

The



Spencer



... Trail

Muswellbrook, Aberdeen,
Rouchel and Scone

The Spencer Trail is an attempt to provide a guide to the key locations in the Hunter Valley that were important to the Spencer Family in the years since Thomas and Mary first arrived in late 1841. Please note; most of the actual buildings from the 19th century associated with the extended Spencer family no longer exist.

Its hard to imagine that the entire population of the Hunter Valley in 1841 was only about 1500. The main population centres were in Morpeth and Maitland. Towns like Singleton, Muscle Brook (original spelling of Muswellbrook), Merton (now Denman) Aberdeen and Scone were tiny settlements with a pub, a store and not much else.

How did Thomas and Mary reach the Hunter?

We really don't know. The two possible routes were via ship from Sydney Cove to Morpeth and then overland or overland the whole way. The overland route was via the newly finished Great North Road which crossed the Hawkesbury at Wiseman's Ferry and arrived out into the hunter south of Denman.

Muswellbrook:

By the time Thomas and Mary passed through Muswellbrook on their way to Rouchel the town had been formally established for 7 years and already boasted a school, court house, Police Magistrate, and steam powered flour mill. An Anglican church was built in 1843 and the town was connected to Newcastle by rail in 1857.

While Muswellbrook was certainly the commercial and transport hub of the region it was not until Mary Jane Spencer married Stephen Dowell in 1875 that a Spencer descendant actually lived in Muswellbrook. Since then there has been a continual Spencer presence in the town right up until today.

The family connection does go back to 1841 when Thomas Hooper, the father of Rebecca Hooper, (Thomas Jnr's first wife) arrived in Muswellbrook. Rebecca was born in the town in 1850.



*Alfred Bokhara Spencer in front of his grocery store in Muswellbrook.
photo supplied by Maureen Seve*

Unfortunately, despite a lot of research we cannot find any of the actual addresses in Muswellbrook. Stephen Dowell and Mary Jane Spencer lived in a very large (seven bedroom) house in Hunter Terrace. Thomas Snr owned a house in Bridge St between Eatons Hotel and Hill St however May Spencer refers to her grandparents huse as up the Hill in 1887. From late June 1887 Thomas Jnr and his second wife Mary and their children moved from Rouchel to a house (possibly Bridge St) in Muswellbrook.

Rebecca Spencer and George Hayne lived for some time in Muswellbrook as we have record of George's Blacksmith and Wheelwright business in the main street about 1899.

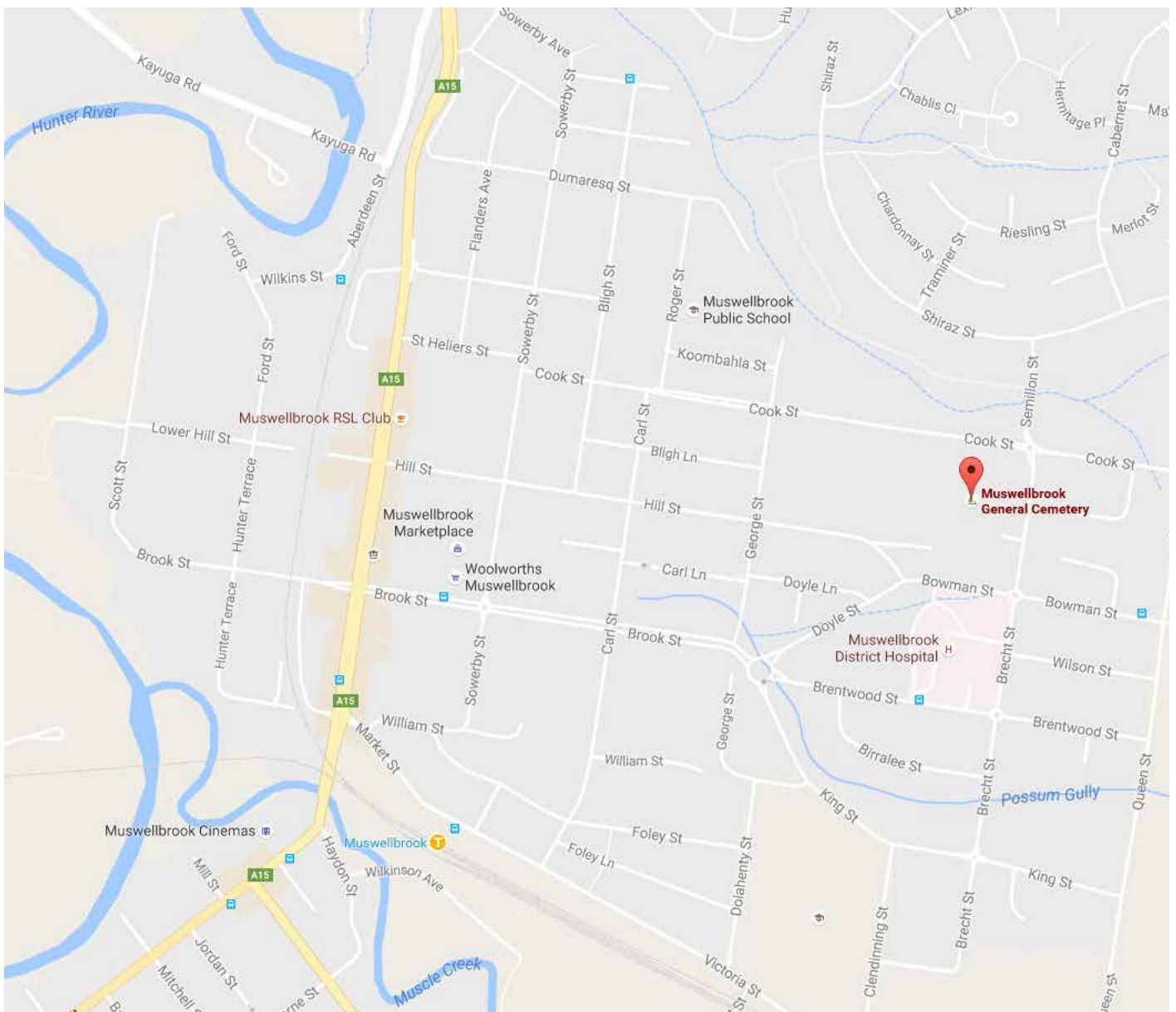
Alfred Bokhara Spencer (son of Thomas Jnr and Rebecca) had a grocery store in the main street. Albert Hooper Spencer lived much of his life in Hill St, Muswellbrook.

What does remain in Muswellbrook?

The most tangible remnants of the Spencer descendants in Muswellbrook today are the headstones of the numerous members of the family buried in Muswellbrook cemetery. See the attached guide to the cemetery.

Directions:

Muswellbrook is 125 km North West of Newcastle on the New England Highway.



Aberdeen:

Roughly half way between Muswellbrook and Scone is Aberdeen. It was established as part of a large pastoral estate in the late 1830s. In 1840 a steam flour mill was built at Aberdeen followed by a school in 1863. It was connected to the railway in 1870 as part of the extension of the Great Northern Railway.

Aberdeen is particularly important in Spencer history for the descendants of both Thomas Jnr and Matthew.

Following the collapse of Cuttabunda in 1896, Thomas Jnr became the Town Clerk of Aberdeen Municipal Council in 1899. He was also the Inspector of Nuisances, Inspector of Dairies and Clerk of Works. He remained in these positions until 1914. He lived in Aberdeen during this period.

Thomas' younger brother Matthew also settled in Muswellbrook in the early years of 20th century. Matthew lived in Aberdeen until just before his death in 1910. Matthew's son Edward Granville Spencer and his children continued to live in Aberdeen until the late 1960's. Edna Mary Spencer (see Aunt Mary's Story) daughter of Edward Granville Spencer grew up in Aberdeen.



Photo of Aberdeen (above) supplied by Leigh Spencer

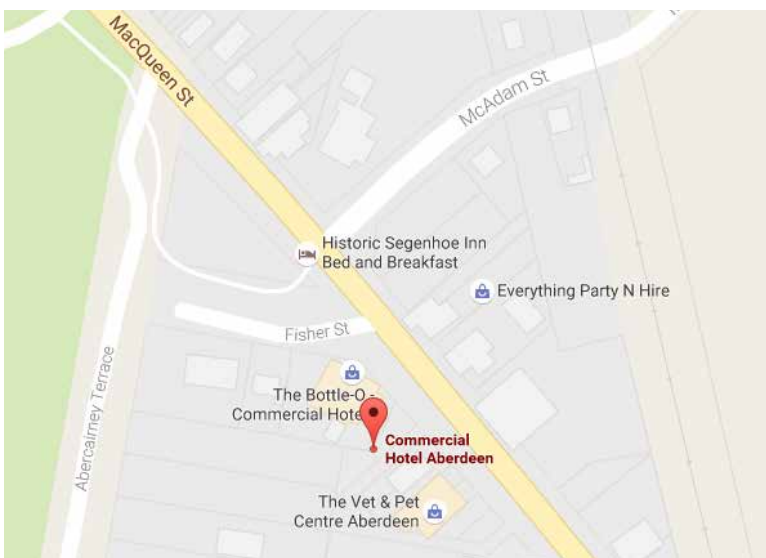
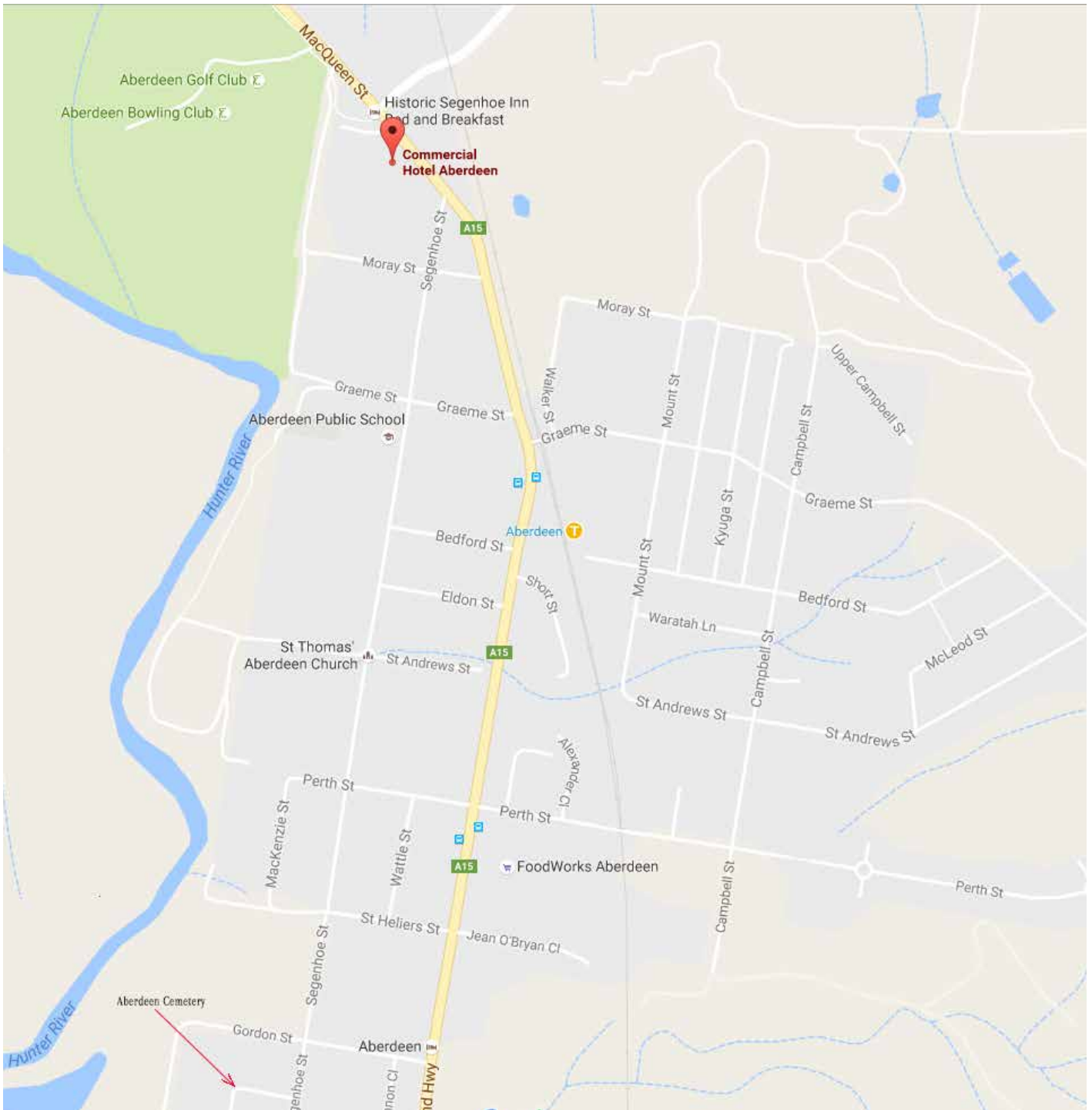


Granville Spencer was born at Rouchel, spent about 5 years as a boy at Cuttabunda and a few years in Brewarrina before he moved back to Aberdeen with his parents. He lived the rest of his life in the town and was one of the founding members of the Rifle Club.

Photo of Granville Spencer (left) supplied by Therese Mackay

Like Muswellbrook, the lasting remains in Aberdeen are hard to identify. A number of Spencers are buried in the graveyard.

For more detail see the attached cemetery guide for Aberdeen



The turnoff to Rouchel is at the northern end of the main street of Aberdeen.

About 100 metres past the Commercial Hotel there is an intersection with a road coming from the east. This road is initially called McAdam Street then becomes Rouchel Rd.

There is a sign on the New England Highway saying Rouchel Rd and Rouchel 23km. The street sign on the other side of the same road says McAdam Street.

Its easy to miss. If you have gone over the Hunter River bridge you have gone too far!

Rouchel:

If anywhere could be called the spiritual home of the Spencer clan it is Rouchel. From 1841 until 1888 there was a continuous Spencer presence at Rouchel. Every descendant of Thomas and Mary alive today has their roots at Rouchel. As well as the original 12 children, many of the next generation were also born at Rouchel.

56 years after the sale of The Vale, Edna Mary Spencer married David Adam in 1944 and they lived at Upper Rouchel for the next 40 plus years

The Locations at Rouchel:

There are three main locations of interest at Rouchel, although none of the original buildings remain.

St John's Church

Coming from Aberdeen, St John's Church is on the right hand side of the road 16.5 km. The building today was built in the 1950's to replace the original building, built in 1875. The modern building is no longer a church and is privately owned by Dave and Trish Walker. Dave and Trish have said Spencer descendants are welcome to come and have a look around.

The history of the Church is that it was built on land gifted by the Spencers. In fact the title did not actually pass to the Church of England until 1923. The church was opened on 31st October 1875



The Church was also used as the local school in the 1880s. We have photos of the Spencer children in attendance. *Photo of the church opening in 1875 supplied by Therese Mackay*

Rouchel Vale:

Just one km further along Rouchel Rd on the left is “The Vale”. The Vale was originally called Rouchel Vale by Thomas Senior and was the land he first purchased in 1855. He built a house from local timber and additional buildings were added to accommodate Thomas John and Matthew and their families.

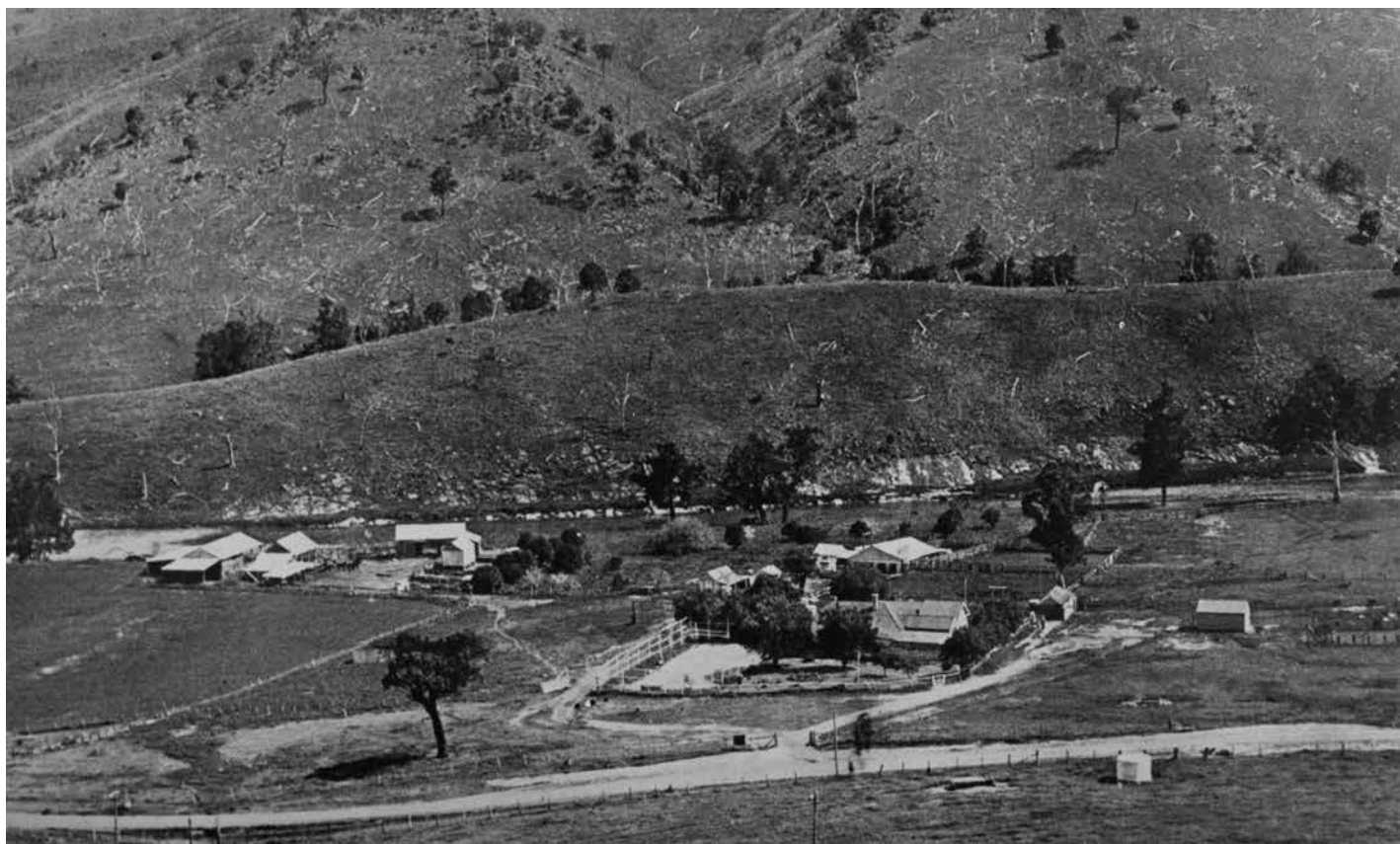
In 1887 Thomas Jnr and his family were living in the main house. Matthew and his family had a separate house. William was also living at The Vale. In June 1887 Thomas and family moved to a house in Muswellbrook. In November 1887 William leaves Rouchel to live permanently at Cuttabundah.

The Spencers sold Rouchel Vale as part of around 2500 acres of land after Thomas Snr died in mid 1888.

The photo below, was provided by the current owners and shows the Vale in 1906. None of the buildings in the photograph still remain. The large gum tree, centre right in the photograph, is still there and can provide you with a reference point.

The original house (albeit much altered) was actually moved from the Vale in the 1960s. It was relocated about 30kms away at Gundy and burnt down about 6 weeks later. There is also a story that the house was haunted by a poltergeist that became active when things were moved in the house. Perhaps the ghost did not like the idea of moving to Gundy!

PLEASE NOTE: The current owners Stephen and Querida David have asked that we please stay outside the front fence. We ask all family members to respect Stephen and Querida’s wishes.



There is a larger version of this photo available in the Resouces section of the website.

Binjeberry (Now spelled Bingeberry):

The original location of Thomas and Mary's 1841 slab hut was on a property called Binjeberry Estate. It was just a corner of the much larger Ravensworth Estate. Harry Clive Spencer (son of Matthew) wrote that the remains of the original hut were still to be seen in the early 20th century near where the current Bingeberry homestead stands.

The first eight of Thomas and Mary's children were almost certainly born in the slab hut on Binjeberry.

The current Bingeberry homestead is about 4 km further along the Rouchel Rd from The Vale also on the left hand side.

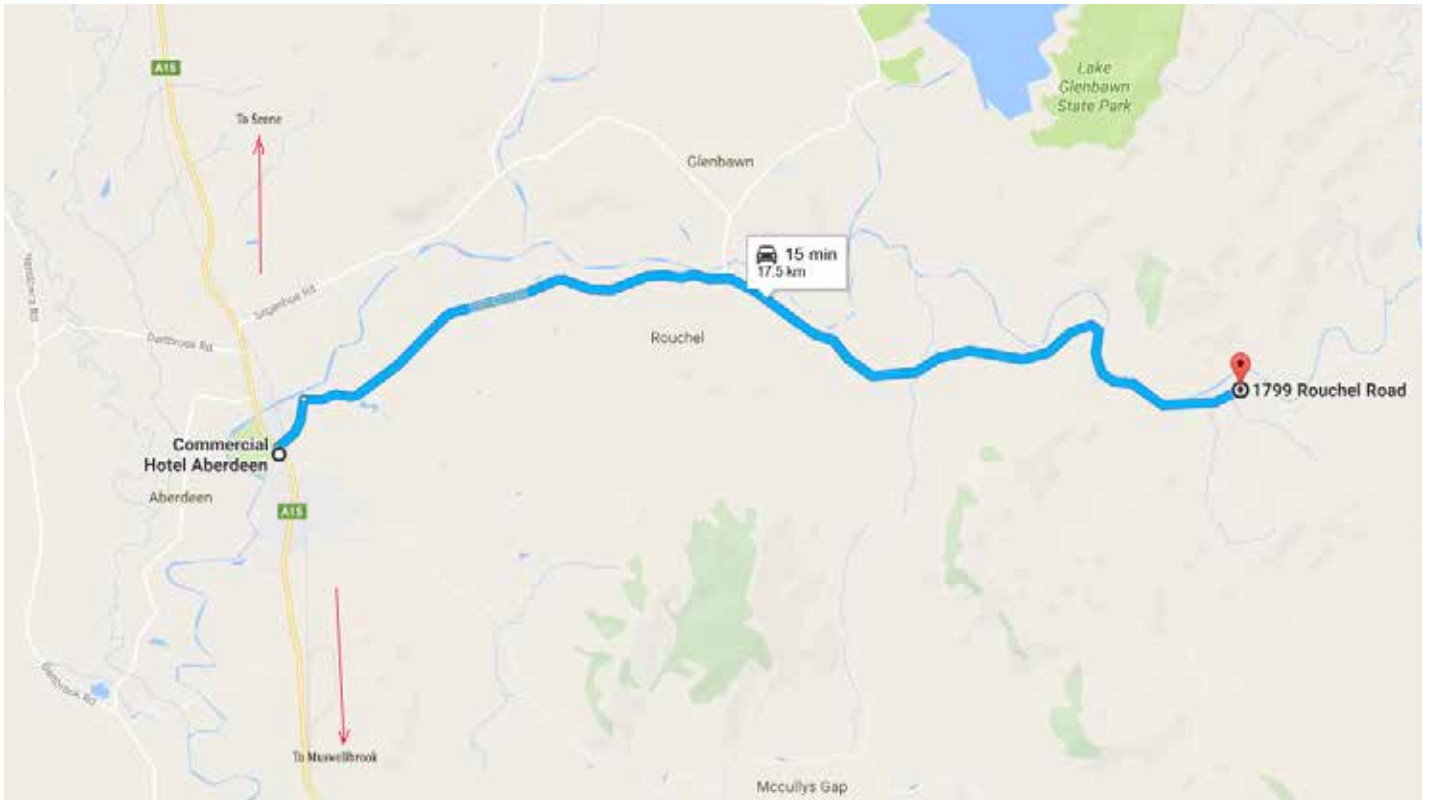
This is private property and we have made no contact with the owners so please respect their privacy.

The image is of the original Binjeberry homestead not the slab hut that Thomas and Mary lived in.

Continuing on from Bingeberry you cross Rouchel Brook on The Cameron Bridge and come into the locality of Rouchel. The current School of Arts hall, Sports Ground and School are more recent additions to the community.



The image is of the Bingeberry homestead supplied by Therese Mackay



The Vale from above showing St John's church bottom left and The Vale centre right. Source Google Earth

Scone:

Even though it is about the same distance from Rouchel as Muswellbrook, Scone does not seem to have been as important to the Spencers in the early days.

The obvious importance of Scone is it is where several of the men who married Spencer daughters came from.

George Hayne who married Rebecca Spencer was born in Scone and it appears that George and Rebecca lived there for some of their lives.

Herbert Horder married Thomas and Rebecca's daughter Elizabeth (Elsie) in Scone and they lived there until Elsie's death in 1945. Herbert was still living in Scone in 1963.

In the last few years of his life Thomas Jnr lived in Scone (probably with the Horders. Thomas died in Scone in 1917



Photo is of an elderly Thomas Jnr with a very young Edwin Horder in Scone
Image supplied by Maureen Seve

Scone is on the New England Highway 13 km north of Aberdeen.
A directory for the graveyard at St Luke's Anglican Church Scone is attached.

