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STOCK BREEDING AT WESTERN PORT.

[BY OUR AGRICULTURAL REPORTER.]

A railway journey from Prince's bridge station to Frankton and thence by a pleasant

coach ride of 15 miles to Hastings takes the visitor into a portion of the district of Western Port—so called from having been discovered originally by explorers coming from the Sydney, or eastern side. Farming has never been very extensively carried on, but there are a few fine properties in the locality, first amongst which must be mentioned the Coolart estate, which is the property of Mr. John Benn, one of the principals in the firm of Grice, Sumner and Co. Mr. Benn's place lies on the shore of Western Port Bay, 5 or 6 miles distant (round the coast) from Sandy Point, towards Flinders. The townships of Mornington, or Snapper Point, and Hastings are distant—the former 16 and the latter about 7 miles. Coolart was the original homestead of the first run taken up in the district, and the pioneer, Mr. Merrick, who first ventured into what then must have been a howling wilderness, exercised a wise discrimination in selecting it, as it contains the pick of the land to be found in the Western Port district, and is also one of the pleasantest sites that could be wished for as a marine residence. The run was taken up about the year 1845, and soon afterwards changed hands, Mr. Merrick selling out to Mr. J. Payne, who, in turn, sold the station to Mr. J. Hann. The latter gentleman kept the property for some years, but eventually sold it to Messrs. Sumner and Benn, who entered into possession in September, 1862, taking over the stock, consisting of horses and cattle, at the same time. Up to about this period the only other settlers in the district were Mr. J. Barker, at Cape Schanck, and a

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were Mr. J. Barker, at Cape Schanck, and a Mr. King, who had a run near where the fishing village of Hastings now stands. The Duffy Land Act of 1862 induced a few persons to settle in the vicinity, those who had previously purchased land in the colony receiving a certificate which permitted them to select up to 320 acres. The Grant Land Act of 1865 and the later amendments of the same measure brought more settlers, and at the present time there is very little Crown land remaining. Originally the district must have been an extremely uninviting one, as it is a poor, thickly timbered, scrubby country, growing in its natural state next to nothing in the shape of grass, and requiring a large amount of labor to render it at all reproductive. Between Snapper Point and Hastings the country is rather level, and generally having a light foamy crust of soil a few inches in thickness, below it being sand, and deeper still a reddish clay. The surface soil hardens during dry weather until it becomes something like cement. From Dromana towards Cape Schanck the country, especially on the Western Port side, is more hilly, the soil being of a rather better description. Being, for these reasons, only sparsely populated, the district has been much neglected, both as regards railways and roads. However railway extension has at last taken place as far as Frankston, and is promised to Snapper Point and Hastings, from which it will probably be further extended to Flinders. When this takes place the whole coast along Western Port Bay, from Sandy Point to Flinders, will doubtless become a favorite place for seaside residences, as there are many beautiful sites for houses, which, facing the sea, would have a south-easterly aspect, with the additional advantage of having an unsurpassable beach also before them.

Coolart at present consists of rather over 2000 acres of land, of which nearly 500 have been cleared and cultivated, the remainder

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been cleared and cultivated, the remainder being bush land, having all the large timber ring. This operation was gone through about sixteen years ago, and until it had been done the land would not fatten anything. After the trees die, and the leaves have fallen and decomposed, the improvement is at once apparent, and the grazing land continues to increase in value. The cleared land is subdivided into about 25 paddocks, varying in size from 3 to 50 acres, most of them being laid down in artificial grasses, the kinds most used by Mr. Benn being ryegrass, clover, or cow grass, cocksfoot and Yorkshire fog. A mixture of these is sown, and the results, so far, have been very satisfactory. About 300 acres of the cultivated land consist of rich black flats bordering on Merrick's Creek, by which they are drained. These flats were formerly thickly covered with ti-tree scrub. The remaining portion of the cleared land is a lighter soil, being on the uplands on the eastern boundary of the estate. These paddocks, previous to either crops or grass being sown, received a dressing of 2 cwt. of raw phosphates to the acre. No manure of any sort is used on the flats. The practice followed by Mr. Benn in laying paddocks down in grass is to plough in the spring and let the land lie in fallow during the summer. This has the effect of rendering the soil friable by the time the land is sown down. It is thus in a good condition to receive the seed, and as a rule the grasses grow excellently. Rape is frequently grown, and fed off by sheep, after which the land is ploughed up and left to fallow as described. Of crops generally, only what are required for home consumption are grown, as, owing to the want of road or rail communication already referred to, the market for produce is inaccessible. Last season from about 16 acres 50 tons in all of wheaten, oaten and pea hay were grown, and 80 tons of splendid clover hay were taken off 23 acres of

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spinnard clover hay were taken off 23 acres of land. This latter crop was sown with wheat, and cut for hay in September the following year, giving a heavy yield of the finest and sweetest grass hay. A paddock of 24 acres was sown last autumn with rape, was fed off with sheep during the winter, and then ploughed up previous to sowing down as permanent pasture. Rape sown early in the spring is found to last excellently through the

summer for sheep. In a small paddock near the house maize, peas and potatoes were grown; the latter were of the Malta variety, and have only recently been brought to the colony. They are a hard white sort, and grow to a good size. They are said to keep well, and those grown at Coolart are shortly to be subjected to a trial by being sent to Malden Island, where it is difficult to succeed in landing sound potatoes as they almost invariably go bad on the way. The maize and peas were grown only in very small quantities. About 4 acres of mangels are extremely healthy looking. They were sown in September, and will be used as winter feed for cattle about July. The same kind of crop has been grown for many successive seasons in the same ground, which only receives a dressing of guano—2 cwt. to the acre being never exceeded. Regarding stimulants to soils, Mr. Bann of course utilises his stable manure, of which only a small quantity is produced. During the summer of 1882 a large quantity of soil was taken out of the Coolart Swamp and used for top-dressing, and with excellent results. An experiment in manuring was tried a short time ago on a 35 acre crop of rape. A third of the land was left unmanured, while another third had raw phosphates applied to it, and the remaining third received a dressing of compound soluble manures. The result showed no perceptible difference

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The result showed no perceptible difference between the two kinds of manure, but a decidedly poorer crop on the ground which received no manure. Previous to sowing hay or grain crops on the lighter lands they receive a dressing of compound manures, consisting of sulphate of ammonia, potash and superphosphates mixed and applied according to what has been recommended as the proper proportions. About 75 acres are this season to be sown down with grass, all of which have been prepared by the following process already mentioned.

Mr. Benn has paid special attention to maintaining his artificial grass paddocks in good condition, and with great success, each of them being thickly grassed with cocksfoot, rye grass and red clover. The latter grass, which is generally not much thought of for permanent pasture, as it soon dies out, appears to do uncommonly well at Coolart. It is to be found in land which has been grazed for the last five years. Mr. Benn exercises judgment and discrimination in feeding these grasses off, especially when sheep are the stock used, early in the season, keeping them understocked at that time so as to give the grasses a fair chance. The wisdom of this course will be generally admitted, and yet it is frequently disregarded by graziers, who overstock and then complain of grasses dying out. The Coolart paddocks are all very clean, there being no thistles, docks, or weeds of any sort to be seen.

The principal stock kept at present is sheep. For years past the name of the owner and also the property itself have been associated with shorthorn cattle breeding, but, owing to the great fall in prices of this class of stock, breeding them on an extensive scale was discontinued and more attention given to sheep. There are about 2000 at present on the estate, some being pure Cotswolds, obtained originally from the flocks of Mr. Calvert, of Colac, while the rest are crossbreds from merinoes to Cots-

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the rest are crossbreds from merinoes to Cotswolds. There are about 160 pure ewes, which are kept as a stud flock, and to which have been put rams bred by Mr. Rutledge, of Farnham Park, from his imported stock. There are also about 500 crossbred breeding ewes and 100 rams of different ages. The Cotswolds are a hardy compact framed sort, being an excellent butchers' sheep; in good condition the average killed from 80 lb. to 90 lb., their mutton being of the best quality. They also clip well—those shorn at Coolart in November last averaging 8 lb all round. For quality and weight of wool combined, the first cross from the merino is pronounced to be the best.

When Coolart was bought from Mr. J. Hann there were about 600 head of an inferior kind of wild cattle, purchased with the property. These were immediately afterwards sold, and the nucleus of a fresh herd established by the purchase from Mr. Coghill, of Cumberland estate, on the Deep Creek, of a number of cows, and a little later on a stud bull, Royal Butterfly 9th, was obtained from Messrs. Morton Bros. and Leach, a Jessamine cow being bought at the same firm's clearing sale not long afterwards. In 1870 four cows and two bulls were imported. The latter were Lord Liverpool and Lord Lorne, and from them is descended most of the stock at present on Coolart. Altogether there are about 200 cattle, 60 of which are pure, while the remainder show the unmistakable signs of years of careful breeding. It is intended to dispose of these as soon as possible, as, having gone into sheep, it is Mr. Beun's intention to keep only a few of his pure bred cattle. The bull at present in use is Lord Liverpool 2nd, by Lord Liverpool, dam Poplin (both imported). He is a good roan color, being an evenly fleshed and compact bull, and a promising stock getter. A rich roan yearling heifer and also a red one of the

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roan yearling heifer and also a red one of the same age, both from the Premium family, are by this bull, and do him credit as a sire, the first mentioned heifer in particular being almost perfection of form. There are also several other youngsters of excellent appearance to be seen, a roan bull calf from Woodbine 2nd and a roan heifer calf from one of the Premiums being especially worthy of mention. In one of the paddocks Rapid's Kora, a cow by the once celebrated bull Rapid, was running with her calf at foot. All the cattle are in good healthy condition, none being poor and none overdone with fat. During winter the shorthorns are

fed principally on pulped mangolds and chaff, which are mixed and allowed to ferment slightly before being used.

The Coolart horses have always been of a good sort; 128 were bought with the place 21 years ago. Of these two are yet on the estate, one of them still doing his daily share of work and looking as fresh as ever. At present the sire in use is a trotting stallion, named Tempest, bred on Coolart. He is a handsome horse standing over 16 hands, with grand shoulders and withers, good loins and quarters, and splendid bone. In color he is a beautiful dark dapple-brown, and is 5 years old. He is by the imported Flying Perfection, his dam being Iris, by the thoroughbred horse Excelsior. There is also a grand yearling colt from the same mare by Mr. Gidney's imported roadster Merryleg. This youngster shows lots of substance and quality, and promises to develop into a fine upstanding stallion. There are about 45 breeding mares, which have been selected and bought for the purpose of suiting Tempest. Well bred mares, possessing size, style and substance, are the sort chosen, as Mr. Benn's object is to breed carriage horses, for which there is a permanent and increasing demand. A pair of carriage

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and increasing demand. A pair of carriage horses with good action will always command a high figure, and anyone who can successfully breed them will certainly find it profitable. The selection of mares and sire is an operation over which too much care cannot be taken; and afterwards in rearing foals destined to grow into carriage horses attention has to be paid to keeping them in the right kind of pasture, which must be of the sort to produce both size and bone. The foals by Tempest from Mr. Benn's selected mares are a grand lot; they are all good colors, being bays or browns, and have especially good heads, necks and shoulders. Altogether they do credit to their sire, and promise to realise their owner's anticipations by growing into large and stylish horses.

Shetland ponies have been bred on Coolart for some years past, and have always paid fairly well. The strain kept is pure Shetland, the original ones having been imported by Messrs. Sumner and Benn. The hardy nature of these ponies enables them to do well on the poorest and roughest pastures. If the paddocks contain food and water of any description they seem to thrive, requiring no attention. They do so well that it began to be noticed as a fault that the young stock began to exceed what is considered to be the proper size of Shetlands, this increase of size being ascribed to climatic influences. With a view of counteracting this, Mr. Benn has recently imported a very small entire from Skye, who has been christened Jumbo. From his name it might be inferred that he is clumsy, but quite the opposite is the case, his action being very clever and stylish. There are about 40 Shetland mares running in the paddocks, most of them having foals at foot. The young stock is sold at two and three years old, and realise profitable prices—from £5 to £20 according to quality.

The house and buildings at Coolart are

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The house and buildings at Coolart are situated in a pleasant position on a bluff, about 300 yards from the shores of Western Port Bay. They are sheltered from the cold winds by blue gum trees and hedges of a variety of ti-tree. Several of the smaller paddocks used for stock or cultivation have the same kind of hedges surrounding them, others having the kangaroo acacia, which does well in this district.

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