

# Battle to farm

## Excavating land files of the World War I Discharged Soldier Settler Scheme from within Closer Settlement files at Public Record Office Victoria

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### Abstract

**Accessing land files which document leases held by participants in Victoria’s World War I Soldier Settlement Scheme has required researchers to take an indirect and challenging pathway of discovery. For the most part, these records could not be easily discovered within our online catalogue because most of the records were located within files otherwise identified as Closer Settlement records. This paper focuses on the preparatory work that was completed to facilitate PROV’s major contribution for the 100th anniversary of World War I, an online tool that identifies both the discharged soldiers and the files in question. The paper outlines why the tool is needed, how the preparatory research was undertaken and the new insights gained into the record series containing the majority of the files. Further information about the Battle to Farm project is available on the PROV website.**

Battle to Farm is the title of PROV’s major initiative to commemorate the 100th anniversary of World War I. It is an attempt to make the key records of the World War I Discharged Soldier Settlement Scheme more accessible through the creation of an online database that will assist researchers to identify the land file documenting the experiences of each Victorian soldier who took up an allotment under the scheme. Key documents from each file will be identified for digitisation and the entries will be linked to the service history file held by the National Archives Australia.

Battle to Farm is a magnificent title for this project because it works on so many different levels.[1] At its most literal it should function as a clearly understood entry point for anyone interested in researching how Victoria’s Great War soldiers transitioned from the battlefields of Europe and the Middle East to agricultural allotments throughout the State of Victoria upon their return to Australia. Alternatively, the title can be understood to refer to the struggles faced by many of the ‘digger’ farmers on their farm allotments that are documented on these Soldier Settlement Scheme files. Moreover, the envisaged final product will hide to all but those involved in its creation the preparatory work required *before* any indexing or digitising commenced. Indeed, our archival battle was deciding how to farm data, that is, how to identify the discharged soldiers for inclusion.

As such, the project deals with some of the most important factors that often impede large-scale digitisation projects, and provides a partial answer to one of the more frequently asked questions about our collection, ‘Why haven’t you digitised your entire collection yet?’ Many factors contribute in framing a response which, for the purposes of this article, I will only mention in passing. These include the size of the entire archival collection, the proportion of the collection closed to public inspection, whether the transferring agency had already digitised the records prior to their transfer to archives and, of course, the resources available to the archival institution in terms of budget, staff, physical space and digitising equipment.

I am ignoring these factors in this article because, even if these did not exist, the indexing and digitisation of many archival series can still be a long, laborious and time-intensive process. The size of the specific project, the degree of conservation work required, the care that needs to be exercised during the digitisation process, and the necessity for stringent quality control, are all factors that can impact quite considerably on the amount of time required to complete a project of this kind. These factors demand that potential digitisation projects are scoped well in advance of the actual imaging process. Scoping establishes a project's feasibility, identifies potential road blocks and formulates solutions, and addresses resourcing and funding issues.[2] In some instances, work on preparing the records is so complex and time-consuming that it must be programmed as a separate project to the actual digitising work.[3]

There are also, in my view, two broad and largely 'historical' factors that can seriously hinder progress or even completely derail a project if it is not properly and thoroughly scoped. One pertains to the degree of knowledge already documented about the records and the other to the adequacy of the existing finding aids, in this case the original paper lists and a microfiche catalogue. Both of these factors presented major issues in developing the Battle to Farm proposal and I will address them in turn.

### **What was known about the World War I Discharged Soldier Settlement Scheme files?**

When the scoping of this project commenced in mid-2013, PROV's collective knowledge about the Soldier Settlement records was documented in chapter 32 of our *Lands Guide*, which was published in 2009.

The chapter advised prospective researchers that two types of files, a land file and an advances file, could have been created under the scheme for each lease obtained by a discharged soldier settler.[4] The *land file* related to the leasing process. This file included documents such as papers relating to the qualification process,[5] reports from land inspectors, application forms, lease documentation and, if relevant, papers about the cancellation or subsequent transfer of the lease to another settler.

Land files were allocated a file number in the form of a fraction. The top number is a serial number and the bottom number is a category number that identifies the section of the act under which the land was chosen by the discharged soldier.

Category numbers for World War I discharged soldier settlement files were originally easy to recognise owing to the addition of a .6 or a .206 extension to what were otherwise Closer Settlement Scheme category numbers. These were:

- Category 86.6 (for section 86 of the *Closer Settlement Act 1914* as varied by section 6 of the *Discharged Soldier Settlement Act 1917*)
- Category 113.206 (for section 113 of the *Closer Settlement Act 1928* with the .206 applying uniquely to discharged soldier settlers)

But a major problem presented itself when a third category was applied to the overall recordkeeping system, which somewhat complicated the identification process. This was:

- Category 12 (for section 12 of the *Closer Settlement Act 1938*)

This category applied to anyone who held a discharged soldier or closer settlement lease on the day the *Closer Settlement Act 1938* commenced operation. On that date, such leases (including discharged soldier settlement category 86.6. and 113.206 leases) were replaced by section 12 closer settlement leases completely removing any distinction (and category identifier) between the previous closer settlement and discharged soldier settlers' files.[6]

The *advances file*, if created, was the other file documenting a discharged soldier settlement lease. It was created to record the settler's approaches to the government for advances, in money or in kind, to allow for the erection of buildings and fencing, the purchase of implements and stock and for other defined purposes. These files were allocated a sequential 'advances' number prefaced with the letters DSL (which stood for discharged soldier lease). The *Lands Guide* advised that these files were held in file number order alongside closer settlement advances files[7] which were located within seven series, one for each of the six land divisions defined by the Department of Crown Lands and Survey, and another series. With two exceptions all of these series shared the same end date of 1982.[8]

The *Lands Guide* advised researchers that the section 86.6, 113.206 and 12 categories are to be found mostly in VPRS 5714. At the time my scoping research commenced, this series was titled Closer (and Solider) Settlement Files, reflecting the belief that it contained files from both schemes. The series description in our online catalogue recorded that the original order of the series had been lost long ago and certainly, on first viewing, there appears to be no logical order.

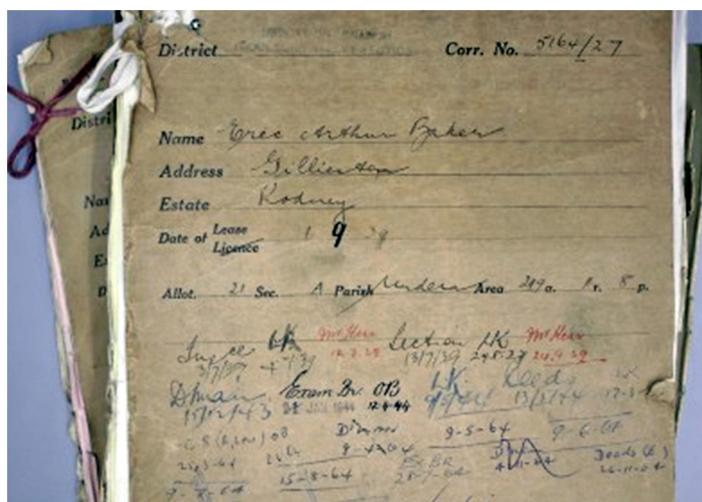
The description did note that VPRS 5714 included a number of different types of files although only estate files[9] and selection files (that is, what the *Lands Guide* subsequently referred to as lands files) were described in any detail. The description made no connection between lands files and advances files.

However, the single most important piece of information in the *Lands Guide* is a note about land files which can be found on page 307:

**Note:** When leased land was transferred from one settler to another, the file number was changed, often with a new category number as well as a new sequential number. In tracking these changes you need to know the parish name and the allotment and section details. These may be obtained from the advances file. Land could be transferred between a settler under the Closer Settlement Act 1915 and a settler under the Discharged Soldier Settlement Act 1917.[10]

What this note means, in effect, is that discharged soldier settler land files could be 'top numbered'. This is a largely nineteenth and early twentieth century recordkeeping term for a practice whereby a more recent file with its own file number (in this case, a land file) is physically placed on top of another file on the same topic (in this case, another land file for the same allotment) effectively replacing whatever number had been allocated to the older item. The note states that leases could be transferred between closer settlement and discharged soldier settlers meaning that a land file may have commenced its active life as a discharged soldier settler file but ended up as a closer settlement file or vice versa. Clearly when the 1938 Act came into effect, any discharged soldier settlement lease (and, thus, land file) would have automatically been converted into a section 12 closer settlement lease (and, thus land file). Unfortunately, the note does not disclose how many of the discharged soldier settlement files were affected. The note's use of the word 'often' also suggests this might not have always been the case.

The information contained in the *Lands Guide* was seemingly adequate at the time of its publication and, for the most part, this remains the case.[11] However, as it became increasingly apparent during 2013 that PROV's contribution to the World War I commemoration was to focus on the Discharged Soldier Settlement Scheme, a basic question emerged that no one could answer; did VPRS 5714 contain *all* or a *significant number* of the World War I Discharged Soldier Settlement Scheme land files? This led me to initially review the adequacy of our existing lists for this series.



This file cover from PROV, VPRS 5714/P0, unit 2326, file no. 5164/27 illustrates the difficulties in identifying soldier settlement land files and the necessity of the Battle to Farm project. During this file's active life, the allotment in question passed through four lessees, the last of whom, Eric Arthur Baker obtained freehold during the 1960s. Only Baker is identified on the cover which provides no indication whatsoever that the second of the lessees was Keith Conacher who had selected the allotment under the WWI Discharged Soldier Settlement Scheme. Conacher held the allotment only for the period 1919–1924 during which time this file was numbered 4757/86.6. For a more detailed explanation of how this file evolved over time through the four different lease holders, and thus file numbers, refer to the case study on pages 311–316 in chapter 32 of the PROV Lands Guide. The second file visible in shot is Baker's 'financial' file.

### The current imperative to make records in archival collections more accessible

The Internet provides the opportunity for increasing numbers of users to explore the collections of archival institutions around the world. The depiction of digitised records in programs such as Who Do You Think You Are or in television advertisements by commercial genealogical enterprises contribute to a general expectation in people with potential interest in researching family history that searching for information about your ancestry should be easy. Anecdotal evidence suggests that researchers are increasingly eschewing online archival catalogues, in favour of Google or other browsers. As a consequence, many cultural institutions have now absorbed the implications of this: that there may be a generation of researchers that has now formed the view that if a resource in a collection is not easily discoverable using a simply keyword search, it may as well not exist at all.

What this has meant for many archival institutions the world over is that many lists created in the pre-Internet era may need to be revised to ensure their online discovery. This means the creation of more detailed lists.

For PROV, this amounts to a 180 degree turn in relation to list compilation and is further magnified by the size of our collection. Until as recently as 15 to 20 years ago, it was our practice to request agencies transferring file-based records to our custody to list just the file number of each file in every box provided the control record series (that is, the index or register) was also transferred. This was based on what, at the time, was a perfectly legitimate assumption; lists did not need to be overly detailed because all researchers needed to visit the reading room at our repository to view the record of interest. The lists thus reflected and consolidated an access regime. Researchers were required to order indexes or registers identifying potential records of interest, view them, and determine the file number required so they could consult the lists to order and view the desired record in the space of a single visit.[12]

However, the initial paper listing for VPRS 5714 did not assist researchers to easily find files owing to what was thought to be the random order of the series. Accordingly during 1985 a project overseen jointly by PROV and the then Department of Conservation, Forests and Land resulted in the development of a detailed catalogue for VPRS 5714 and many other land selection file series. Staff employed through a Commonwealth Employment Project filled in data input sheets that, in addition to the file number for each file, also recorded the allotment and section number of the property, its size (in acres, roods and perches), the name of the relevant parish or township and the date range of the papers on file. The information gathered by these data input sheets were imported into a computer at the department and two microfiche catalogues produced which were placed in all PROV reading rooms.[13] The names of individuals who held the allotment and any file numbers that may have been top numbered into a given land file were not captured during this 1985 project.[14] At some point after the completion of the 1985 project, PROV received a copy of the database itself.

At this point, it is important to note that the 1985 catalogue by reference to the final allotment number, size dimensions and lease details was, in archival terms, the most appropriate way of describing a *land file* which, after all, is *the government's record of the leasing of a particular piece of Crown Land* rather than a record about the individual holding the lease.[15] The data was certainly useful for anyone who knew that someone held a lease *and* knew where it was located. But, in today's world, such data no longer meets general researcher expectations, particularly for the increasing number of researchers wanting to know if a given individual *might* have held a lease or did not know where the allotment was located.

Accordingly, after the introduction of the PROV online catalogue in 2002, thoughts turned to using the database as a means to improve the quality of the listings for the series it covered. Since then, data has been extracted from this database and used to improve the lists for some of the series covered by it augmented with the name of the last person to hold the lease.[16] At the start of 2013 the program moved to VPRS 5714.

However, these changes to the listing for VPRS 5714 still were not sufficient to answer the basic question about the number of discharged soldier settlement files PROV held. Some detailed research and number crunching was required.

### **Developing an understanding of the records**

No record exists that identifies every individual who obtained a lease under Victoria's World War I Discharged Soldier Settlement Scheme, however Wikipedia states a total of 11,639 discharged soldier settlers were allocated allotments under the scheme. [17] Using the computerised data from the 1985 listing project, I identified a total of only 1,349 files with discharged soldier settlement category numbers, the great majority of which (1,029) were located in VPRS 5714.[18] A further 14,400 files were identified with a section 12 category number which obviously contained a mixture of former closer settlement land files in addition to former discharged soldier settlement files.

At this point simple mathematics came into play; 1,349 category 86.6 and 113.206 and other files added to 14,400 category 12 files within VPRS 5714 resulted in 15,749 individual files, a figure greater than the 11,639 soldiers who had obtained allotments. If the Wikipedia figure is correct, this means that 10,290 discharged soldier settlement files were unaccounted for,[19] almost all probably held within VPRS 5714. What also needed to be kept in mind was that the 14,400 section 12 files in VPRS 5714 included a considerable and equally unknown number of former closer settlement files that had been occupied by individuals who were not discharged soldiers.[20] The sheer number of advances files in the various advances series additionally indicated that the number of discharged soldier land files had to have been much greater than 1,349.

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It was initially tempting to conclude that all of the unaccounted 10,290 discharged soldier land files had been directly top-numbered to become section 12 files as a result of the 1938 Act. But this would also be inaccurate because it was common knowledge that a significant number of the discharged soldier settlers had, by then, given up their leases. The same Wikipedia entry, for example, stated that by 1939 over 60% had left their blocks.[21] This equates to 6,983 files that would not have been directly converted into a section 12 lease. Subtracting the 1,349 category 86.6 and 113.206 and other known discharged soldier files that I had already identified (which clearly had not been converted to a section 12 lease) left me with a total of 5,634 files that likewise could not have been top-numbered directly into a section 12 lease. Rather, they would have been top-numbered into either another discharged soldier or closer settlement file which, in turn, was converted into a section 12 lease. A detailed analysis of the files in VPRS 5714 was in order.

Given the seemingly greater number of advances files compared to land files, I first looked at the various advances file series to see whether these contained any clues. I found that individual advances series had been listed in one of two ways. Some of these series were range listed, basically identifying the first and last file in each box. The files in the remaining series had been individually listed, identifying a settler, parish name, file number, an indication of whether this was a discharged soldier settlement case and a date range. What immediately became apparent was that a considerable number of files in these series ended in either 1938 or 1939 reflecting the advent of the 1938 Act.[22] All the remaining advances files ended at various points beforehand and *none* ended after 1939. Clearly it would appear that the advances series contained the closer settlement and discharged soldier settlement advances files that were closed prior to the mass conversion of current leases to section 12 under the 1938 Act.[23]

Indeed, by 1938 a lot of the information contained in the advances file had become irrelevant to the government as explained in the *Lands Guide*:

... by 1932 the majority of settlers under soldier settler and closer settlement were insolvent, due largely to the economic conditions of the time. Despite adjustments made to their liabilities, the position could not be rectified until section 32 of the Closer Settlement Act 1932 came into operation in 1937. This allowed the Closer Settlement Commission to value the land and improvements ... and then to write off the deficiency between the valuation and the settler's liabilities to the commission.[24]

Moreover, the 1938 Act specified that the outstanding monetary liability (that is, whatever remained of the advances debt) was to be set at the amount still outstanding on the day before the Act was to take effect.[25] This led to the creation of a new file to deal with the repayment of the remaining liability. The new file, now apparently referred to as a 'financial' (as in 'financial liability') file,[26] had the same file number as the section 12 land file number and was physically attached (usually by ribbon) to it.[27]

It was while I came to an understanding of what happened to the advances files that I began to also understand the arrangement of the land files, and so I next analysed the 1,029 category 86.6 and 113.206 files in VPRS 5714. Recordkeeping logic dictated that if the advances files series included advances files for leases that had become inactive *before* the commencement of the 1938 Act, it stood to reason that the discharged soldier settlement (and closer settlement for that manner) land files in VPRS 5714 that still held their original file numbers must also relate to cases where the lease became inactive before the 1938 Act. A sort of the date range fields on my spreadsheet compiled from the electronic data for this series confirmed this.

By now VPRS 5714 had started to reveal itself as an accumulation of documents organised in some way around the introduction of section 12 of the *Closer Settlement Act 1938*. It became reasonably clear that the series contained the following records:

- a mixture of closer settlement and discharged soldier settlement files that had been converted into the section 12 category;
- obsolete discharged soldier settlement and closer settlement land files that had not been converted to a section 12 lease because the leases were no longer active when the 1938 Act commenced operation; and,
- additional files, such as the estate files, that were related in some way or other to the land or leases covered by the section 12 files.

While this was good news from a collection management perspective (that is, there was now scope to review our documentation to describe VPRS 5714 as just outlined), it was potentially bad news for the feasibility of the digitisation project. If former discharged soldier settlement files were converted into section 12 files, how would anyone identify them without having to actually go through each and every file? I then attempted to determine whether any records existed of the conversion process of soldier settlement scheme file numbers to a section 12 closer settlement file number; surely a register or something similar would have been created to record old and new file numbers?



Estate *Sec 20 (Hendry Bros)* No. *D.S. 9*

Applicant *CORDERY Harry Lane* *209*  
*Murboo South* *12*

Date of Lease.	Area.			Allot.	Sern.	Parish.	Capital Value.	W N
	A.	R.	P.					
20-7-20	193	3	32	21-21 <sup>0</sup>	-	Murboo South	£1460	<i>11774</i>
		0	17					<i>less issued 3/1/44</i>
ADVANCE		D.S. 1467		LAND		<i>Howards 11-3-37</i>		<i>2/1/44</i>
				<i>5111/86.6</i>		<i>Ex B2</i>		<i>2/1/44</i>
				<i>14-8-39 1279/29</i>		<i>Ex B2</i>		<i>21-3-39</i>
				<i>Deeds M.M. Sullivan</i>		<i>Ex B2</i>		<i>2/1/44</i>
				<i>10-4-40 3-7-40</i>		<i>24-10-40 26/1/41</i>		
				<i>2/1/44</i>		<i>2/1/44</i>		
				<i>15/1/44</i>		<i>26/4/44</i>		
				<i>15/1/44</i>		<i>26/4/44</i>		

*Paid in full Grant 9-2-44*

A card from PROV, VPRS 13982/P1, unit 2, (Co-Do), showing the conversion of soldier settlement file 5111/86.6 (for Harry Lane Cordery) to closer settlement file number 209/12. Only the former Land file number (that is, 5111/86.6) and the DS (for discharged soldier) annotation in the top right-hand corner identify the lessee as a discharged soldier. Note also the pre-1939 advances file number (DS 1467) in the bottom left-hand column.

Ultimately, I found cards in VPRS 13982 for 317 of the 386 section 12 files in the sample.[33] According to the cards, 214 of the 317 files (or 67.5 %) were related in some way to a discharged soldier settler.[34] If this percentage is constant throughout the 14,400 section 12 files in the series, VPRS 5714 is likely to hold files related to 9720 discharged soldier settlers. That figure rises to 11,069 when the 1349, previously identified files are added, leaving only around 500 files unaccounted. More importantly, a follow-up inspection of the actual hardcopy files indicated that I had correctly interpreted the information of the cards and, thus the construction of individual files.

In undertaking this exercise, I came across numerous instances of discharged soldier settlers transferring their leases in a manner which clarified the meaning of the note quoted earlier from page 307 of the *Lands Guide*. Predictably, in instances where the discharged soldier transferred the lease to another discharged soldier, the file category remained the same although the top number might have altered to take into account the new selector. Just as predictably, both elements of the file number were changed if a discharged soldier lease was transferred to a closer settler or vice versa. And, as had already been proven, both elements were also changed for all discharged soldier settlement files still active when the 1938 Act was proclaimed and converted into section 12 closer settlement files.[35]

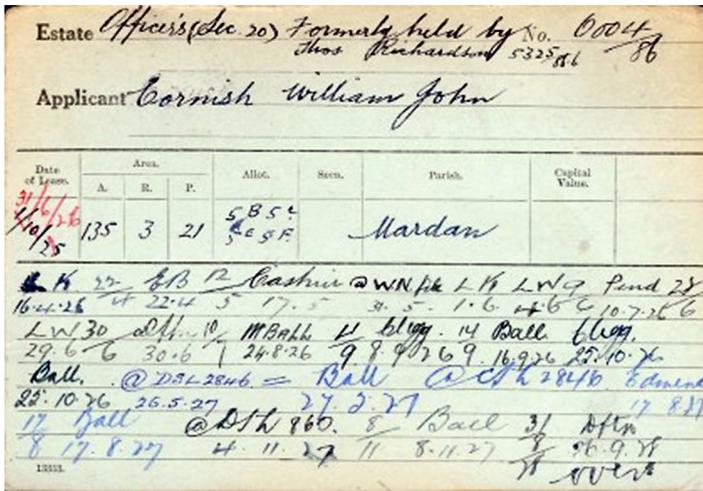
The experiment also revealed something else which consolidated my understanding of VPRS 5714. In many of the individual boxes I examined as part of this

survey, the section 12 files were found to be roughly in file number order. Checking them against the cards established that the section 12 file numbers were allocated by the Department of Crown Lands and Survey in alphabetical order according to the surname of the lessee at that time.[36] This appeared to be confirmed following a sort of the electronic data for the portion of the series to which our volunteers had added personal names.

The sort, in turn, revealed instances of what appeared to be numerous duplicate section 12 land file numbers. A further sort, this time of all the section 12 file numbers in the series, revealed up to six files were created with the same number, all in different parishes. My immediate thought was that the department had created a separate section 12 land file sequence for each of the six land divisions in Victoria. Accordingly, I added another column to my spreadsheet and added the land division against each file. A subsequent sort of the data confirmed my theory.[37]

These last two discoveries are significant in providing a plausible picture of how VPRS 5714 may have been physically stored and managed at the department where it was created. My view is that the department probably stored most of the key records – the section 12 files, estate files and the obsolete, pre-1938 discharged soldier settlement and closer settlement files – according to the land division of the allotment to which they referred, as was the case with the obsolete, pre-1938 advances files.[38] The physical order of what was processed as VPRS 5714 was probably lost as time went by or was lost as part of the actual process of boxing the records for transfer into the archives.[39]

Despite these successes in reconstructing the history of these records, one part of this possible explanation nagged at me; there were seven pre-1938 advances series in the PROV Collection, not six. Six of the series were identified in the online catalogue and in the *Lands Guide* by reference to the land division to which they related. The seventh, VPRS 10381, was identified simply by the title Soldier Settlement Advances Files. Fortunately, VPRS 10381 was one of the advances series that had a detailed listing that included the parish name for each file and so, once again, I obtained an electronic version of the list and added a column for the land division. This quickly established that the files in the series were all from the Melbourne Land Division and steps will be taken to cancel the more recently created series and to attribute its contents to VPRS 10381.



This is a card from PROV, VPRS 13982/P1, unit 2, (Co-Do), for William John Cornish which records his closer settlement file number as 6004/86 and shows that it had previously been discharged soldier settlement file 5325/86.6 (for Thomas Richardson). The reverse of the card (not pictured) showed that the file underwent another change of file number to closer settlement file 284/113.

**Applying the knowledge gained**

Armed with this newly-gained knowledge, it was time to devise instructions and a workflow for our volunteers who are to extract the necessary information from the files in VPRS 5714. One of the challenges for us in administering the project was to produce documentation that would enable our volunteers to extract the relevant and accurate information from the cards in VPRS 13982. After initial discussions with key staff[40] it was decided that I should attempt to create a visual guide showing typical cards and the information content that should be harvested from them.

The resultant tool was a good concept in theory but, unfortunately, in reality there was no such thing as a typical card. In fact, nine different variations were identified and even they did not cover every eventuality. A test using some of our volunteers confirmed there were simply too many variations for the tool to be useful during the actual process, although the index itself remained an important information resource.

The same test also found that it was difficult to integrate the cards into a meaningful workflow. Originally it was thought that someone could continue the work that I had begun with the sample survey, and thereby create histories for every file which would then be validated by volunteers comparing the completed histories to the contents of the actual file. It quickly became apparent this was not an efficient use of time or resources; simply going through each file and harvesting

the lessee names actually required less time compared to using the cards. It also meant that volunteers could be formed into teams that could start with different boxes in the VPRS 5714 box sequence and proceed at their own pace. The cards though remain on hand to resolve any inconclusive cases.

The work on extracting lessee names commenced in March 2014. As of the time of writing (September 2014), around 80% of the name-listing is complete.

The resultant online tool will provide an important resource for anyone who wishes to find the land files for these discharged soldier settlers whether it be for local, social or family history research or for any other purpose. Public Record Office Victoria will have made these records more accessible in a manner that is aligned with researcher expectations in searching for a particular file without requiring them to master much of the complex information presented in this article.

**Endnotes**

- [1] Credit here to Liz Buckle, one of our volunteers, for the superb title.
- [2] All digitisation proposals at PROV must be scoped, considered and approved by our Collection Access Governance Group before any work can commence.
- [3] One example of this was that all of the approximately 11,000 plans in VPRS 8168 Historic Plan Collection needed to be individually listed and reprocessed as separate units before their digitisation could even be contemplated.
- [4] A similar arrangement was in place for leases organised under the Closer Settlement Scheme operating during the same era.
- [5] To receive a block under the scheme, discharged soldiers had to appear before an agency known as the Soldiers Qualification Committee and obtain a qualification certificate by providing proof of previous farming experience and references as well as submitting to an oral exam. See PROV, *Lands Guide*, PROV, Melbourne, 2009, pp. 301 and 303.
- [6] Sections 12 (1) and (6) *Closer Settlement Act 1938* No. 4597.
- [7] Discharged soldier settlement and closer settlement advances files in these series can be distinguished through the addition of the prefix DSL (or DS) and CSL (or CS) to their respective sequential file numbers. CSL stood for closer settlement lease.

[8] The advances files series are: VPRS 745 Advances Files – Northern Division; VPRS 746 Advances Files – Geelong Division; VPRS 747 Advances Files – Eastern Division; VPRS 748 Advances Files – Western Division; VPRS 749 Advances Files – Mallee Division; VPRS 10381 Soldier Settlement Advances Files; and, VPRS 15763 Advances Files – Melbourne Division. As I will discuss later on, there should only be six advances files series, one for each of the land divisions and that none of these series contains documentation created after 1939.

[9] These were files documenting the repurchase of properties by the Victorian Government so these could be selected by discharged soldier settlers and are also found in VPRS 5714.

[10] *Lands Guide*, p. 307.

[11] The same applies to the information provided for VPRS 5714 in our online catalogue, although elements of it were not amended in light of what was published in the *Lands Guide* (notably the characterisation of ‘land files’ as ‘selection files’).

[12] Listing records by file number only as described above, also greatly assisted staff at our client agencies who were required to create the actual lists before transfer. The creation of detailed lists would only have served to delay the receipt of the transfer and increase the cost to agencies of preparing the records for transfer.

[13] The microfiche catalogues are: VPRS 7311 Catalogue of Crown Lands and Survey Files: File Number Order (Microfiche) and VPRS 7312 Catalogue of Crown Lands and Survey Files: Parish/Town Order (Microfiche). See also the *Lands Guide*, pp. 107–111.

[14] I suspect, but cannot confirm, that names were excluded because of the likelihood that the allotment[s] documented in the file could have many leases over time and any attempt to have the indexers inspect each file for all the names would have significantly extended the length of the project.

[15] Another way to look at matters is to visualise the government as the landlord of a piece of property and the land file as the primary record of its leasing.

[16] The name of the last person holding the lease is always recorded on the land file cover alongside the other data that was extracted from it for inclusion in the 1985 listing.

[17] See ‘Soldier settlement (Australia)’, *Wikipedia*, available at: <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soldier\\_settlement\\_\(Australia\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soldier_settlement_(Australia))>, accessed 18 March 2014.

[18] The breakdown was: 935 files with the category number 86.6; 94 with 113.206; 79 with category 46.6; 33 with category 46.6.81.49; 18 with category 46.6.49; and, 190 with category number 198.6. Without exception, all of the 86.6 and 113.206 files were located in VPRS 5714, the remainder were in VPRS 5357. The land files in VPRS 5357 will also be included in the final tool. None of these remaining categories are discussed in the *Lands Guide* and further research will be required on these.

[19] That figure being 11,639 settlers allocated allotments minus the 1,349 files I had already detected.

[20] On top of that VPRS 5714 also holds an additional 353 category 86 closer settlement land files.

[21] ‘Soldier settlement (Australia)’, *Wikipedia*, available at: <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soldier\\_settlement\\_\(Australia\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soldier_settlement_(Australia))>, accessed 18 March 2014.

[22] That a number of files ended in 1939 instead of 1938 was not a major concern. The 1938 Act was proclaimed on 5 December 1938 and so it made sense that many advances files were closed in 1939.

[23] This leaves me having to explain why most of the various advances files were given an end date of ‘?1982’ according to the *Lands Guide*. Obviously, the archivist who dated the series was unsure as to its end dates as reflected by the use of the ‘?’ qualifier but they may also have formed the assumption the series ended in the 1980s which is when the post–World War II (and totally different) scheme ended.

[24] *Lands Guide*, p. 308.

[25] Section 12 (8), *Closer Settlement Act 1938*.

[26] These files are identified as financial files on the section 12 file movement cards found in VPRS 13982, which will be described in greater detail later on in this paper.

[27] In many cases, the ribbon has been broken and so today, the section 12 land file and advances/financial file have been placed together in the one bag.

[28] VPRS 14450, spanning the period 1921 – ?1923.

[29] In any case, I was not confident that *any* of these sources would yield a result because all recorded just the most recent number allocated to the file. What I needed was a record that could be used to identify both the most recent and the previous number.

[30] *Lands Guide*, p. 306

[31] VPRS 13982 is not even referenced in the *Lands Guide*.

[32] For the record, I chose units 901–1000 of VPRS 5714/P0.

[33] I was not concerned by my inability to find cards for 56 files in the sample. This was because 3 of the 16 boxes of cards in VPRS 13982 were found to be extremely disordered and time constraints meant I could not re-sort these. The same time constraints resulted in my not analysing the remaining 13 files.

[34] This takes into account either discharged soldier settlement files converted into section 12 files in 1938–1939 or into closer settlement files before this time that were converted as such into a section 12 file.

[35] In fact I came across some instances where a lease passed though 2 or 3 discharged soldier settlers before it was ultimately taken over by a closer settler.

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[36] The fractured nature of the file arrangement in VPRS 5714 effectively hid this detail when names were added by the volunteers. Even then, as the volunteers were adding only the *final* name on the file, they were not necessarily capturing the lessee's name at the time the new section 12 numbers were allocated in 1938–1939.

[37] This sort also revealed numerous gaps in the six numbering sequences, suggesting that many section 12 files had, in turn, been top-numbered into yet other categories of land files. Hopefully this has not prevented the discovery of a significant number of World War I soldier settlement leases.

[38] There is a possibility that the various series of advances files had been stored with VPRS 5714 as well but I have no evidence to suggest this. Indeed, most of the advances series were transferred to PROV many years prior to the transfer of VPRS 5714, and were received in the order reflected by their assigned VPRS numbers, which possibly means these may have been stored elsewhere.

[39] Unfortunately, I could not ascertain *where* the records had been stored prior to their transfer to PROV. It is possible that the records were stored in the notorious secondary storage facility of the Department of Crown Lands and Survey known as the 'Dead House', graphically described by Professor Bill Russell in the book he wrote about the history of PROV, *A Matter Of Record*. If so, this would be sufficient to suggest that the order of the records was lost when they were transferred to that secondary storage location. It is also worth noting that VPRS 5714 was transferred to PROV over the course of a number of smaller accessions during 1983–1984, which raises the possibility that the records were stored in a location where space was at a premium thus restricting the ability of the most skilled and experienced archivists to obtain a meaningful overview of the series.

[40] The staff being my colleagues in Collection Management: Jack Martin (Co-ordinator, Collection Services) and Leigh Kinrade (Team Leader, Volunteers) as well as Co-ordinator, Digital Projects Daniel Wilksch.