

TRAVEL

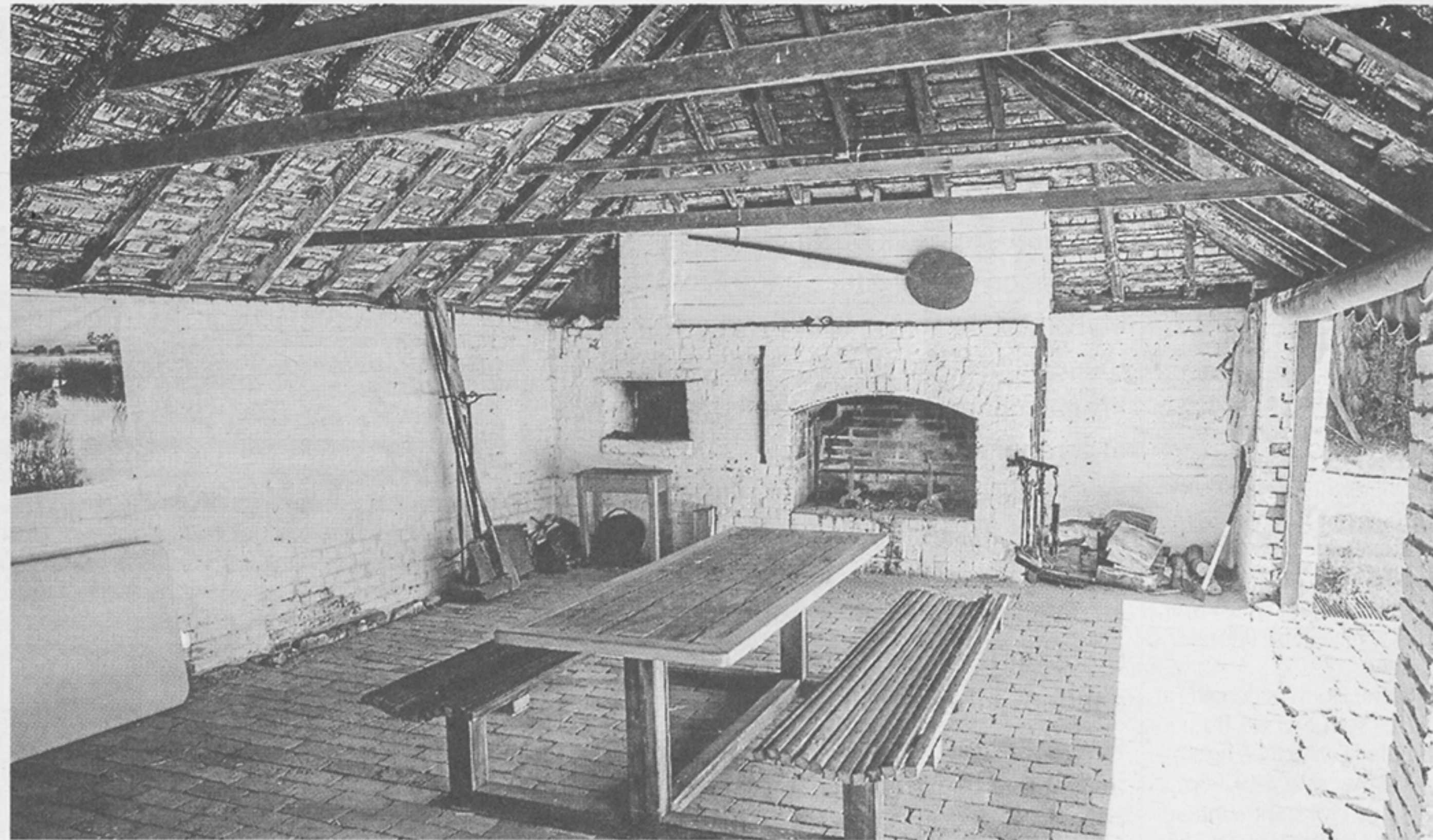


TRUE BREW

MARY O'BRIEN follows the hops and heritage trail in Tasmania's Derwent Valley.

It's a long way from a pint of bitter in a pub to a field of swaying hops. The tall lines of flowering vines look much too pretty to be used in beer making. Hanging on four-metre-high trellises, the cones are turning yellow, as harvest time is just around the corner.

The picturesque Derwent Valley, just outside Hobart, is where the hops industry started and it's



flourishing again today. The countryside here is lush and green, dotted with lovely colonial buildings. It's a place often overlooked by visitors.

The growing interest in craft beer has set Hobart local Kim Dudson on the trail of Tasmania's hops heritage. Dudson has all the fervour and passion of the newly converted. Two years ago, she moved to Tasmania, fell in love with the place, and has become entranced with the romance of the hops story.

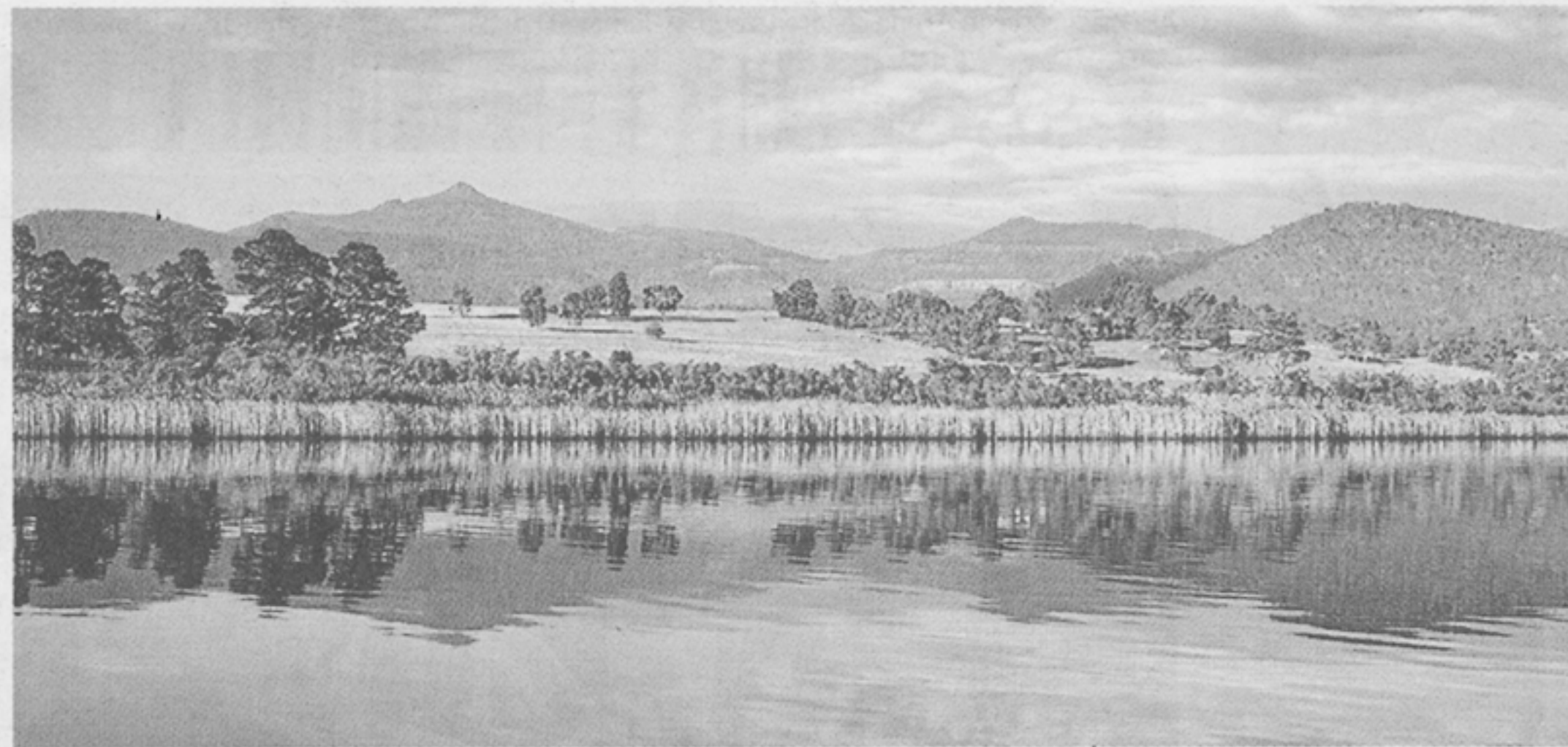
The most spectacular reminders of the past are the beautiful hops-drying or oast houses, mostly two-storey timber and brick buildings along the banks of the river. Our first stop is at Valleyfield estate, owned

by Tasmania's governor, Kate Warner, and husband Dick. Although it is not normally open to the public, daughter Meg Bignell shows us through the 1860s oast house. Valleyfield, which was Australia's first commercial hops farm, has been in the Warner family for four generations and Bignell remembers hops being dried up to the 1970s, when a new variety wiped out the local industry.

After the hops were harvested, they were spread on the elevated floors of these oast houses and left to dry. The famous Valleyfield oast, with its large, round red-brick tower and shingle roof, was built by Ebenezer Shoobridge, who was influenced by the

The convict kitchen at Redlands. Photos: Tourism Tasmania and Nick Osborne

HOLIDAY



A Derwent Valley oast house; [right] the Derwent River passes through lush, green countryside.

hops buildings in his father's home county of Kent. Shoobridge and his sons also built the impressive Bushy Park complex of seven oast houses, including the famous Text Kiln with its religious inscriptions in 1867. Today, this is a private commercial hops farm, but if you visit the Bushy Park Cemetery, you can see the oast houses dotted through the valley.

The area is also a great place for growing fruit, such as plums, apples, blackberries and cherries. It's too good an opportunity to miss a visit to Westerway Raspberry farm. Pick some heritage gold raspberries, if in season, and relax at the coffee and cake shed.

On the banks of the Plenty tributary, Redlands Estate is being transformed by owners Peter and Elizabeth Hope. The estate, with its 1860s oast house, has a colourful history. It was built by George Frederick Read, reputed to be the son of King George IV. Today, the Hopes are restoring the estate and have opened a whisky distillery in the 1857 granary. In July, Redlands' first paddock-to-bottle single malt whisky will be released.

As a special treat, Peter bakes some bread for our lunch in the historic convict-built oven. We have a picnic and afterwards stroll around the beautiful grounds.

Head distiller Dean Jackson shows us through the distillery, where barley is harvested from nearby fields, transferred by hand and left to floor malt. Everything is done the old-fashioned way and the whisky is distilled twice. There isn't any available for tasting until July, but I enjoy trying the Redlands apple schnapps and apple liqueur.

Next door is the Salmon Ponds heritage hatchery, the oldest trout hatchery in Australia. The 19th-century gardens are beautifully kept. I have some fun feeding the fish, which are rather large from all the food, but the real excitement is the resident platypus, who seems to enjoy having his photo taken.

Our last stop is Shene, a grand country estate being restored to its former glory by the Kernke family. Shene was granted to another royal-connected settler, Edward Paine, grandson of King George III.

Pride of place here goes to the amazing Gothic-style stables designed in the 1850s by architect Francis Butler. We're shown around by one of the owners, Myf Kernke, who recently had her own wedding in the atmospheric stables. A whisky and gin distillery is opening at the end of the year in the 1840s convict-built barn.

A good place to finish the trip is at Mona's Moo Brew brewery in Bridgewater where the hops are put to good use. Five craft beers are brewed from hops (which adds the flavour and aroma), barley, yeast and water. A special harvest ale, using fresh local hops, is released every August, and it always tastes slightly different each year.

Exploring the beautiful Derwent Valley and its historic landscape is both a journey into the past and into the future as the hops industry gains a new lease of life.

The writer was a guest of Tourism Tasmania and Bespoke Tasmania Tours.


THE FACTS
FLY

Jetstar Melbourne to Hobart from \$39.

STAY

Sullivans Cove apartments, Hunter Street, Hobart, 6234 5063
sullivanscoveapartments.com.au.

DO

Bespoke Tasmania Tours offers small tailor-made tours of the Derwent Valley, bespoketasmania.com. Visit Salmon Ponds, Plenty, salmonponds.com.au.

EAT & DRINK

Whisky tour at Redlands, Plenty, redlandsestate.com.au; Westerway Raspberry farm, Westerway, lanoma.com.au; Moo Brew brewery, Bridgewater
MORE
discovertasmania.com.au