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# Thomas George Gregson and some early history of Hobart's eastern shore

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THOMAS GEORGE GREGSON has a modest profile in Tasmania's pre-federation history following his arrival in 1821. He became a visceral opponent of the policies of Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur and a campaigner for 'liberal institutions' such as trial by jury, a free press and an elected House of Assembly. He was briefly Tasmania's second Premier in 1857. Less well known was that he became a large land holder on the eastern shore of the Derwent, opposite Hobart Town. By the 1840s he owned over 6800 acres, stretching in a continuous band from present day Old Beach to Rosny. Research for this paper has clarified the circumstances and origins of the naming of several eastern shore suburbs.

## **Gregson's early years and emigration to Van Diemen's Land**

Thomas Gregson was born in 1796 to John and Elizabeth Gregson, who lived at Lowlynn, at Buckton, close to the coast of Northumbria.<sup>1</sup> On 18 January 1820, Thomas married Elizabeth Bugg.<sup>2</sup>

In late September 1820, Gregson applied to the secretary of state for war and the colonies for a recommendation of a grant of land in Van Diemen's Land, stating that he had capital of £3000, and attaching letters of support from the Duke of Northumberland and a local baronet.<sup>3</sup> The secretary's approval arrived the following month.<sup>4</sup> Gregson's motivation for emigrating is unknown, but it has sometimes been ascribed to a family dispute, perhaps over the inheritance of land.<sup>5</sup> He, his wife Elizabeth ('Betsy') and her brother Ralph Compton (who was originally Compton Ralph Bugg) arrived at Hobart Town on the *Emerald* on 13 March 1821.<sup>6</sup>

After arriving, Gregson applied for a grant of land and wrote to Lieutenant-Governor William Sorell stating he had brought with him two servants and an assistant, and that a further man was arriving soon on the



Location of some places associated with Thomas Gregson in Northumberland (*Diane Bricknell*)

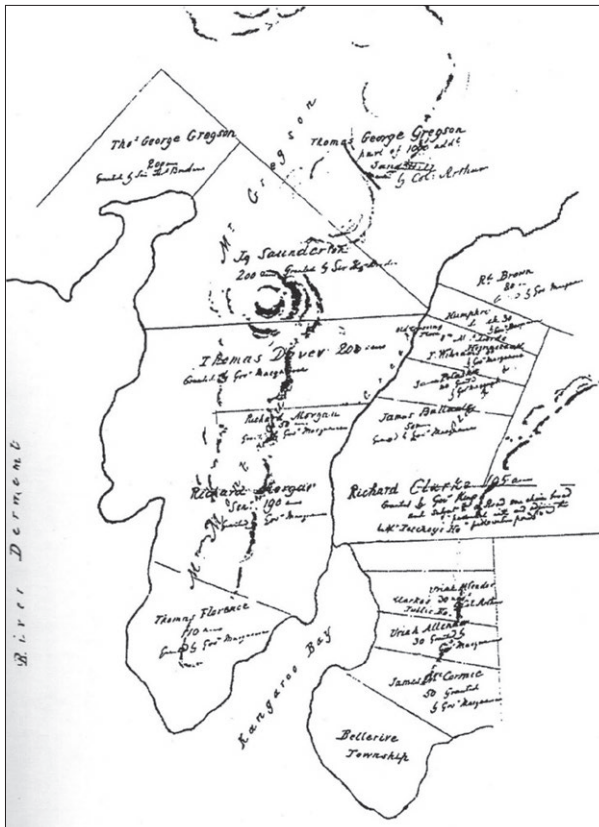
*Westmoreland*.<sup>7</sup> Among other items, he brought a grand piano, forge and bellows, patent brewing machine, fourteen iron ploughs, wine, plate and linen.<sup>8</sup>

Gregson received the maximum grant of 2000 acres but wanted to locate his land over two sites, which was not allowed without the permission of the lieutenant-governor or the surveyor-general. Easy-going Lieutenant-Governor Sorell told him he could have the two sites if he could persuade the surveyor to certify that there was no more free land at Jericho, according to fellow-settler Major Honner in 1826.<sup>9</sup> The following year the land commissioners claimed that Gregson bribed surveyor George Evans ‘to the tune of a piano forte’ to allow him to take his original grant in two locations.<sup>10</sup> As Gregson brought a piano with him, the story may well be true.

Bribery or not, on 30 June 1823 Gregson obtained grants for 1500 and 300 acres on the Jericho River south of Oatlands, which he called Northumbria.<sup>11</sup> On the same day, he received a grant of 200 acres at Clarence Plains, on the eastern shore of the River Derwent.<sup>12</sup> As was the custom, Gregson occupied his land well before it was granted. On 6 October 1822, recently arrived settler John Maule Hudspeth wrote in his diary that ‘Mr Gregson of Jericho was over at his farm on the [Risdon] side of the [Derwent]’.<sup>13</sup>

## Lindisfarne, ‘Lindisfern House’ and surrounds

According to the Pretyman index in the Tasmanian Archives, Lindisfarne in Hobart took its name ‘from Lindisfarne House, the homestead of the property adjoining Rosny’.<sup>14</sup> The *origin* of the name of Lindisfarne has long been ascribed with some confidence to the Monastery of Lindisfarne on Holy Island off the coast of Northumbria, but until now, the person who gave the name to the farm, the house and ultimately the suburb on the Derwent has been uncertain. Traditionally, Hezekiah Harrison has edged out Thomas George Gregson for the title, as Harrison was known to have



Gregson's 200-acre grant at Lindisfarne at the top left (Sourced from the inside cover of P. MacFie, *Stock thieves and golfers: A history of Kangaroo Bay and Rosny Farm 1803-1998*, Rosny Park, 2001. Unfortunately, the book provided no source for this map)

Gregson's 200-acre grant on 'Hoberman's Bay' traced from the top left of the MacFie map on to an air photo base



farmed there in the mid-1820s, when Gregson was at Jericho.<sup>15</sup> Recent research however has established that Gregson was the first to call the land there 'Lindisfern Farm' and Harrison rented it from Gregson.

The only named features in the description of Gregson's Clarence Plains grant were the Derwent and 'Hoberman's Bay' which was the originating point for the description. In 1828, Gregson wrote a letter addressed from 'River Derwent, Hobman's Bay' indicating that for him at least, the name was still current.<sup>16</sup> In that letter he stated that he had cleared forty acres on his Derwent grant, with thirty under tillage, and had built a barn, a two-roomed cottage and a hut for servants. Today, the grant would cover the main commercial part of Lindisfarne, as shown.

The designation of 'Hoberman's Bay' is intriguing. 'Hoberman' was John Hoberman, also known as Obleman or Ogleman, a German who was transported on the *Calcutta* after being tried in London in 1802. He was mustered in Hobart Town in 1811 and at some point became a servant of Anthony Fenn Kemp and George Gatehouse at their brewery in New Town. How did his name become associated with Lindisfarne Bay? In June 1823, he was granted forty acres north-west of the Jordan River on the upper River Derwent which is unlikely to have been confused with the Lindisfarne area.<sup>18</sup> Tipping mentioned that in 1812, he claimed 30 acres 'which became part of Geils land at Old Beach', but this is still some ten kilometres away from Lindisfarne Bay. Nothing certain has been found to link Hoberman with Lindisfarne Bay or the area around it, although an area the same shape as Gregson's 200-acre block at Lindisfarne is outlined

on Evans' 1819 map without an assigned name.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps Hoberman was living there and had applied for the land but for whatever reason, it was not granted to him.

What of Hezekiah Harrison? He came from Essex and after arriving in June 1823, apparently received a grant of 500 acres in the Risdon-Bridgewater district on 30 June 1823 (a date mistake in the documentation, surely).<sup>20</sup> Although Harrison is sometimes said to be 'of Rochford Hall' in Essex, a family history speculated that the family were probably tenant farmers near Rochford and that 'Rochford Hall' was used to embellish their land applications.<sup>21</sup>

The key document in giving precedence to Thomas Gregson in the giving of the name 'Lindisfarne' to the locality on the Derwent is an agreement made between Gregson and Harrison on 1 November 1823.<sup>22</sup> In this, Gregson agreed to lease 'all that estate called Lindisfarne situate near Kangaroo Point on the banks of the Derwent containing 200 acres' to Harrison for five years at a peppercorn rent. Thus, it was Gregson who associated the name of his farm on present-day Lindisfarne Bay with the monastery near his childhood home in Northumbria. Harrison, from Essex, came on to the land later.

Harrison lived on the property for at least several years. In 1825 he was 'of Lindisfern' when he married Caroline Matilda Hill in Hobart Town.<sup>23</sup> Mysteriously, just a few weeks later, the *Hobart Town Gazette* published an anonymous poem, 'The Lovers of Lindisfern Bay', which told of a bridegroom leaving Lindisfern Bay to be married over the river, but the 'lovers' drowned in a storm when they made the return journey. Harrison and his bride returned safely to Lindisfern Bay to live and no event has been found that may have been the basis of the poem; perhaps it was a malicious slur by an enemy of Harrison's. In 1825 he was granted 1000 acres in the Epping Forest

'The Lovers of Lindisfern Bay' (anonymous)  
(*Hobart Town Gazette*, 17 June 1825)

**X** **POETRY.**  
The splendor of morning illumined the sky,  
And yon mountain\* had caught the bright ray,  
Fill'd with rapture and love, & with heart-beat-  
ing high,  
The bridegroom left Lindisfern Bay.  
Now sparkles the wave, and spreads the white  
sail,  
Derwent stream bears the bark swift away,  
Ah! swifter she'd carry (could wishes prevail)  
The bridegroom of Lindisfern Bay.  
The youth leaps on shore, and hies to the fair,  
All lovely in bridal array,  
The Priest joins their hands and offers a  
prayer,  
For the lovers of Lindisfern Bay.  
From the altar attend the fair virgin train,  
To deck with sweet flowers the way ;  
On the beach bid adieu and ne'er see again  
The lovers of Lindisfern Bay.  
And now they embark, again spread the sail,  
But when shall they land well a day!  
The squall comes resistless, death breathes in  
the gale  
As they enter sweet Lindisfern Bay.  
They're gone! and for ever, the cold briny  
wave  
Dash'd the hopes of the morning away.  
They lov'd, were united, and lie in one grave,  
The lovers of Lindisfern Bay!  
\* Mount Wellington.

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area and this, together with some later grants and purchases, became his main Merton Vale property.<sup>24</sup>

Harrison moved on by 1829 and for some years afterwards, the Gregsons appear to have used a cottage at Lindisfarne as a place for entertainment, as for visitors from Hobart Town it would have been more convenient than Gregson's main residence, which by then was out at Risdon. The Rev. Robert Knopwood noted visiting Gregson at 'Lyndhurst Town' (ie Lindisfern), or similar spellings, from March 1831 through to May 1836.<sup>25</sup> On 19 January 1832 Knopwood wrote: 'With a capital booth erected, we enjoyed one of the happiest days that a party ever had on V.D. Land, in commoration [sic] of Mr. & Mrs. Gregson's nuptial day'. A year later, Knopwood dined there for the same celebration and a number of times through the 1830s Knopwood rode with Gregson's hounds, sometimes meeting at 'Lyndhurst cottage'.<sup>26</sup>

According to his diary, when Knopwood dined with Gregson after 1838, it was out at Risdon, not Lindisfarne and this made way for John Price to rent the Lindisfarne farm, where most likely he built the farmhouse known later as Lindisfarne House. Price married Sir John Franklin's niece Mary in 1838 and was made Muster Master of convicts by Franklin in 1839. He left Hobart Town in 1846 to go to Norfolk Island as commandant.<sup>27</sup> Alexander noted that Price leased land and built a house 'on the site of the later Queen Victoria Home', which would put it and him on Gregson's farm.<sup>28</sup> The most reliable evidence for John Price occupying and indeed building Lindisfarne House is a sketch attributed to George Hawthorn and dated 1839 and a letter written by Jane Franklin in 1838:

[Price] in the meantime commences building another [house] on his rented property, for which he is to have a suitable reduction in rent from his landlord Mr Gregson. He is cultivating the land and burning lime for which he has an easy market in Hobart Town.<sup>29</sup>

This excerpt does not definitively identify Price's new dwelling as Lindisfarne House, especially as lime was being quarried at 'Lime Kiln Bay' (Geilston Bay) not Lindisfarne. Also, the name in the title of the drawing appears to be the modern spelling of 'Lindisfarne', so the title may have been a later addition.

After being known as Lindisfern Bay, the inlet became known as Price's Bay from about 1845 and was labelled such on a map drawn by surveyor Robert Power in 1854. It reverted to variants of 'Lindisfern Bay' and the farming area around it known as variants of 'Lindisfern' until the late 1800s.<sup>30</sup>

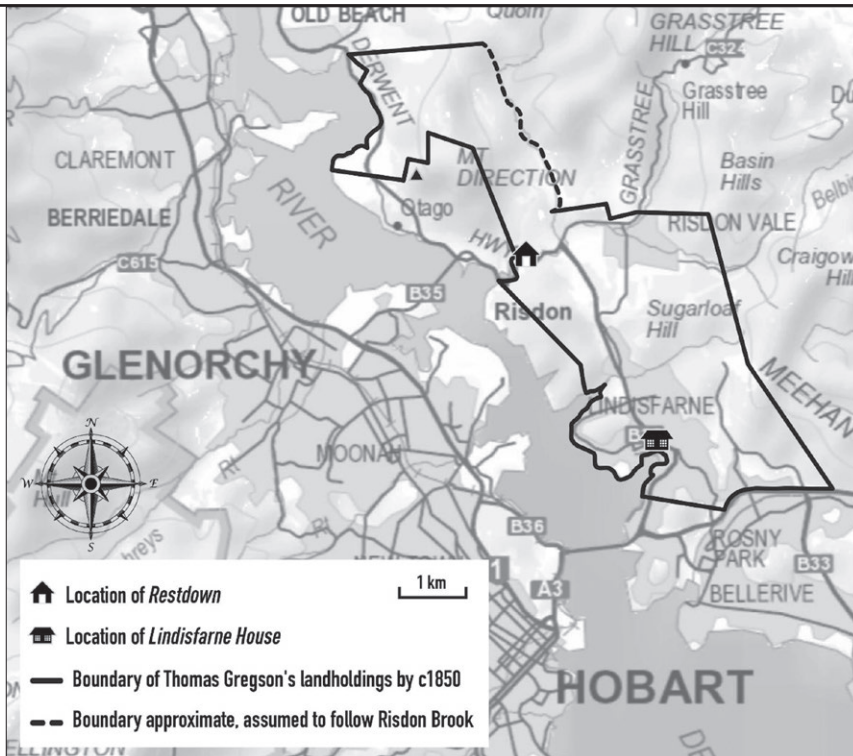




'John Price's residence at Lindisfarne 1839' (Attributed to George Hawthorn, State Library of Tasmania, Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, SD\_ILS:74431)

In 1850, Gregson was granted a further 1000 acres at Lindisfarne, behind his and an adjoining grant which he had purchased in 1829 from John Saunderson, covering today's Flagstaff Gully area, consolidating his dominance of land in the area.<sup>31</sup> The original application for this block was made in 1828; it was recommended by Surveyor-General George Frankland and agreed by the Land Board, but was then refused when Lieutenant-Governor Arthur, no friend of Gregson, intervened. Gregson doggedly argued his case, pointing to improvements he had made since his application (including a cottage of split timber, and a barn at Lindisfarne) and the Land Board again recommended the grant but it appears it was again refused by Arthur.<sup>32</sup> The successful 1850 grant was originally to have been split between the Jericho and Mount Direction areas, but Gregson was allowed instead to have it adjoining his existing Lindisfarne lands.<sup>33</sup> In 1837, he purchased two small parcels of land that lay within his later-applied-for 1000 acres.<sup>34</sup>

In December 1855, George Mussell Forster married Thomas Gregson's daughter, Cicely, and they moved on to her father's land at Lindisfarne. The Valuation Roll of 1858 has Forster occupying 1000 acres at Lindisfarne, so he was on more than just the 200-acre block.<sup>35</sup> In 1865, the report of an attempted robbery includes a rare contemporary mention of 'Lindisfern House'.<sup>36</sup> When George Forster died later that year, Cicely left the area and Henry Littlechild occupied the farm.<sup>37</sup>



Outline of the full extent of Thomas Gregson's landholdings on Hobart's eastern shore, by the 1850s (*Diane Bricknell*; base image reproduced with the permission of the Land Tasmania Division, Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment, © State of Tasmania)

Thomas Gregson died in January 1874 and left his estate to his wife who by that time was ill; she died in 1879.<sup>38</sup> Soon after Gregson's death, 5000 acres comprising 'Lindisfarne Farm' (including Saunderson's original 200-acre grant and Gregson's 1000-acre additional grant), 'Lime Kiln' farm (formerly 'Geils Town' farm), Restdown and its adjoining lands and some other blocks subject to an 1856 mortgage were put up for sale by the mortgagees.<sup>39</sup> Although no conveyance or other evidence of acquisition by a Degraives has been found, the lands appear to have been acquired by John Degraives of Cascades, Hobart, as after his death in 1880, his executors applied for grants of them.<sup>40</sup> After grant, the executors put the whole 6860 acres up for sale and this allowed Frank Bond and then the Beltana Land Company to subdivide it, resulting in the suburb of Beltana being created. The name Beltana reverted to Lindisfarne in 1903.<sup>41</sup> This was because, it was reported, 'The Beltana residents, without in any way wishing to pay a compliment to the departed Price [a brutal man], met in solemn conclave the other day, and came to the conclusion that Lindisfarne was a



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more euphonious term than Beltana, and they made an application to the Government to alter the name'.<sup>42</sup>

### **Geilston Bay and 'Geils' Town Farm'**

The location of 'Geils' Town farm' (sometimes termed Geilstown farm) has been put either at or near Risdon, or at present-day Geilston Bay in the past. Alexander wrote of 'the large Geilstown farm near Risdon' rented by John Potatski, and MacFie described 'Geils Town' as being at Risdon.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, an 1824 advertisement mentioned a 500-acre farm (which sounds like Restdown at Risdon – see below), although it was described as being about three miles from Hobart Town.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps there was some real estate licence used. Supporting present-day Geilston Bay as the location of 'Geils Town Farm', besides the obvious present-day name connection, is an 1818 advertisement describing the farm as 200 acres opposite New Town.<sup>45</sup> However the matter can be put to rest beyond doubt by a list of Andrew Geils' lands compiled for him in 1814, as follows:

GEILSTOWN		
Four grants purchased by Colonel Geils	One from Mansfield	50 acres
	One from Parish	70
	One from Collins	30
	One from Wakefield	30
	TOTAL	180 acres <sup>46</sup>

Major Andrew Geils was appointed commandant of Van Diemen's Land in early 1812 and served until the arrival of Thomas Davey as Lieutenant-Governor a year later.<sup>47</sup> In 1812 Geils purchased the grants of Michael Mansfield and William Parish on either side of present-day Geilston Bay.<sup>48</sup> Geils acquired the farms of David Wakefield and William Collins on the western side of the bay the same year, for 'satisfactory remuneration'—essentially they were put onto government stores by Geils.<sup>49</sup> In 1832, Gregson wrote to Geils offering to buy both his 'Geils Town' farm and his Restdown farm at Risdon, as will be described in the next section.

'Geilston' was probably just a natural shortening of 'Geils Town'. As Geilston first appeared in newspapers in 1868, it is unlikely to have been adopted from the name of Andrew Geils' estate in Scotland.<sup>50</sup> The term 'Geils Town Bay' was used as late as 1905.<sup>51</sup> 'Lime Kiln Bay' was another name for the feature and was still in use until about 1939.<sup>52</sup>

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## Risdon and Restdown

The Restdown property, with its south-eastern boundary on Risdon Cove and creek, had a complex history after Lieutenant John Bowen's settlement at Risdon Cove was abandoned in 1804. A 500-acre block was granted in 1810 to William J'Anson, an assistant surgeon on the *Calcutta* and this included most of the early buildings erected at Bowen's settlement.<sup>53</sup> An 1823 grant to Thomas Sharp(e) on its western boundary would later be an issue, as would a 300-acre grant to George Guest on the other side of Risdon Creek, made in 1810.<sup>54</sup> J'Anson died in late 1811 and his executors sold the farm to Major Andrew Geils in March 1812.<sup>55</sup> Geils built a brick cottage which he called Restdown and developed a good farm around it — in the twenty months to mid-December 1813 he spent an extraordinary £7,259 on capital, labour and livestock.<sup>56</sup>

Geils also unilaterally occupied the adjacent grant made to George Guest and received a reprimand from Governor Macquarie for this.<sup>57</sup> Geils left Van Diemen's Land with his regiment in 1814 and for the next decade, a succession of agents mismanaged his property and allowed the house and farm to deteriorate.<sup>58</sup> By 1822, Geils had put his farm into the care of solicitor George Cartwright until, eventually, Geils nominated William Lyttleton to occupy it.<sup>59</sup>

In early 1829, Thomas Gregson took up a lease on Restdown.<sup>60</sup> The house was in a bad state of repair and Gregson's family probably lived at Lindisfarne for a while before moving to Risdon. A letter from Betsy Gregson to Mary Meredith, wife of Thomas' friend George Meredith, was addressed from 'Lindisfern'. The letter has no year on it but was part of a series of letters she exchanged during 1829/30.<sup>61</sup> At various times during 1829, George Meredith used to accompany his friend from Hobart Town to Risdon, starting by boat across the Derwent and then on foot, going via 'Lindisfern'.<sup>62</sup> Curiously, in a November 1829 letter, Meredith made reference to 'Lindisfern (alias Piano Place)'. No other reference to 'Piano Place' has been found.<sup>63</sup> In October 1830, Gregson offered his house at Jericho to the new parson at Green Ponds, without doubt ending his occupation at Jericho.<sup>64</sup>

In October 1832, Gregson wrote to Geils offering to buy both the 'Restdon' [sic] and 'Geils Town' properties. 'Restdon' he noted was still in very bad condition and he found the house had been gutted when he went to reside there: 'The doors and windows were all either broken, or stolen, and all the plaster of the walls, and ceilings, the paling round the garden is down'.<sup>65</sup>



Restdown, image undated, showing the wing built by Gregson on the right, and Geils' original cottage, with extensions, on the left. While the weatherboards at the end of Gregson's wing and the end of the larger building are the same, the windows and roof trims are different, suggesting that they were not contemporaneous (*Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery Q190.016*)

The original Restdown, photo dated 1928. The brick cottage constructed by Geils in 1814 is in the middle. To the left is a brick addition and to the right a weatherboard one, both of unknown age (*UTAS Special & Rare Collections, Hudspeth papers, RS3/6 (1)*)

Gregson also noted that a surveyor's measurement of Thomas Sharp's adjacent grant had cut into 'Restdon' but he was taking action about that. After its purchase, Gregson had the Restdown block granted to himself in 1838. It then measured 667 acres.<sup>66</sup> He probably did this to be assured of title, after the land's uncertain history.

Some early photographs demonstrate the layout of the Geils building and a later Gregson extension. On the right, the single-storey wing of Restdown, probably built in the 1830s by Thomas Gregson, and in the past this has sometimes been mistaken for Bowen's residence and wrongly labelled as the 'First Government House'. Geils' original brick cottage is

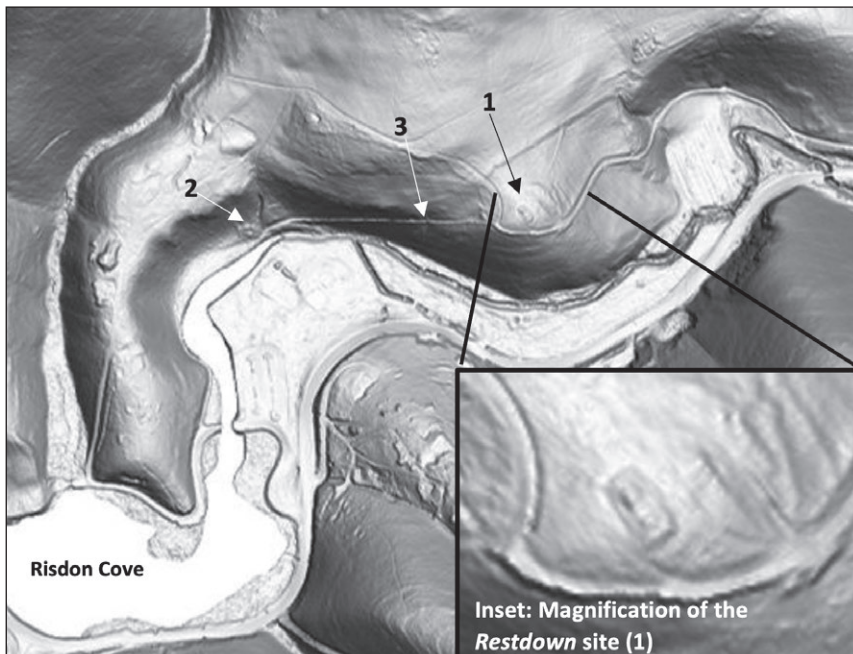
probably in the middle of the other wing, with a wooden addition adjoining Gregson’s wing.

The site of Restdown is today marked only by some brick rubble but an aerial LIDAR survey clearly outlines the footprint of Gregson’s building. There is no sign of the Geils structure, which lay at the top corner of the Gregson structure shown in the inset, striking north-east.

In the 1830s and early 1840s Gregson expanded his land holdings at Risdon:<sup>67</sup>

1831	300a	purchase from Andrew Crombie	originally George Guest, then Geils
1833	505a	purchase grant from the Crown	present-day Otago area
1833	100a	purchase from Andrew Crombie	present-day Otago area
1833	80a	purchase from William Young	between Restdown and the Guest grant
1835	2560a	purchase from Andrew Crombie	between Risdon Brook and Lindisfarne
1842	314a	purchase grant	north Risdon

LIDAR (Laser Imaging Detection And Ranging) image of Risdon Cove, Risdon Creek and adjacent areas, flown in 2013. 1= Site of Restdown (also shown in the inset), 2= Obelisk at Bowen’s landing site, 3= Convict built road up to Restdown (Base image reproduced with the permission of the Land Tasmania Division, Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment, © State of Tasmania. LIDAR penetrates vegetation and soil to reveal otherwise concealed features)



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Gregson occupied the *Restdown* farm and house until his death in 1874, whereupon it was sold, together with other lands, as noted above under 'Lindisfarne'.<sup>68</sup>

## Conclusion

When Gregson emigrated to Van Diemen's Land in 1821, he brought with him abundant capital and agricultural implements, plus several workers, so he seemed well prepared to develop his main land grant, which was Northumbria at Jericho. He also took up a small grant at present-day Lindisfarne, opposite Hobart which he named and developed, seemingly as a second residence, close to the capital where he was increasingly spending time on his social campaigns. By 1829 he had decided to move to Hobart and first leased, then purchased the Restdown homestead at the original Bowen settlement site at Risdon. This he expanded and continued to live in until his death in 1874.

Having established himself on Hobart's eastern shore, over the next few decades he assiduously accumulated more and more land, from present-day Old Beach to Rosny. This was mostly hilly ground seemingly unsuited for agriculture of any sort, so the motivation for buying it is uncertain and he appears not to have done much with it. Perhaps despite his somewhat egalitarian social ideals he was accumulating an estate overlooking Hobart of which he would be the squire. He enjoyed his riding at hounds with Knopwood. His source of capital to make the purchases is also unknown, but mortgage would appear to be the main one. When he died, it all unravelled and mortgagees from an 1858 borrowing sold up most of his 6800 acres. From part of this, the Beltana land development company was eventually able to subdivide the suburb that became Beltana, later Lindisfarne. Besides his antagonism to the colonial authorities, perhaps that suburb is Gregson's enduring legacy.

MALCOLM WARD is an Orford-based historian whose main interest is the colonial history of the Glamorgan-Spring Bay area. He completed a PhD on Gregson's friend George Meredith in 2020 and thanks Peter Taylor for a number of informative subsequent exchanges concerning Gregson.



ENDNOTES

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