Closer settlement revisited at Kendenup, Western Australia: a historical geography

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Abstract

In the early 1920s a Victorian entrepreneur, C. J. (Jack) De Garis, purchased a large estate at Kendenup in the south-west of Western Australia where he established a comprehensive settlement scheme based on his earlier experiences in Mildura, Victoria, and Pyap, South Australia. De Garis’ plan was to found a model community based on intensive production from the more than 1000 blocks he had subdivided and marketed to buyers throughout Australia and overseas. He also laid out a townsite, installed infrastructure and built a dehydration plant to process and market products from the farms. But the scheme failed, resulting in much of the land lying idle for decades. However, the properties have recently been ‘rediscovered’ and marketed as a less costly alternative for people seeking smaller, country holdings than those available in higher amenity locations nearer the coast. This paper has two principal objectives: first to discuss the original settlement scheme and its aftermath and, second, to address the more recent land developments and their implications for future planning.

Key words: historical geography, rural settlement, counter urbanization, planning, community development

Introduction

Once Australia had been firmly established as a British possession, it became a high priority initially for the colonial governments and subsequently for the Australian and state governments to consolidate their presence and achieve levels of economic development that would allow them to become essentially self-sufficient. An integral part of this strategy, bolstered by a perceived need to solve the mother country’s overpopulation, was to encourage immigration into Australia and establish an agricultural population in those of the country’s interior regions that were thought to be able to support such a policy. Through the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries then, various governments embarked on a large number of schemes designed to achieve those objectives. In Western Australia, as in other parts of the country, large expanses of territory, often several thousand hectares in each in area, were released to individuals and agencies deemed have wealth enough to attract capital into the country. However, these schemes had a generally poor rate of success and in many instances led to vast tracts of land being turned over to extensive agricultural practices or even abandoned as owners or leaseholders struggled with the harsh environment, lack of knowledge, or limited capital resources. In response to such failures, governments turned to a variety of schemes seeking to encourage the migration of larger numbers of people whose principal resource was their labour and to place them on smaller properties destined for more intensive production. These poli-
cies became identified as ‘closer settlement’ schemes (Henzell 2007; Powell 1988). Many such schemes were largely government sponsored and financed through the Empire Settlement Act, for example, Western Australia’s Group Settlement scheme (Gabbedy 1988; Brayshay and Selwood 2002), while others were private initiatives. However, ignorance of the local environment and inadequate capital continued to be common problems. The nature, extent and intensity of these various endeavours as they played out in the 1920s and earlier are discussed at length in two seminal works: F.K. Crowley’s (1960) *Australia’s Western Third* (especially Chapter 7, pp. 199-240) and G. Bolton’s (1972) *A Fine Country to Starve In*. Mentioned in Bolton’s work, but not discussed at length (see p. 44) was the Kendenup Scheme in the south-western corner of Western Australia (Figure 1). It was one of the private initiatives.

Kendenup is located in the Shire of Plantagenet about 340 km south-southeast from Perth and about 65 km north of Albany and the Southern Ocean. Kendenup townsite is adjacent to the main railway line and just a couple of kilometres east of the main Albany Highway (see Figure 1). It lies in the Great Southern district and enjoys a Mediterranean climate, with a winter rainfall maximum and hot, dry summers. Kendenup’s relatively moist environment, with a long-term average precipitation of around 730 mm/year, is drier than localities closer to the coast which can receive over a 1000 mm/year, but it is significantly wetter than localities further to the east where the amounts decrease quite rapidly into the wheatbelt, for example, around 500 mm/year at Jerramungup. Its temperatures can be noticeably higher than those at the coast during the summer and cooler during the winter. The climate gave the Kendenup area a naturally forested area of “Jarrah, Marri and Wandoo woodlands with pockets of Mallee and Sheoak woodlands” (Meat & Livestock Australia [MLA] 2012; Oyster Harbour Catchment Group Inc 2012).

The Kendenup Scheme was the brainchild of a Victorian entrepreneur, C. J. (Jack) De Garis who, on hearing of a large tract of land available for purchase in Western Australia, saw it as a golden opportunity to bring to fruition an agricultural settlement project that he had been dreaming of for some years. This project involved the establishment of a form of cooperative of small farmers who would produce fruits and vegetables that would be preserved and sold on local and world markets. This dream had emerged from his previous experiences with the industry in South Australia where he had had major successes in producing and marketing dried fruits, but ultimately had been unable to realize his dream.

Initially, the Kendenup Scheme was a roaring success, but it very soon ran into trouble when De Garis’s Development Company ran short of cash and the scheme collapsed. Nevertheless, a few survivors struggled on through the inter-war years and into the gradually more prosperous post-war era. However, more recently the district has been reinvigorated as the long established farmers have expanded and consolidated their holdings, while newcomers, motivated by the so-called sea change/tree change, have also moved into the area, generating additional growth. This new growth has been significantly generated by, and superimposed over the palimpsest of the original cadastre, which is continuing to have considerable influence over the recent development. This paper has two primary objectives: first, it will provide new insights into the De Garis Kendenup Scheme and its aftermath, second, it will examine how it is affecting current development, and implications for the future of the locality. Most of the research for the paper has been based on original data drawn from unpublished government and personal historical documents as well as from published sources. These have been extensively supplemented by information derived from interviews to saturation level with local government personnel and real estate agents, as well as long term, community engaged residents selected by snowball techniques to identify people with extensive or specialized knowledge. The interviews were completed during the summers of

![Figure 1: Location of the Kendenup Scheme in Western Australia.](image-url)
De Garis and the Genesis of the Kendenup Scheme

Clement John (Jack) De Garis has been acknowledged as one of Australia’s most colourful entrepreneurs. He grew up in the Mildura region of Victoria, the son of an enterprising man whose diverse business interests included real estate, auctioneering, storekeeping and the ownership of a packing shed. Jack very quickly assumed control of the family business and, with a series of audacious moves employing mostly borrowed capital, he shortly thereafter built a substantial reputation as a highly successful businessman. He developed the Sarnia Packing Pty Ltd, an ultra modern facility producing dried fruits, and secured commitments from growers for supplies. Barely three years later, he acquired the South Australian government’s failed 10,000 acre (4050 ha) Pyap Village Estate community settlement scheme, and reversed its fortunes, developing it as a form of communal endeavour, again employing the newest technology and business strategies to grow the business. From there, he went on to become the champion of the dried fruit industry in Australia, becoming director of publicity for the Australian Fruit Growers Association and successfully marketing the “Sun-Raysed” brand throughout Australia. It was from these experiences that De Garis drew inspiration for his Kendenup scheme (De Garis 1925; Hill 1946; Cairns 1965; McCalman 2006; Flinders Range Research 2011).

Frustrated in his efforts to obtain the freehold on the Pyap estate (De Garis 1925, p.319), De Garis moved swiftly in July 1920 when he learned of the extensive, 47,000 plus acres (19,000 plus hectares) Hassell sheep station being up for sale in Western Australia and put a deposit on the property sight unseen. He was probably unaware that the Hassell family had been trying to sell the estate for some years, offering it up to the state government over the previous decade on several occasions, the most recent in 1919, for a soldier repatriation settlement scheme. However, the government had baulked at the suggestion, being advised by its surveyors that most of the land was too poor for closer settlement and not worth the asking price (Government of Western Australia 1919). Despite also receiving negative rejections from his advisors, De Garis put in an offer on the estate of $1,000 an acre (De Garis 1925, p. 366-367). His rationale at this point was that, relative to Mildura which had been purchased for the same price some thirty years earlier and which was then without any of its costly improvements and still out in the wilderness, Kendenup was a much superior proposition. To quote De Garis (1925, pp372-373):

At Kendenup we have a 12-mile metal road to start with. We have land that for 82 years has been fenced, and well manured by cattle and sheep. It is surrounded by proved fruit growing lands not needing irrigation. We have an average rainfall of 29 inches over a period of 35 years, and a place where a drought is entirely unknown. This water supply costs £3 per acre per annum in Mildura today. We have a railway and three railway stations, or sidings. Dams, for and emergency irrigation, will be the only expense for a settler in conservation of water. We are within ten miles of a cool store, and 40 miles of a port, with its butter factory, meat works, shipping and other conveniences, and connected already to all of these by a daily train service, with sleepers and dining car conveniences.

De Garis sent out his father, the Mildura Shire Engineer, and manager and consulting engineer at Pyap, Frank Cootes, to evaluate the Kendenup estate. Because of continued opposition from those former advisors and his own serious misgivings when he personally inspected the property several weeks later, De Garis had some doubts about the purchase. He was, nevertheless, impressed by the aura of prosperity of Mount Barker, just south of the Kendenup estate, and the fact that fruit orchards were thriving right up to the estate’s boundary. According to De Garis himself, he was ultimately persuaded by Frank Cootes’ assertion that the land would produce “… fruit, fodder, vegetables and sugar beet … every acre is good for something “(De Garis 1925, p. 396). Coote also assured De Garis the timber on the estate could be sold and the land cleared cheaply employing government tractors available at a low rental (De Garis 1925, pp. 391-392). De Garis completed the purchase after securing Coote’s agreement to manage the estate and the services of a local representative to assist him in developing the property (De Garis 1925, pp. 397-398; Cairns 1965, pp. 43-44).

Given the time of year, the gently undulating property would have appeared quite verdant and at its most attractive (Figure 2). Although only about 200 acres of the estate had been cleared, much of the remainder had been ringbarked and the land provided good pasturage for the Hassell sheep station. Despite regrowth having begun to over-run the estate (Cairns 1965, pp. 35-36), De Garis’ plan was to bring the land into much more intensive production.

Frank Coote, had already prepared a preliminary survey of the estate and went ahead under De Garis’ instructions to produce a plan of subdivision. This was loosely based on the...
popular and widely employed gridiron plan quite common to colonial settlements and used in the design of Mildura townsite with which both De Garis and Coote were familiar. It is interesting to note here a Canadian connection in that the Mildura plan and settlement had been created by two Canadian brothers from Ontario, George and William Chaffey, who had first migrated to California, where they had successfully established irrigation colonies, then migrated to Australia where they had repeated their accomplishments at Renmark and Mildura (Nichols and Maudsley 2012). Although Coote eschewed the City Beautiful designs that were then being promoted by Australian town planners, he and De Garis did incorporate many of the planning concepts that were seen to be important in designing urban communities (Williams 1974; Garnaut 2003; Powell 1973; Freestone 2007) and which De Garis had himself already become a fan of in his operations at Pyap. De Garis envisaged:

A properly laid out town site, with all reserves and parks for future expansion, with factory and shopping areas distinct from residential sections, with provision for public squares, and buildings, and strictly enforced building regulations,

With provision (ahead of production) for a dehydrator, a pulp- ing (and later a jam-making and canning) factory, so that a settler’s problem will end with his production. He delivers to us. We pay, and we market. …

Fruit and Vegetable experts to be provided for the settlers; and amusements, dances, concerts, picnics and social gatherings to be encouraged, so that at least once a week, the community shall meet in happy and friendly intercourse (De Garis 1925, p.373).

In the event, the central townsite was of excessively ambitious proportions containing around 500 one-quarter acre (0.1 ha) lots, and the remainder of the estate divided up into almost another thousand blocks ranging in size from smaller “suburban” lots of less than twenty acres (8 ha) adjacent to the townsite, up to around 100 acres (40 ha) on the periphery. However, the great majority of the lots were closer to fifty acres (20 ha) in size. For the most part, the relatively gently rolling terrain allowed the grid plan to prevail (Figure 3). Coote’s initial proposal had sensibly called for lots averaging 100 acres in area

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**Figure 3:** Frank Coote’s Kendenup Estate Plan of 1921. The reduced image clearly shows the location of the rail and road alignments.
in deference to Western Australian practice. However, this was over-ruled by De Garis whose preference was for a thirty acre average, to squeeze out greater returns to the land and encourage more intensive agriculture, hence the fifty acre compromise (Figure 3) (De Garis 1925, p. 373).

A lavish Australia-wide campaign promoted both the development scheme and the sales of lots (Nichols and Maudsley 2012). The first sales came in December 1920 and within six months the settlement boasted a population of more than 300. By then, a brick kiln had been completed and a dehydration plant for processing the farm output had been constructed. Numerous residences were in place on the farm properties although, because of De Garis’ stipulation that homes in the townsite had to be constructed of brick and tile, there were virtually none as yet built in that area, even though clearing and other improvements were underway. A year later, the population had risen to more than 600 and 132 homes had been built. Some 262 town lots and almost 12,000 acres (4,856 ha) of farm land had been sold. Bumper crops of vegetables had already been harvested and hundreds of fruit trees planted. Plaudits were showered on the progress of the scheme by the press and sundry Western Australian dignitaries, including the State Premier, Sir James Mitchell, and the Leader of the of the Opposition, the Hon. Phil. Collier, both of whom had been taken on a personal inspection tour (Cairns 1965). This tour had been filmed and became an integral part of the Development Company’s promotion campaign (Murphy 1921).

Much of the initial success at Kendenup was undoubtedly due to De Garis’ imagination, personal charm and salesmanship. He was able to finance his scheme almost entirely through the sale of debentures with the land as security on the loan. Although prices were very high relative to what else was available, sales were nevertheless brisk because De Garis had guaranteed to purchase all the farmers’ output at the Kendenup Fruit Packing Company’s dehydrator (Figure 4). The plan was to generate a high cash flow from land and product sales sufficient to pay for further improvements to cover interest and repayments on the debentures. However, this situation could not be sustained and it was not long before the project went into meltdown.

The Scheme’s Collapse and the Aftermath

Despite De Garis’ best efforts to obtain new sources of finance, he was quite unsuccessful and could not hold the project together. De Garis’ flamboyant lifestyle and lavish spending on Kendenup’s operations had eaten up funds at an astonishing rate; budgeted amounts for removing the trees were significantly underestimated; the Packing Company’s contract for its processed output was not renewed after the first year; debenture sales dried up and efforts to secure additional loans from government, eastern states financiers and overseas financial institutions were not only unsuccessful, but signed agreements were reneged upon by those who had promised support. De Garis also became the victim of adverse publicity, aggravated by some libellous claims made by an Eastern rival. These combined to force most of the settlers to abandon their farms as they ran out of the means to survive, let alone make payments on their land holdings. Many of them simply disappeared, often carting off their homes which were being claimed as the Development Company’s assets by the Trustee for the debenture holders. Two Royal Commissions appointed to investigate the Kendenup affair cleared De Garis of any criminal behaviour, but they were not enough to rescue the project (De Garis 1925; Cairns 1965; Grogan 1922; McDonald 1924). Nor were De Garis’ continued efforts to support the settlers.

Nevertheless, the settlement survived, albeit in a much modified form, due to a number of factors. De Garis himself made good on his promise to pay the outstanding debts against the blocks. The Settlers’ Association representing the few remaining farmers helped maintain morale and effectively lobbied for assistance. The debenture holders and their trustee, Mr. McCutcheon, took a relatively sympathetic position towards the settlers and did not insist on draining the last pound of flesh from their claims on the estate and, indeed, eventually collaborated with other interested parties in giving the three dozen or so remaining settlers the opportunity to increase the size of their holdings to a more viable size. The settlers also received sustained support from Sir Ross McDonald, one of the Royal Commissioners who very much sympathized with their predicament, and who continued to provide financial and technical advice while urging the state government to provide some support of substance for the struggling community. Eventually, in 1926, the State Agricultural Bank made loans available to the settlers for capital, which loans were transferred to the regular banks a year later. Although off-farm income had made it possible for several settlers to maintain their existence, better access to financial resources enabled them to consolidate and expand their operations, diversify, and increase their incomes. Thus, the few survivors of De Garis’s scheme were able to soldier on, gradually acquiring larger acreages and broadening the base of their operations to include livestock and a wider range of crops (Rowe 1979; Cairns 1965),

Figure 4: The Dehydrator site now commemorated as a historic site.
Despite closure of the dehydrator and eventual sale of the plant’s equipment to meet the Development Company’s outstanding liabilities, vegetable production continued and expanded, with the growers marketing their produce privately or through their local Growers Committee (Cairns p.76). An important cash crop that provided significant income was pea production. Peas had been grown from the very beginning of the De Garis years as they had been one of the dried vegetables produced from the infamous dehydrator. Fresh peas were subsequently grown for the Perth market. Three times a week the peas were picked one day, stored in ice, railed up to Perth and sold there on the following day. However, in 1963, two commercial freezing and canning firms, decided to get into processed pea production. Hunts Foods, with a seasonal fish canning plant in Albany, saw the opportunity to extend its seasonal operations by canning vegetables, while Peters W.A. of Perth also came on board. Both firms collaborated heavily with the growers, providing seed, advice, equipment and a market. Peters pulled out of the market in 1978, but Hunts continued on until unreliable rainfall and increased competition from New Zealand destroyed that market as well (Mentha 1984; Sandilands 2010; Kelly and Kelly 2011).

By the late 1920s, temperate fruits, especially apples, had become the mainstay of production for many of the farms. Early on, old-timers told of picking apricots and taking them down to Albany, some 70 km to the south for sale on fruit stalls. However, the major markets were Mount Barker, Perth and the Goldfields. In 1928, Kendenup apples were exported for the first time, when over 200 cases were sent through the Mount Barker Fruit Growers Co-op. Rapidly expanding apple production during the war years saw the Co-op eventually taking over the dehydrator building, using it as a packing shed, before building a new facility with immediate access to the railway line. It ceased operations in 1966, when export markets had collapsed. Another packing shed operated by Austin Woods, was built in 1958 to serve the export market. It continued to operate until 1972, when low prices dried up even the regional market. First the Suez Crisis and then creation of the Common Market led to the demise of the European market for Kendenup apples. The State government finally paid local growers to pull out their trees and the market in 1978, but Hunts continued on until unreliable rainfall and increased competition from New Zealand destroyed that market as well (Mentha 1984; Sandilands 2010; Kelly and Kelly 2011).

One exception to these extensive farm operations is the nevertheless large-scale chicken farm, Mount Barker Free Range Chicken (http://www.mtbarkerchicken.com.au). This operation and type of product would have conformed to De Garis’ dream of intensive, speciality production, although probably not at the scale he envisaged. It is, however, perhaps symbolic of the intensive production and closer settlement that is becoming characteristic of the Kendenup district in more recent years.

Closer Settlement Revisited

In distinct contrast to the outer ring of extensive farms prevalent on the outer zone of the Kendenup Estate, and a range of smaller farms elsewhere in the locality, an inner ring of more intensive farm enterprises surrounds the townsit. Furthermore, the townsit itself is now more densely occupied than ever before (Figure 6). Mount Barker Free Range Chicken’s operations are currently located adjacent to the townsit and in the same
general area there are numbers of hobby farms, mostly located on the smaller, relict ‘suburban’ rural properties, producing speciality crops or exotic animals (Figure 7). Mount Barker Chickens originated when a group of local people began commercial operations raising rabbits for meat production. This enterprise failed when disease destroyed the animals. However, the operation the was subsequently taken over by an outside corporate enterprise for the production of chickens and which is now in process of expanding its operations to a larger property to accommodate the increasing demand for its product. It is nevertheless the exception (Kelly and Kelly 2011; Lennard 2011).

The other, smaller farm operations are not of commercial scale, although they may generate some income. One such enterprise is maintained by a couple whose principal income derives from the male partner’s work as a prison officer at the Albany Regional Prison. He commutes there regularly, while his partner, who has more casual, seasonal employment, runs the household and manages their small farm. Their ‘farmlet’ boasts three pet alpacas, chickens, a half-dozen cattle, and a flock of two dozen or so sheep, the produce from which is almost all consumed by the family (Begutter 2011).

There are additional examples of households whose primary ambition was to escape the big city in favour of a rural environment and an alternative lifestyle. One such case is the Whites, who were originally from the eastern states and who moved to Perth, then eventually to Kendenup. They both had professional office backgrounds, but were wanting something different. In the late 1980s they had been looking for property closer to the city, at Gidgeganup, up on the escarpment to the east of Perth, but were not able to obtain a mortgage there. However, they saw an alternative in a newspaper advertisement for land at Kendenup and liked the look of the place. Lots there were then selling in the order of $1000 an acre, making the move an affordable proposition since they were able to sell their Perth home, purchase a 14 acre (5.2786 hectares) property, and pay for much of the new home’s initial construction costs out of the proceeds. The Whites also note that, at that time, numbers of other newcomers were doing the same sort of thing and they assisted each other with their improvements. For some years after moving down to Kendenup and after completing the basic improvements, Bob worked in Albany while the couple continued to improve the property through their sweat equity. Both are craftspeople, with Bob working with wood, including building musical instruments, while Mercedes sews and paints. Over the years, they have derived some income from these activities and some from rental of their pasture, along with other benefits drawn from the local barter economy. When they first arrived their property was essentially an open pasture, whereas it is now fully landscaped with numerous fruit trees, an organic vegetable garden, and a dam providing water and yabbies (a small, freshwater crayfish) which, together, supply most of their food needs (Figure 8). Nevertheless, the Whites observe that their life at Kendenup is not inexpensive. Water is costly, as are other expenses, especially transportation, which have been rapidly increasing to the point with their improvements.
Counter-urbanization has been the main generator of growth in Kendenup over the past twenty-five or so years, although the population in the district had experienced relatively slow growth during the post-war period. Even so, the population in the 1960s was still small. According to the 1961 census there were 136 occupied dwellings and 514 people versus 88 dwellings and 344 people in 1947 (Cairns 1965, p. 94). However, even in 1971, there were only twelve houses in the townsite if one excludes the numerous Aborigines’ ‘humpies’ on the reserve alongside the railway tracks (Sandilands 2010; Fergie and Sagger 2010). So low was the demand for town property that, by the mid-seventies, a large section of the townsite plan was cancelled and the land made over into a golf course (Department of Lands and Surveys 1976; Shire of Plantagenet 2009). The most recent figures from the 2006 census show that the population then stood at 1290 people for Kendenup and 4733 for Plantagenet, the shire in which it is located. Because of boundary changes and lack of more recent data, the current population of Kendenup cannot be ascertained, however, the Australian Bureau of Statistics does estimate that Plantagenet’s numbers had risen to 5071 by 2010 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011). Kendenup’s primary school enrolment figures are more revealing. During the 1980s they were generally in the low seventies, whereas they had rebounded more than 150 in 2006, before falling back again to around 100 in 2012. An estimated 300 or so children under 18 years of age now live in the district, although the figures vacillate greatly because of the highly transient population (Fergie and Sagger 2010; Education Department of Western Australia 2011; Kendenup Primary School 2012). These population movements can be attributed to Australia’s much broader ‘sea change/tree change’ now widely recognized in the global and specifically Australian literature (Salt 2001; Burnley and Murphy 2004; McKenzie 2010; Argent et al. 2011), although it has various components, and the changers’ motives are not always amenity driven.

In Kendenup’s case it is important to acknowledge the important role taken by the real estate industry in exploiting the movement. The availability of smaller properties created by De Garis in his original settlement scheme came to the attention of people in the industry and it was their active promotion of the area which certainly encouraged people to migrate there. Although others, including local farmers, were involved, two people have been held largely responsible for bringing the Kendenup properties on to the market. The first, a Mr. Lenton, drew inspiration from his earlier successful experience in buying a farm property containing several smaller parcels and marketing the smaller lots in a relict subdivision at Woodanilling, somewhat closer to Perth, and who searched for another location presenting a similar opportunity. His activities then motivated Neil Lennard to do the same thing, although Lennard focussed his attentions on Kendenup townsite’s one-quarter acre lots, many of which he acquired though tax sales. These realtors, along with others in the local industry, strongly promoted the Kendenup properties in Perth during the late 1980s (Griffiths 2011; Kelly, T and D. 2011; Sandilands 2010; Orzel, J. 2010; Lennard 2011) and led to a rapid increase in the population, although many of the newcomers had bought their lots for the purpose of building vacation or second homes.

However, others were lured to Kendenup by the prospect of permanent residence and an idyllic, rural lifestyle at lower prices relative to areas of higher amenity closer to the coastal communities of the lower south-west. Additionally, Kendenup village could boast of having some infrastructure in place, including a school, church, shops, post office, recreation grounds, and a vibrant core of citizenry and their institutions (Figure 9). Initially, the low prices attracted people of lower income and fewer resources, many of whom had little or no experience of rural living. This led to high rates of transiency as the disaffected sought locations that were better serviced or cashed in on the rapidly rising prices for property. Nevertheless, others who were more determined or resilient stayed on to become permanent residents, especially if they were able to find some local employment. They have been followed by people with greater resources, often early retirees with skills that allowed them to work at home-based activities (Griffiths 2011). The recent global crisis in financial markets, especially property markets, has had a dramatic effect on the property market at Kendenup. After a flurry of rapidly escalating prices between 2002 and 2006, they peaked in August of that year after which mortgage lending institutions withdrew from the action. After that point, town lots that had sold for $80,000 could not find buyers at half that price. Since then, prices have stabilised or even strengthened somewhat, but asking prices for the quarter-acre (1012 square metre) lots remain in the range of $50,000 - $60,000. However, sales are slow and generally properties sell at a lower price (Griffiths 2011, 2012; Naderi 2010; Orzel 2010). The global financial situation has undoubtedly slowed, or even stopped growth in Kendenup. But, even so, the increased population, especially in the townsite, has brought its problems.
Current Issues

Recent developments at Kendenup are fairly typical of small rural localities experiencing population increases associated with counter-urbanisation and sea/tree change in other areas of the country and further afield. Indeed, they can be considered an extension of developments occurring closer to the coast in the south-west of Western Australia. Rising property prices around Margaret River to the west and Denmark and Albany to the south have increased demand for the less expensive land around Kendenup, which is still only a forty minute drive from the ocean. Even with the escalation of prices in Kendenup, they still provide a more affordable alternative for those of lesser means or who are looking for more spacious surroundings than available nearer to the coast. The generalities associated with such developments have been widely reported in other studies of the sea/tree change phenomenon and need not be reiterated here (Argent et al. 2011; Burnley and Murphy 2004; McKenzie 2010). However, this study of Kendenup does provide some additional insights that are noteworthy. Longstanding residents of the district observe that the recent population increases have brought changes in the social structure of the community, some of them good and some not so good. Whereas the more affluent migrants have generated wealth for the area and the newcomers have brought diversity and supported community improvements, they and the less affluent have put pressure on local resources, especially in the school and on recreation and social services. Increased enrolments, higher levels of transience and variability of attendance in the school have been somewhat disruptive and also have also raised concerns about after school activities or the lack thereof. One outcome of these concerns is the recent construction of a skate park in the heart of the village. This research is the precursor to a more comprehensive study of the demographic and social characteristics of the local population and further research is required to determine more definitively the impact of the migrants on the infrastructure and land use patterns.

Of major concern to district planners is the zoning of the Kendenup Estate. At present, virtually the entire area is zoned rural despite the concentration of small 1000 square metre lots in the central townsite or village. Land zoned for rural purposes can be used for a much wider range of uses than permitted on urban zoned land and this has allowed owners to build large structures on lots that are too small to accommodate them without causing visual intrusion, inconvenience and a potential fire hazard to neighbouring properties. Some dwellings are little more than tin sheds and are well below contemporary urban building standards. The central village has reticulated water supply, but the uncoordinated and sporadic pattern of development makes hook-ups very expensive and there are growing concerns about the community’s ability to handle its sewage. Installation of a comprehensive sewage system is far too costly and existing lot sizes in the central area are too small to accommodate septic systems. Furthermore, because of the almost flat ground, surface drainage is also a significant problem, especially during the winter wet season, when the land can be turned into a swamp. The Shire of Plantagenet has had a draft planning strategy for Kendenup that has been in place for some years. To take pressure off the need for services and to consolidate development, the proposed plan calls for a significant reduction in the size of the village’s area and its rezoning to urban residential with a minimum lot size of 2,000 square metres, that is, large enough to accommodate on-site effluent disposal. Landgate, the State Government’s land development arm, is currently consolidating a number of the its existing 1,000 square metre lots into 2,000 square metre parcels to have them conform to the more stringent criterion (Duncan, 2012). Much of the surrounding ‘suburban’ area is to be designated as Rural Residential or Rural Small-holding zones with appropriate restrictions in conformity with State regulations (Shire of Plantagenet 2009 p.26). However, the plan’s formal implementation has been delayed at the State level and this has limited the planning authority’s ability to enforce compliance. Dealing with these kinds of issues has proven too much for some of the newcomers who have left the community in hopes of finding better conditions elsewhere (Shire of Plantagenet 2009; Duncan 2010).

Conclusion

This paper’s objectives have been to provide some geographical perspectives on the origins and evolutionary development processes that have created the community and landscape of Kendenup, a relatively intensive and anomalous settlement in the lower Great Southern district of Western Australia. Kendenup’s location on the major highway linking metropolitan Perth to the coastal city of Albany, along with its ready access to the beaches and fishing attractions of the Southern Ocean, have provided strong inducements to those dreaming of a quasi-rural lifestyle. The locality is also blessed with high levels of scenic amenity, with views of the Stirling Ranges and rolling hills swathed in woods and open and productive farmland which can be quite idyllic for much of the year. De Garis’ vision of a close knit community of small scale farmers failed largely because it was poorly managed and inadequately funded, however, it is also clear that, had it not been for his original plans for closer settlement, the pioneering efforts of the earlier settlers and their improvements to its infrastructure, it is highly unlikely that the Kendenup property would be so fully developed as it currently is. Were is not for the relict cadastre left as the palimpsest for subsequent occupation, it is very doubtful that it could have been so effectively promoted and marketed by realtors to the renewed wave of migrants associated with the sea/tree change of more recent vintage.

This relict, but nevertheless legal townsite cadastre, comprising several hundred relatively affordable urban sized lots and smaller, ‘suburban’ acreages has now come within the orbit of prospective clients seeking escape from the city, and has become an island of closer settlement within the landscape. Higher amenity properties command higher prices in the more accessible and established localities in closer proximity to the coast such as Margaret River, Denmark and Albany. They are also subject to more stringent regulations and the subdivision approval process can be a long, drawn out and expensive pro-
procedure in those localities. For these reasons, the convenience of relatively available property on the Kendenup estate has become an attractive proposition for those wanting to adopt a permanent alternative lifestyle, or to establish a second home in an area of higher amenity while hoping to escape perceived higher living costs. Our research has thrown more light on the origins and evolution of the Kendenup settlement scheme. It provides additional insights into the nature and processes of the sea/tree change as they are occurring in Western Australia. It highlights the development problems inherent in adapting to a relict settlement cadastre and brings this case study into the geographical literature on planning and settlement.

Acknowledgements
The authors wish to thank residents of Kendenup and district for their contributions to this paper, to the Universities of Curtin and Western Australia for their financial support and to two anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions.

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