verse, one of which was "Burning Off", and sent them to the *Spectator*. "Burning Off" was accepted, and the others returned ...

³⁸ MLSLSNW: Mackellar Family, VII Isobel Marion Dorothea Mackellar, Papers, 1886-1868, A. Personal Papers, iv Verse Books , 1901-1943, e. 'Verse Book July 1909' in Box ML MSS 1959/16.

³⁹ MLSLSNW: Mackellar Family, VII Isobel Marion Dorothea Mackellar, Papers, 1886-1868, A. Personal Papers, iv Verse Books , 1901-1943, d. 'Isobel and Other verses' in Box ML MSS 1959/16.

⁴⁰ MLSLSNW: Mackellar Family, VII Isobel Marion Dorothea Mackellar, Papers, 1886-1868, A. Personal Papers, iv Verse Books , 1901-1943, e. 'Verse Book July 1909' in Box ML MSS 1959/16.

Visitors and houseguests came and went continually. There were visits to the properties of neighbours, private dances and picnic races. Apart from the social life of a wide country area, there were all the activities of the home station, and Dorothea took an interest in everything. There was the ploughing, the sowing, and the reaping of the wheat done by the beautiful Clydesdales in harness, the mustering and branding of the cattle and the breaking-in and training of the brumbies and stock horses.⁴¹

However, there is no reference to an engagement in the Sydney press, despite numerous mentions of Dorothea and the family in the social pages, the Great White Fleet visit was 1908, and 'Burning Off' was completed well before her reputed visit to Brisbane later in the year. While these inaccuracies are an aside to the key issue of Dorothea's connection to *Kurrumbede*, and inaccuracies in dating are to be expected, their nature in this instance undermines confidence in the narrative, because of inconsistencies within the events under narration, and the compression of memories.

Howley was essentially relying on the oral testimony of Dorothea in the last years of her life, almost 60 years after the events, told to her as she acted as her nurse companion. They developed a close loving bond of friendship. Disparities in dates can be explained by the great time lapse and the age and condition of Dorothea at the telling, suffering as she was, the effects of years of alcoholism. When the supporting narrative of related events does not coalesce, then other reasons need to be considered. The story of the engagement is a potent one in carrying the narrative, providing a compelling and romantic tale, serving to demonstrate Dorothea's strength of character, her independence of mind, and that she had had the opportunity to marry.

From 1910 Dorothea's diaries and verse books have survived to provide hard evidence of her links with the property and as contemporaneous primary source documents are a more reliable source than her memories, as recorded by Howley in the 1960s, in the last years of Dorothea's long life.

In early 1910 Dorothea was in Sydney, from where she corresponded with Eric at *Kurrumbede* who at the end of January 1910 was dealing with an 'awful flood'. In early June, Dorothea left for an extended Queensland trip, staying at Government house in Brisbane and travelling up to Cairns and Cooktown, she returned to Sydney in late September - on reading the travelogue, one wonders if this is the trip referred to in Howley as occurring in 1909.

⁴¹ Howley, *My Heart.*, p. 107.

The first reference in her diary to Dorothea at *Kurrumbede* in 1910 is dated 25 October when she stayed for 12 days, after her return from Queensland.⁴² From the diaries, which are occasionally in fragments, and the verse books, which occasionally provide a location, it is possible to say that at the very least Dorothea visited *Kurrumbede* at the following times:

Unknown dates in c. June-July 1909

25 October to 4 November 1910

10 March to 24 March 1911

31 August to 15 September 1911

[From January 1912 to January 1914 Dorothea was travelling overseas]

9 June 1914 to c.25 June 1914

c. 8 July to 30 July 1914

21 July to c. 9 August 1915 [pages missing]

c. 19 October 1915 ... ?

c. 20 November to 8 December 1915

26 April 1917 to 6 June 1917

14 December 1917 to 22 December 1917

28 October 1918 to c.15 November 1918

c. 4 July 1922 to c. 13 July 1922.

Passing Time at *Kurrumbede*

In October 1910 Dorothea commented, on her arrival, on the garden 'looking splendid'. She spent her days reading in a hammock, 'doing' the flowers, going for walks, housework, gardening, knitting, writing letters, receiving visitors and accompanying Eric to visit the '... Dilworths about some cattle' and to Calgai to inspect the wheat. In the evenings she played cards (whist and patience), 'yarned' with Eric and the boys, listened to the gramophone, and on one particularly happy occasion shortly after her arrival, she 'Sat on the verandah and listened to Dave Nelson stories.' Adding the comment, 'Oh- it is so good to be here again!'.⁴³

Her next visit was in March 1911, arriving on the 10th, to find 'the gardens a dream', she left regretfully on the 24th. During the visit she recorded witnessing a 28 strong bullock team take timber across the river. In the mornings she variously 'did' the flowers; played billiards with Eric; wrote letters and worked on her novel *Little Blue Devil*; went riding; and on one occasion helped Eric move sheep from Redbank to Calgai. In the afternoons Dorothea refers to riding about in Calgai and comments on the black swans and duck; mustering, on one occasion to Emu and Vicky (Vickery?) Castle, and on another, rode with Eric to take delivery of 500 head of cattle; she played with the dogs; walked in the garden and yarned.

⁴² MLSLNSW: Mackellar Family, VII Isobel Marion Dorothea Mackellar, Papers, 1886-1868, A. personal papers, iv Diaries, 1910-1955, a. Collins Handy Diary 1910 in Box ML MSS 1959/9.

⁴³ MLMSS 1959, 9/22 vii A. Collins Handy Diary 1910. The diaries have been edited by Jyoti Brunsdon and published by Angus and Robertson, however there are significant gaps and some detail that has been edited out. A combination of the two has been relied on for the account presented her. Jyoti Brunsdon (ed.) *I Love A Sunburnt Country: The Diaries of Dorothea Mackellar*, Angus and Robertson, 1990.

In the evenings there were games played, rhymes written and on another occasion she refers to 'rhymes about this morning' when she had gone for a ride; sitting on the verandah; listening to the gramophone; working on the *Little Blue Devil* manuscript; more yarning and billiards with Malcolm. She comments on the 'splendid moon', the 'glorious sunsets'.⁴⁴ Dorothea's verse book indicates that 'The Sunset Rainbow' was entered on 11 March 1911 at *Kurrumbede*.⁴⁵ Later in the year, in August, a similar pattern is recorded. On the return journey she comments that she made 'colour verses about Australia nearly all the time'. On one evening when they had visitors they walked out and the men had a few shots – 'poor little green parrots'. In the day she helped with mustering, watched the drafting of sheep, talked to the shearers, made rhymes (including one about swallows); exercised the grey hounds; spent time talking and riding with Nelson, and began to write a story inspired by him.⁴⁶

Her diary is notable for her observations of the colour in nature – of birds, water, sunsets, plants. She noticed the bird life on Calgai and on the lagoon, noting 'stately brolgas' or a glorious storm – 'black, blue and silver' and 'beautiful still golden days'.⁴⁷ In June 1917 she recorded inspecting a wheat paddock where the cattle had broken into and:

...lots of brolgas were stalking about, devouring, some had to be shot as a warning. Such an image of grey and scarlet fretted with jade green beak- it was horrible to see it struck out of life, though one didn't wish to sentimentalize. The evening sky was one of the most wonderful I have ever seen.⁴⁸

In her time at *Kurrumbede* over the decade she notes in her diary the activities of the property, the work undertaken, her participation in it, she also refers to her own writing, for example, 11 September 1911 'made more verse. Wrote a little Nelson story, strolled about on the Race Course plain catching a gorgeous, flaming, feather sunset.' She also refers to the Broun family, of visits between the families and their friendship. *Colston*, their property was often a stopping off point when they travelled between Gunnedah and *Kurrumbede*. The garden was a particular interest, in August 1915 for example, she was transplanting hibiscus, pruning, lopping the pepper trees with Eric and she simply 'gardened'.

⁴⁴ MLMSS 1959, 9/22 vii B Collins Handy Diary 1911.

⁴⁵ ML SLNSW: Mackellar Family, VII Isobel Marion Dorothea Mackellar, Papers, 1886-1868, A. Personal Papers, iv Verse Books, 1901-1943, g. 'Verses Feb 1911, 19.1.11' in Box ML MSS 1959/17.

⁴⁶ MLNSW: Mackellar Family, VII Isobel Marion Dorothea Mackellar, Papers, 1886-1868, A. Personal Papers, iv Diaries, 1901-1955, b. in Box ML MSS 1959/9.

⁴⁷ August 1915 and May 1917 in MLNSW: Mackellar Family, VII Isobel Marion Dorothea Mackellar, Papers, 1886-1868, A. Personal Papers, iv Diaries, 1901-1955, f. in Box ML MSS 1959/10.

⁴⁸ MLNSW: Mackellar Family, VII Isobel Marion Dorothea Mackellar, Papers, 1886-1868, A. Personal Papers, iv Diaries, 1901-1955, f. in Box ML MSS 1959/10.

In May 1917 she planted oleanders, peaches and a passion vine. In 1922 she records planting double poppy, nasturtiums and other flowers. Dorothea also liked to settle in the bay window of the billiard room to sew and read and on the verandah in the evening where she could 'yarn' and watch the 'huge' stars.

The influence of Kurrumbede and The Rampadells on Mackellar's Poetry

In the current debate, the weight placed on the potential influence of *Kurrumbede* on 'My Country' has been at the expense of *Kurrumbede*'s readily verifiable influence on Dorothea's other writing. Aside from those verse mentioned earlier there is 'Dawn', 'September', 'Spring on the plains', 'The Magic Forest' and 'The Wings of a Dove' and this list is not exhaustive. 'Culgai Paddock', for example is the name of one of the main paddocks at *Kurrumbede* and its opening verse, 'I know the tawny grass of the plain/Is blown like the sea today', can readily be related to *Kurrumbede*. The wind on the lagoon, the rushes and cranes, the cattle and reeds of the later verses strongly link this poem to *Kurrumbede*. The opening line of 'Burning Off', 'They're burning off at the Rampadells' also establishes the origins of this poem to the area. The references to the brolgas, cranes, pelicans, ibis and black swans in 'Spring on the Plains' may well be references to birdlife on the lagoon. In 'Dawn', aside from the very explicit 'On the road to Gunnedah', the references are generic. 'The Magic Forest' on the other hand refers to cypress pines known to be part of the native vegetation of *Kurrumbede* and the reader can conjure the experience readily in their mind's eye; it is a *Kurrumbede* experience. 'The Wings of a Dove' verse:

I know a long lagoon on Northern Plains
Where small white everlastings shine,
Where lovely things are happening all day long
And that hour shall be mine
When level sun rays on a day of spring
The throngs incarnadine
That come to drink: ibis and pelican,
Parrots in patchwork dresses,
Egrets like slender sad bewitched princesses.
I'll watch the hunting swallows and the teal
And pearl-grey brolgas tall
With a brother or a horse –
Or nobody at all.

has strong *Kurrumbede* influences that can be seen articulated in her diaries.

Her verse book indicates the entry of 'Westward Ho', 'The Half Starved', 'A Question of Focus', 'Encounter', 'Royal Blood' 'Tiolet' and 'Babylon', 'The Moving Mountains' 'Violet Plants' while staying at *Kurrumbede* in 1914-1915.⁴⁹ In October 1915, 'The Unpardonable Sin', 'I wonder what they are' were entered there and 'West Wind' has the notation 'train Gunnedah to Sydney'. Other poems entered at *Kurrumbede* for 1915-1916 are 'Business', 'Autobiographical to a Devil', 'Drought and Wartime'.⁵⁰ The influence of Dorothea's time in the *Kurrumbede* drafting yards is also evident in the novel *Little Blue Devil*, for example:

He was tough and strong as No.9 fencing wire, though he was not yet thirteen....
 'loafing again, you Tony? I'll teach you what work means before I've done with you.
 '... one day at the yards when things were going quickly, Tony let a yearling lamb in with the ewes. It was the sort of mistake that happens a dozen times a day when the sheep are crowding as fast as they were then, but it was undoubtedly a mistake. Tony expected the curse that he got, but the blow that followed it took him entirely by surprise.⁵¹

Dorothea also re-wrote the dialogue for the 1918 film *The Lure of the Bush*, directed by Claude Flemming and starring Snowy Baker, a friend of Dorothea's younger brother, Malcolm. It was partly shot at *Kurrumbede*. The screenplay had been the winner of a competition conducted by the *Bulletin*, it told the story of a boy from a pioneering family in the Australian outback who on returning from schooling in England with a 'monocle, plus-fours, and a riding-crop in his hand', wanted to relearn the ways of the bush and took a job as a jackeroo. In the words of film historians Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper:

The rugged, virile hero, the setting on the rolling plains of central New South Wales, the rough riding and kangaroo hunt, all carried strong appeal for Australian audiences ... Promotion exploited the outback spirit of the film.⁵²

In a review in *Theatre*, the setting was commented on '... there are some great views of mobs of cattle and horses and flocks of sheep, and the many birds and animals snapped include a mob of some hundreds of kangaroos ...'.⁵³

⁴⁹ MSLNSW: Mackellar Family, VII Isobel Marion Dorothea Mackellar, Papers, 1886-1868, A. Personal Papers, iv Verse Books , 1901-1943, i. 'Verses 1st May 1912' in Box ML MSS 1959/17.

⁵⁰ MSLNSW: Mackellar Family, VII Isobel Marion Dorothea Mackellar, Papers, 1886-1868, A. Personal Papers, iv Verse Books , 1901-1943, j. 'Verses Dorothea Mackellar. October 19 1915, Dunara, Rose Bay' in Box ML MSS 1959/17.

⁵¹ Dorothea Mackellar and Ruth Bedford, *The Little Blue Devil*, Alston, Rivers Ltd; London, 1912, pp.38-40

⁵² *Australian Film, 1900-1977: A Guide to Feature Film Production*, Rev. Edn, Oxford University press, 1998, pp.82-83.

⁵³ Cited in Pike and Cooper.

Dorothea's last major publication was *Fancy Dress* in 1926, her most productive years as a writer coincide with her association with *Kurrumbidgee* and it was undoubtedly a great and much loved influence on her.

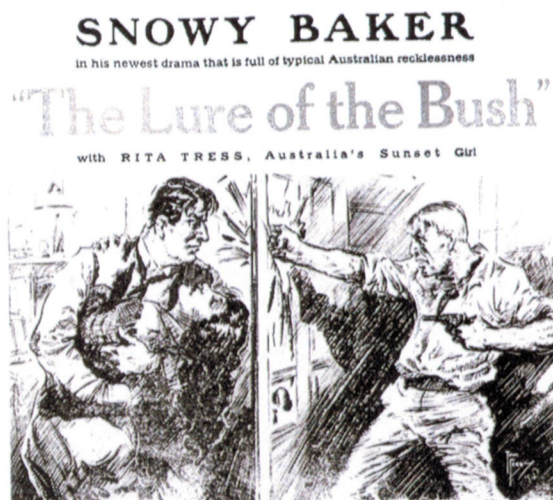


Figure 2: Publicity for *The Lure of the Bush*. [Reproduced in Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper, *Australian Film, 1900-1977: A Guide to Feature Film Production*, Rev. Edn, Oxford University press, 1998, pp.82-83.]

References attributed to Dorothea as to inspiration and writing of *My Country*

That 'My Country' was several years in gestation is evident in the themes of poems in Dorothea's early verse books. Beverley Kingston has noted 'Drought-time 1902'⁵⁴ from the earliest volume which includes many 'nature' poems. In the 1905-06-verse book, there is 'The Call of the South':

I heard the call of the Southland,
To the grey-green north it came,
In my heart the love of the Southland,
Reddened and sprang to flame,

A wind blew over the ocean,
And sobbed down a London street –
I felt its kiss on my eyelids
Languorous, wild and sweet.

A fleet kiss – a sweet kiss
Soft on the eyes and mouth
Light as a moth's wing
With all the soul of the South!

Where scarlet flowers and garden
Strangely scented and bright

⁵⁴ Dorothea Mackellar: *A Poet's Journey*, Forward by Beverley Kingston, The Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society, Gunnedah, 2002.

All under a sky of cobalt
Lift their heads to the light

The sun can pity the northland
So he gilds it pale and fair
But his own true love is the Southland
And he pours his heart out there!
The one land, the sun land,
That holds my heart in thrall –
I turn at her summons
I come at her call.⁵⁵

Unfortunately, there is no statement written or recorded by Dorothea Mackellar herself that articulates where or when she wrote 'My Country' or expressing the influences on it. Except for the 1907-1908-verse book, all the known evidence is a quotation or a retelling of what Dorothea expressed to others many years later. The verse book is the only primary source that has bearing on the issue.⁵⁶

The earliest reference explicating the writing of 'My Country' is dated 7 July 1955, some 50 years after the reputed writing of the poem, when Dorothea was interviewed for an article in the Women's Section of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, titled 'Dorothea Mackellar Still Loves Her Sunburnt Country', the article reports Dorothea's account:

The game of tennis was over, and the three teenagers - at the turn of the century - were talking about their trips to England ...
One was enthusing about the countryside - "so green and tidy and, well civilized- after Australia ..."
Dorothea, who was nineteen, disagreed. "You shouldn't try to compare the two - they're so different. I do admire England, but I don't feel at one with it..."
Walking home she began to turn the conversation into a poem. It began with her friend's "love of field and coppice," then burst out into her own feelings: "I love a sunburnt country."

In 1961 the publisher, Rigby produced a collection of Australian poetry titled *Australian poets speak* in which poets comment on a selected poem. Correspondence between Rigby and Hazel De Berg, who had recorded Dorothea reading 'My Country' for the National Library, indicates that Dorothea was too ill at the time to write and Hazel was asked to contact Dorothea for a quote.⁵⁷ The following was attributed to Dorothea in the publication:

⁵⁵ MSLNSW: Mackellar Family, VII Isobel Marion Dorothea Mackellar, Papers, 1886-1868, A. Personal Papers, iv Verse Books , 1901-1943, b. 'le Domino Rose and Others - 1905-06' in Box ML MSS 1959/16.

⁵⁶ ML SLNSW: Mackellar Family, VII Isobel Marion Dorothea Mackellar, Papers, 1886-1868, A. Personal Papers, iv. Verse Books , 1901-1943, i. 'Verses 1907-08' in Box ML MSS 1959/16. CY Reel 1395.

⁵⁷ National Library of Australia: Biographical cuttings on Dorothea Mackellar, BIOG; Hazel de Berg Papers, MS 888.

One day when I was nineteen I was talking with a friend of the same age about the anti-Australianism – commoner then than now- of many Australians we knew. We both vehemently disliked it, and I went straight home from her house with verses ringing in my head.

Several friends saw the result, and persuaded me to send it to *The Spectator*, where it was published.⁵⁸

In 1965 in an article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* titled 'Dorothea Mackellar Repeats the Verse of her Youth', when Dorothea was 78 years old, she recalled the breaking of the drought at *Torryburn* as the influence for the lines:

*Over the thirsty paddocks
Watch, after many days
The filmy veil of greenness
That thickens as we gaze*

The article goes on to state that the poem was written while Dorothea was in her teens.

In 1966 Ken Tye, a life member of the Royal Australian Historical Society (RAHS), visited Dorothea at the Tranquillity Private Hospital, Bondi, and published his account of the visit in the RAHS newsletter in July 1967 and in *On Service* in 1967.⁵⁹ Tye also wrote that it was the breaking of the drought witnessed by Dorothea at *Torryburn*, c.1900 that inspired, some 5 years later, the 'drought breaking' lines in 'My Country'

Gordon H. Williamson and Dorothea MacMilliam (close friends of Dorothea) prepared and signed a formal 'Declaration' that stated that Dorothea had informed them on her 82nd birthday in 1967 that 'My Country' '... had been written by her in the apartments above the consulting rooms of her father, Sir Charles Mackellar, in Buckland Chambers, 183 Liverpool Street, Sydney (on the corner of Commonwealth Street)' after the family had returned from an overseas trip.⁶⁰

The following is a transcription of a manuscript prepared by Williamson titled 'Who was Dorothea Mackellar?':

Where 'My Country' was actually conceived and where it attained status and what makes it so eminently important and a part of Australia's literary heritage, is necessarily a somewhat involved story. Delightfully and most appropriately its beginnings were inspired in Dorothea's youthful mind from impressions gained in many parts of Australia's outback, mostly on her family's properties which were widely spread, but particularly and notably at "Torryburn", East

⁵⁸ Colin Thiele, Ian Mudie, eds. *Australian Poets Speak*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1961, p.65

⁵⁹ *On Service*, NSW Public Service Professional Officers Association, August 1967, pp.2-3; Newsletter of the Royal Australian Historical Society, July 1967.

⁶⁰ Mitchell Library of the State Library of NSW, Ref: Gordon H. Williamson Papers ML MSS 5132.

Gresford, near Maitland, her father's cattle station. Simultaneously with the formulation, of a self-governing independent nation of Australia with its compounded number of autonomous states or colonies held together since its inceptive years – mainly by their common allegiance to the British Imperial Crown – a nation and its love story evolved at one and the same time. Dorothea has stated that as fragments concerning Australia formed from time to time in her ever-questing mind, they did not at first seem related to each other. Nevertheless they remained fallow or dormant in her memory even during the period she was absent from Australia. In time, when indeed her nostalgic sentiment for Australia inspired many of her best known verses until with times swift ebb and the mellowing influence of the years and the landscape still surrounding "Torryburn" and its abundant indigenous animal and bird life, the auspicious moment for release and consecration Of Australia's Love story, a serenade, arrived. It happened to be strangely enough at the close of a game of tennis on a suburban court. A number of teenage girls were discussing impressions derived on a recent visit to England and one of them reminisced about the English country said and its formal beauty, its lusciousness and its greenness, so civilised after Australia's ragged landscape.

Dorothea who was one of the company and one need hardly remark immediately disagrees as was invariably her custom when aspersions were cast upon her beloved country that as she said you should not try to compare the two. Walking home, after the game, the dormant image forming in her mind over years suddenly became alive and seemingly irrelevant phrases written at random here and there assumed relevance, and so it was that Australia and Australians acquired an official love story.⁶¹

Dorothea's nurse, Sr Adrienne Matzenik [later Howley] was interviewed, as Dorothea's biographer, for a 1967 article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* to mark Dorothea's 82nd birthday. Matzenik is quoted as saying,

... she has told me how she wrote 'My Country' bit by bit in a notebook. At the time she was living with her father, Sir Charles Mackellar, at Buckland Chambers, in Liverpool Street, overlooking Hyde Park.

Although she was only 19, she had been travelling most of her life, overseas and here. She knew the bush, and had seen all those things in the poem – rain coming after drought to her father's property, Torreyburn [sic]. Near Maitland; orchids in the forests of Queensland; ferns on the New South Wales Coast.⁶²

In 1971 Matzenik wrote an introductory memoir of Mackellar to introduce *The Poems of Dorothea Mackellar* published by Rigby. In this

⁶¹ Gordon H. Williamson Papers ML MSS 5132.

⁶² June 1967, p.6.

she again refers to Dorothea's experience of the drought breaking at *Torryburn* and that the 'incident was still fresh in her mind when, at nineteen, she wrote the best known and best loved of her works: *My Country*'. Matzenik then goes on to state that she had commenced writing 'My Country' in England, '... when nostalgia for Australia was made sharper by hearing her friends praising the soft beauty of the English countryside.' Not happy with the verses, she reworked them several times, with the final draft prepared in Buckland Chambers.⁶³

In 1978, Matzenik quoted in the *Northern Territory News*, continued to maintain that 'My Country' was commenced in England and completed in Sydney.⁶⁴

Matzenik's biography of Dorothea was finally published in 1989 (under the name Adrienne Howley). She had nursed Dorothea for the last eleven years of her life, c.1957-1968, and commenced work on her biography of Dorothea in the 1960s with Dorothea's co-operation. In that work Howley reiterated Dorothea's witnessing of the breaking of the drought in 1900 at *Torryburn*, with the poem completed as 'Core of My Heart', in 1905 on her return from the UK, when the reaction of friends to her return set her mind

'... to work on the verses she had been occupied with, on and off, for several years, and in which she had been endeavouring to express what Australia meant to her... So "Core of My Heart" was completed but put aside as not fit for publication.'

In Howley's view, it was time spent at *Torryburn* that 'laid down impressions that can be found not only in *My Country* but in many of Dorothea's poems having to do with bush creatures, drought and flooding rain'.⁶⁵

'Core of my Heart' is entered in the 1907-1908-verse book on page 93. The book ends in May 1908 and is 137 pages in length. It is possible then, that the verse book entry for 'My Country' could date to early 1908, when Dorothea is reported by Howley to have been at *Kurrumbede*. While this possibility is only conjectural it offers an explanation for the claim made by 78 year old Mrs Alice (Tot) Broun, in a interview with Micky Maas, that Dorothea had told her that part of 'My Country' was written at *Kurrumbede*. In 1980 journalist Keith Finlay, writing in the *Women's Weekly* in December stated that he had heard the recording of Mrs Braun saying 'I have her [Dorothea's] word that part of 'My Country' was written at Kurrumbede'.⁶⁶ According to Maas, a passionate advocate for the Dorothea and 'My Country' connection to Gunnedah, the recording of that interview which she

⁶³ *The Poems of Dorothea Mackellar*, Rigby, 1971, n.p.

⁶⁴ 15 December 1978, p.21.

⁶⁵ Adrienne Howley, *My Heart, My Country - The Story of Dorothea Mackellar*, University of Queensland Press, 1989, pp. 54, 87- 88. See also Howley in Val Anderson, *The Dorothea Mackellar - My Country- Patterson Valley Connection*, Patterson Historical Society inc., 1197, p.4.

⁶⁶ *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 31 December 1980, p.11.

held for many years has been lost. It is now impossible for it to be independently assessed in the context of what other questions were asked around it, the state of mind of Mrs Broun, the broader narrative in which the claim was made, and the conviction and tone with which Mrs Broun spoke.

Despite the variations in the story of the writing of 'My Country', the above accounts consistently point to the writing of 'My Country' in *Buckland House*, Liverpool Street, Sydney by Dorothea in 1905 at the age of nineteen after the families return from the UK. There is a certain pride in the claim that it was written when she was a teenager that is consistently expressed across the accounts. Dorothea turned 20 in 1 July 1905, and passenger lists indicate that she had returned from overseas in March of that year. It was written prior to the purchase of the Gunnedah properties, most probably between March and July 1905 with a long gestation prior to that. The *Gunnedah* properties were not an influence on 'My Country' because the earliest possible association of the family with the area dates to late October 1905 and their purchases from 1906. That conclusion however does not preclude the possibility that the entry of 'My Country' into Dorothea's verse book occurred at *Kurumbede* in the first half of 1908, prior to its submission to the London *Spectator* and publication in early September 1908.