

Research Notes: Horse Drawn Seed Drill

Brief description and date

Horse drawn H V McKay brand seed drill or hoe.

C. 1940s

Bill Browne Collection, Weethalle Museum, Weethalle NSW.



McKay Sunshine seed drill/hoe drill - Bill Browne Collection, Weethalle NSW

Fabric, manufacture, condition

H V McKay Sunshine brand seed drill or hoe drill manufactured at Sunshine in Victoria.

Cast iron and timber manufacture.

Seed drill/hoe drill is covered with a patina of rust on cast iron parts. Timber seed box is split and worn in places, but otherwise intact. Condition is consistent with age and use.

Good condition.

Seed drill/hoe drill measures 3270mmL X 4210mmW X 1800mmH

Criteria

The seed drill/hoe drill is historically significant, as a surviving original object, used in connection with the sowing of seed in the dry land farming areas of the Bland Shire in western New South Wales.

Representative of a style of agricultural technology and operation using horse teams, that was once common in the Bland Shire, but has now all but disappeared. This object holds research potential and interprets the themes of agricultural technology, horse teams and farming practices common in the Bland Shire in the early to mid 20th century.

History and provenance

Used by Bill Browne on his farm *Wilga Park* from around 1950 until the early 21st century. With his team of 10 draught horses and the assistance of several working

men, Bill Browne cleared and fenced *Wilga Park* and continued to do contract farm work on other properties.

As Bill's family got older, they helped to clear the farm after the mallee scrub had been knocked down with a roller pulled by 12 horses. Enough progress was made for Bill to sow and harvest his grain crops and run stock.¹

Donor's, owner's and community recollections

History of the Seed Drill:

1500BC - The Babylonians used primitive single-tube seed drills. This technology never reached Europe.

200BC - Multi-tube iron seed drills invented by the Chinese, enabling an efficient food production system. This multi-tube seed drill may have been introduced into Europe following contact with China.

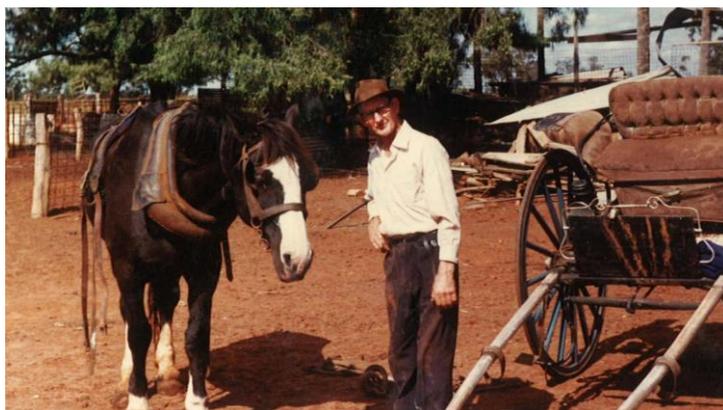
1566 - First known European seed drill attributed to Camillo Torello (Italy) and patented by the Venetian Senate.

1701 - The seed drill was further refined by Jethro Tull (England) during the Agricultural Revolution.

Successive types of seed drills were both expensive and unreliable. They did not come into widespread use in Europe until the mid-19th century.

Bill Browne: After his marriage in 1945 an application was made through the Lands Board for a farming block. In the meantime, Bill and his wife had decided to move to The Rock. The day of his departure, the letter arrived from the Lands Board confirming his successful application. There was no turning back for Bill however, as his wife and small child had already gone to The Rock. Bill Browne spent the next two years share farming around The Rock.

In February 1950, Bill and wife and three children came back to the farming block at Euratha, granted to Bill by the Lands Board. The block was subsequently named *Wilga Park*. With no house on the block, the family spent the first few nights camping in the open, "with their wardrobes and tarps to make a cover"². For the next five years the family lived in a house built from pine logs by Bill. In 1953, with the help of his brother Albert, Bill constructed the home in which he still resides.



Bill Browne with horse and sulky c1990s

¹ *Talk About Weethalle 75th Celebration 1924-1999* p25.

² *Talk About Weethalle 75th Celebration 1924-1999* Ibid.

Draught Horses: Children's author Max Fatchen, who was born on a farm in South Australia recalls in detail rising early to help with the horses:

I do remember what I'll always call draughthorse dawn – when I stumbled out of bed to feed the horses. Draughthorse dawn was crossing the path of a fallow paddock to a long, stone stable... It was the sharpening definition of river trees in the strengthening light - But it was the big draughthorses, horses with heavy hooves and a good strain of Clydesdale in them, big horses waiting for breakfast before being harnessed in the plough or some other agricultural implement. The horses fed from mangers, each manger a compartment. The kickers and malcontents had their own stalls but even they were reasonable animals. As soon as they caught sight of my figure in the growing light, there were whinnies of recognition, a throwing up of heads, impatient blowing through velvet nostrils. There came the sound of a hairy knee against a manger, much as we bang a spoon upon the table. The chaff shed which made up half the stable was dim. There was a smell of mice ... Bang, snuffle, neigh from the windows that opened into the mangers. Calls for breakfast. Breakfast was served, tubs of chaff with a dash of bran, a sheaf of hay for the old mare who was finicky. A soft nose against my hand, big liquid eyes and the white blaze of a great head: a horse's good morning.³

Comparative Examples

H V McKay Collection, Elmore Victoria and the Garth Jones Collection, Up To Date Store, Coolamon NSW.

Context of use

The seed drill/hoe drill was used from the 1940s until the late 20th century. In particular, this piece of agricultural equipment was utilised in the sowing of cereal crops. The seed drill/hoe drill enabled seed to be deposited evenly in the right amount and to be covered at a uniform depth.

The McKay Sunshine brand seed drill/hoe drill is also associated with the continued use of horse teams in the mid to late twentieth century. which was a rare practice for that period.



Bill Browne breaking in the "blue stallion" Wilga Park c1990s

³ Fatchen, M. *Waterbag summers & draughthorse dawns*. Cited in Dutton, G. (Ed.). (1982). *Country childhoods*. St. Lucia QLD: University of Queensland Press. p168.

Statement of Significance: Horse Drawn Seed Drill

The McKay Sunshine brand seed drill/hoe drill is a significant provenanced example of agricultural equipment from the mid 20th century. This object forms an integral link with the Browne family, in particular William (Bill) Browne and his farm *Wilga Park* and the connection to the farming community in the Euratha and Weethalle area.

The seed drill/hoe drill is a key object in the interpretation of themes and narratives connected to agricultural technology, share farming, make-do and mend, bush engineering skills, horse teams and dry land farming practices used in the Bland Shire during the early to mid 20th century.

The continuous use of the seed drill/hoe drill and horse team from the 1950s through to the early 21st century gives a rare insight into the use of pre-mechanisation equipment and farming practices.

Researched and written by Dr Annette Brown
May 2015