

Farming on the Bellarine.

~~Seed cultivation was also a key part of Robert Willey's 'Avondale' farm, 10 Church Road, Bellarine. Unlike Levien's 'Murradoc Farm', 'Avondale' exists today as a physical legacy of mixed farming on the Peninsula. The existing timber dwelling (built in c.1868) first commenced as the Farmer's Hotel on land originally owned by Robert Willey's father, Frederick. Educated at Geelong College, Robert Willey had established a garden at his Farmer's Hotel property by 1871 as it was at this time when he won first prize in the garden produce section for his twelve onions in the Geelong and Western District Agricultural and Horticultural Society's Spring Exhibition.¹⁰⁶ By 1888, Willey had turned his full attention to farming and nominated 'Avondale' for the best managed farm in the Geelong and Western District Agricultural and Horticultural Society's annual competition. The extent and type of farming carried out at 'Avondale' by Willey was detailed in the Australasian:~~

One of the most interesting farms at East Bellarine is a small property of 80 acres owned by Mr. Robert Willey, of Avondale. He has other land in the district, I believe; but on this property, where he resides, there is an immense amount of farming done, labour employed, money laid out and, generally speaking, a remarkable quantity and variety of produce grown. Mr. Willey's house, and some of the stock he keeps and the crops he grows, are shown in the accompanying pictures, and anyone can see at a glance that an air of prosperity and comfort pervades the place. A small but select herd of dairy cattle are kept, mostly pedigreed Jerseys. In the way of dairying little more is attempted than supplying household requirements, but even in doing thus much Mr. Willey aims at doing it in the best and cheapest way possible, by keeping good cattle and treating them well. Whatever work he does is done thoroughly; there are no mediocre, unprofitable cows, calves, pigs, or poultry about his premises. His house, his barns, and stables, and machinery and all the very best of their kind; there is nothing but what is tidy and neat. Mr. Willey's specialty, however, is seed growing. Farm and garden seeds are raised on a large scale. The most of the farm is devoted to seed growing, and dealing with so many different kinds of plants required no little skill and accuracy in carrying on such work. Nearly every kind of seed is grown, including peas, onions, lettuces, carrots, cabbages, parsnips, and vegetables of every kind, far too numerous to mention. The land for seed-growing purposes is laid out in sections or plots, as shown in the accompanying illustration, and a prettier sight, when the different crops are in bloom, is hard to find. The minute and technical features of this business are too intricate to describe on paper, but it may be said that order and system prevail throughout. Every operation has to be done with accuracy and precision, and exactly at the time it should be done, or the seeds would be spoiled. A large quantity of machinery is necessary for thrashing and planting the various seeds grown, as well as numerous barns and granaries for storing and preparing them for market. All those things are provided, and the buildings of one kind and another on the place form what may be correctly described as a small

township. Mr. Willey has done useful service for Victorian Government in testing both seeds and manures, and in the numerous prizes and certificates which adorn his dwelling, gained at industrial exhibitions in various parts of the world, testify that his seeds are of the highest quality.

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Australasian, 10 November 1894, p.27.