



Nicolas Cammillieri,
1762/73–1860, artist (attrib.)
Ship 'David Clark' coming
into the harbour of Malta, 1820
Watercolour and ink on paper
Private collection Lance Pymble

La Trobe's first Immigrants: passengers from the 'David Clark', 1839

By Irene Kearsley

Irene Kearsley, a La Trobe's Cottage guide, also volunteers at Gulf Station, the historic farm at Yarra Glen managed by the National Trust. Other roles include preparing research reports for the National Trust on public art to be registered. As a member of the La Trobe Society, she participated in the project at Public Record Office Victoria of indexing the Inward Correspondence to La Trobe, 1839–1851. Irene is a long-term volunteer at PROV and continues to work on projects to preserve and digitise records of state significance.

William Bell, who as an adult established *Gulf Station*, came to the Port Phillip District with his parents and siblings in 1839 on the *David Clark*, the first ship to bring assisted immigrants from Great Britain direct to Port Phillip.¹ I began researching the man for whom the ship was named;² that led to researching the 1839 voyage and then to the ship's passengers.³ This paper is derived from the Friends of La Trobe's Cottage annual lecture 2016 and describes how some of those immigrants maintained contact with La Trobe after their arrival.

On 29 October 1839, a month after taking up duties as Superintendent of the Port Phillip District, Charles Joseph La Trobe welcomed the first ship to arrive with assisted immigrants direct

to the District.⁴ He did this in person by going on board as the ship anchored in Williamstown. He was accompanied by the Chairman of the Immigration Board Dr John Patterson, Charles Henry Le Souef,⁵ Dr Patrick Edward Cussen and Captain William Lonsdale (who took the opportunity of employing one of the passengers as a housemaid).

La Trobe was given 'three cheers' by the immigrants while he gave them 'needful advice', however none of the passengers took up the offer of the 'Governor's secretary [*sic*] of employment' who hoped to employ 'about 20 of the young men at 18 shillings a week and rations'. They were banking on better offers once they went ashore.⁶

The *David Clark* was an ex-East Indiaman cargo ship, newly converted for passengers. She had sailed from Greenock, west of Glasgow, on 13 June. During the voyage one baby was born

Irene Kearsey, photographer
Royal Botanic Gardens
Melbourne directors, 2018
 Rockface near Gate H,
 Alexandra Avenue
 First curator of the Botanic Gardens
 John Arthur 1846-1849



and one passenger died. The ship's Surgeon Archibald Gilchrist's journal records the cause of death as 'peritonitis'. He could not perform a post mortem but the symptoms certainly resembled appendicitis.⁷ The 229 passengers were all Scots, bringing skills the new settlement desperately needed. The local Greenock newspaper declared that they were 'chiefly agriculturalists, and from their appearance and behaviour... evidently much superior to the ordinary class of emigrants'.⁸ La Trobe was able to report to the Colonial Secretary in Sydney on 5 November, one week after the ship's arrival, that 'most *David Clarke* [*sic*] immigrants have found positions'.⁹

La Trobe's first involvement with one of the passengers was the immediate appointment of the shepherd Archibald McIntyre as overseer of convict road gangs. This unlikely skills match, unsurprisingly, did not turn out well. On 3 December, La Trobe recorded that McIntyre had been 'informed that, in consequence of another arrangement having been made... there will be no occasion for his service as overseer of roads'. A gentle dismissal, but La Trobe was more forthright in reporting to Governor Gipps the following day that McIntyre was: 'apparently destitute of the many qualities necessary to one in that station'.¹⁰ I have been unable so far to find out what happened to Archibald McIntyre after this setback, but there are traces of his wife Elizabeth and three of the four children later in her life.¹¹

The widowed Christina Stewart travelled with her five-year-old son Duncan and her brothers Alexander and James Menzies. In November 1839, the third Earl of Sefton wrote a letter to Lord John Russell, the Colonial Secretary, recommending that the family be granted land; Russell wrote to Governor Gipps

who in turn referred the matter to La Trobe. This correspondence chain took until May 1840. La Trobe made enquiries to find the family and invited Christina to tea at *Jolimont*, when he explained there was nothing he was able to do for them.¹² A possible topic of conversation over the tea table was the condition of the Aboriginal people: La Trobe's concern is well known and Christina, from her first arrival, recorded in her journal her concern for their plight.¹³ Later, after re-marrying and moving, first to Rivoli Bay near Mount Gambier then later to Mount Gambier itself, Christina worked for the welfare of the local Aboriginal people, establishing a school for them in 1885. In 1880 she published *The Boandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines: a sketch of their habits, customs, legends and languages*.¹⁴ Christina has an entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, the only *David Clark* immigrant to be recorded in this publication.¹⁵ Her son Duncan learned the local language so well that at fourteen, he was appointed as official interpreter.¹⁶

Two of the passengers, John Arthur and John McEwin, were horticulturalists who continued their contact with La Trobe through his botanic interests. Both brought seeds and cuttings from Scotland and settled in Heidelberg, managing their individual horticultural businesses.

John McEwin, in addition to his own horticultural skills, also brought sons who influenced horticulture in New Zealand, South Australia and Victoria. His son Andrew went to New Zealand and published on horticulture there;¹⁷ George (not a *David Clark* passenger) emigrated to South Australia in 1839 and was similarly influential.¹⁸ Peter became Curator of Heidelberg Botanic Garden and by 1932 a grandson and a great-grandson were on the

Unknown photographer
Former Yarra Flats
Common School, No.956
 Yarra Glen and District
 Historical Society
 Erected 1866, the building
 served as a schoolroom and
 a place for Presbyterian
 worship. After 1878 it
 became a men's meeting place



staff of Burnley Horticultural College.¹⁹ John McEwin is reputed by a descendant to have provided plants for the Melbourne Botanic Gardens and even to have selected the eventual site of the Gardens, although a similar claim is made by a daughter of John Arthur on her father's behalf. After the death of John Arthur, the first superintendent of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens, McEwin may have stood in before the next appointment.²⁰

John Arthur held horticultural qualifications from Scotland and had held prestigious appointments before emigrating.²¹ On arrival, Arthur himself employed a fellow passenger, James Joiss, to plant and tend the plants he had brought from Scotland. Joiss later ran his own horticultural business in the Brighton area.²² This arrangement enabled Arthur to take well-paid employment at *Chelsworth* in Ivanhoe, the estate of Captain George Brunswick Smyth who, like La Trobe, was a member of the Melbourne Club.²³ As Ivanhoe is close to Heidelberg, Arthur was able to manage his own business importing seeds,²⁴ and later apparently operate a shop in Little Bourke Street.²⁵ After a year or so, Arthur took on a lease of a part of *Chelsworth*. His daughter Grace remembered in later life that La Trobe asked her father 'to find a suitable place for a [botanic] garden, as he was well qualified for the job',²⁶ with Arthur becoming the first curator/superintendent. The appointment put him in regular contact with La Trobe.²⁷ In March 1847 the *Port Phillip Gazette* reported:

We have great satisfaction in noticing the progress which the botanical garden is making under the careful superintendence of Mr Arthur. The part of the reserve now inclosed [*sic*] is already in a high state of culture, and contains the whole of the plants indigenous to the country, and the

rarer plants from England and India. The ground is very tastefully laid out, and already forms a delightful walk for persons from Melbourne. In another year this will be a delightful spot.²⁸

Sadly, in January 1849, John Arthur died.

The evidence for one contact with La Trobe exists as a family heirloom although the history of the artefact is a family mystery. Archibald McMillan arrived with wife and ten children but only five shillings in his pocket — and that had been earned during the voyage. McMillan and his working-age children pooled their earnings and, with the funds managed by matriarch Catherine (Kate), very quickly acquired a herd of cows on forty-two acres (seventeen hectares) in Brighton. Eventually the family amassed vast land-holdings and a huge fortune.²⁹ McMillan was active in public life, including as one of the first Trustees of the Brighton Cemetery.³⁰ This may be the reason for a presentation portrait of La Trobe which the family still holds. It is the mezzotint (ca.1857) by Samuel Bellin of the 1855 Sir Francis Grant portrait and is inscribed 'etching [*sic*] of Charles Joseph Latrobe, Lt Governor of Victoria, presented to Archibald McMillan by Latrobe.'³¹

William Bell senior with his wife and children settled at Kangaroo Ground a year or so after arrival and they were joined by several other *David Clark* families.³² In 1851 on his way to Yering, La Trobe visited the Bells' house *Hitchill* at Kangaroo Ground. Possibly this was a regular stop for La Trobe on his visits to friends in the Yarra Valley. For such an important visitor, one might imagine the *David Clark* neighbours also being present. Hearing that the residents of Kangaroo Ground planned to build a school house, La Trobe made a generous personal donation of ten pounds towards the project.³³ It has been suggested that La Trobe recommended the new building should



Mike Ridley, photographer
School house Gulf Station,
Yarra Glen, 2018

In the early 1900s the former dual-purpose schoolroom and church was moved closer to other farm buildings at Gulf Station

Charles Joseph La Trobe,
1801-1875, artist
The Inn, Mount Sturgeon, 1850
 Sketched in a letter to Sophie La Trobe,
 12 March 1850
 Australian Manuscripts Collection,
 State Library Victoria, H15618



serve as both school and place of worship, as he had recommended in his West Indian reports on the educational needs of the emancipated slaves,³⁴ because such a combined building was erected in Kangaroo Ground around that date.³⁵ When Yarra Flats (later Yarra Glen) needed a school and a place for Presbyterian worship, William Bell's son, William, and son-in-law Thomas Armstrong were owners of *Gulf Station*. They became involved as two of a six-man committee formed to select a site, then two of the ten trustees, and eventually two of four-man management committee for the combined building,³⁶ which was erected in 1866 on *Gulf Station* land.³⁷

On one of La Trobe's many journeys around the Port Phillip District he visited Mount Sturgeon (Dunkeld) on 11 March 1850,³⁸ staying at the *Woolpack Inn* run by Andrew and Jacobina Templeton with a partner Samuel Woodhead.³⁹ He remarked in his notes that it was 'much improved'.⁴⁰ In a letter the next morning to his wife Sophie,⁴¹ La Trobe included a little sketch of the inn at 'the foot of the Grampians Mountains'.

David Armstrong, after an initial spell as a blacksmith, went gold prospecting in California before returning to Melbourne. Settler John Wood Beilby⁴² corresponded with La Trobe in June 1851, claiming there was workable gold in the Navarre and Amherst districts. After a meeting with Beilby, La Trobe organised an investigating party that included Armstrong.⁴³ Perhaps La Trobe already knew Armstrong, or at least of Armstrong and his experience of gold prospecting. After gold was later found, Armstrong was appointed a Gold

Commissioner, initially for Ballarat, where he was painted, standing at the flap of his tent, by William Strutt. In 1853, La Trobe appointed Armstrong as a magistrate.⁴⁴

As several of the *David Clark* passengers took employment with friends and colleagues of La Trobe, it is possible that there were further meetings. Mary Mouncie was William Lonsdale's housemaid; Eliza Shiels and Allan McKenzie were employed by Dr Farquhar McCrae; Agnes Edgar, John, Duncan and Alexander McMillan (sons of Archibald) and Margaret McMillan (daughter of Archibald's brother John) were employed by Captain Sylvester John Brown. In addition to John Arthur, Captain Smyth also employed John Mathieson.

Other *David Clark* passengers took employment in businesses that are likely to have provided services to the La Trobes' *Jolimont* household: for instance, Peter Forman and Neil Mathieson were employed by Melbourne's first butcher, John McNall; and Alexander Beith worked for Melbourne's first baker, William Overton. When La Trobe laid the foundation stone of St James' church on 9 November 1839, he may have recognised Archibald McMillan and James Lawrie, employed by Alexander Sim, the builder.

On the day of his departure from Melbourne on 5 May 1854, La Trobe held a levee in the Government Offices. The list in the press of those attending unfortunately provides only surname and initials, so firm identification is not possible. However, it seems very likely that 'Armstrong, D' is in fact David Armstrong, the



William Strutt, 1825–1915, artist
Thomas Ham, 1821–1870, engraver
Commissioner's tent Ballarat, (1851) 1854

Engraving coloured

Rex Nan Kivell Collection, National Library of Australia, NK11266/F
 Shows a group of troopers at Golden Point, Ballarat, with
 Commissioner Armstrong in the entrance to the tent

ex-Gold Commissioner.⁴⁵ No other *David Clark* passenger names appear on the list but, by 1854, many of those first assisted immigrants were well established outside Melbourne, a few had died, and others may not have had the 'morning dress' required for attending the levee. Some were certainly among the 3,000 people described as thronging the streets and bay foreshore to wish La Trobe farewell.⁴⁶

Over La Trobe's fifteen tumultuous years in office, it is likely that his memory of his first immigrants had faded, but it is hoped that he would have been pleased with their progress. I have found at least something about most of

the *David Clark* passengers and, with only a few misfortunes, they made at least a modest success of their new lives. A first clue to finding these individuals in newspapers, via the National Library of Australia's database *Trove*, has often been the proud note in a death notice that mentions the deceased's year of arrival or that they came on the *David Clark*. This passenger ship made no other voyage to Melbourne, although she did make other voyages to Hobart and to Sydney. Indeed, one descendant, at the celebrations marking the 100th anniversary of arrival, proudly described the ship as 'Victoria's *Mayflower*'.⁴⁷

Endnotes

- 1 Some assisted immigrants had arrived in Port Phillip earlier in 1839, but they had been sent on from Sydney as 'not needed' there.
- 2 David Clark (1779–1838), was born in Scotland but went to India to join an important partnership of East India merchants, the senior partner being William Fairlie (probably his uncle). The partners named four cargo ships after themselves. After the partnership failed in 1833, the ships were sold and converted to passenger ships: one of them, the *Fergusson*, brought La Trobe and his family to Sydney in 1839. After the failure David Clark returned to London; he is buried in the crypt of St Marylebone Parish Church, London.
- 3 For the spelling of the passengers' names, I have used the most accurate version I can find (e.g. in a will or other official document) where that differs from that recorded in the passenger list at PROV VPRS 14, Register of assisted immigrants from the United Kingdom P1 Book, giving name, family relationship, trade, employer and conditions (where appropriate).
- 4 PROV VPRS 4, Inward Registered Correspondence, Police Magistrate, Port Phillip District, P0 unit 7, item Folder No: 91.
- 5 La Trobe's *Australian Notes* (refer endnote 34) p.83, and other sources, say 'Mr Le Souef'. This was Charles Henry Le Souef, son of William Le Souéf and tide waiter (inspector) in the Customs department. (Edmund Finn, 'Garryowen', *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne, 1835 to 1852: historical, anecdotal and personal*. Melbourne: Fergusson & Mitchell, 1888, p.45)
- 6 Keith Rees, *Menzies from the Innerwick Inn Glen Lyon, 1761*, [Ballarat, Vic.: privately published] 2013, pp.93-94, 242.

- 7 National Archives (UK), ADM 101/76/8, Medical journal of the emigrant ship David Clark, from 6 June to 2 November 1839.
- 8 *Greenock Advertiser*, 14 June 1839, *Caledonian Mercury*, Edinburgh, 15 June 1839 p.3.
- 9 *Historical Records of Victoria*, Vol.4, *Communications, Trade and Transport*, ed. by Michael Cannon, Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Office 1985, p.330–331. (In many sources the ship's name is spelled 'Clarke' with an 'e'.)
- 10 *Historical Records of Victoria*, Vol.3, *The Early Development of Melbourne*, ed. by Michael Cannon, Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Office 1984, p.328.
- 11 The McIntyre family has a singular distinction: one daughter, Ann, died in 1851 and was buried in the Melbourne Cemetery, with Elizabeth added in 1857; another daughter, Christina Henderson, was added to the grave in 1903 and Christina's daughter, Jean Hamilton Henderson, was buried there in 1917, being the last burial before the cemetery was finally closed. (*Old Melbourne Cemetery: information collation stage 2*, documentation draft report prepared for City of Melbourne, 2013: City of Melbourne public access version, 2017, p.81.)
- 12 Rees, p.243.
- 13 *Ibid*, p.242.
- 14 Government Printer, South Australia, 1880. Reprinted in 1965 and 2001.
- 15 Leith G. MacGillvray, 'Smith, Christina (1809–1893)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Supplement, 1580–1980*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005, p.364.
- 16 Provenance, 'Duncan Stewart', <http://archives.samuseum.sa.gov.au/aa307/provlist.htm> (accessed 3 March 2018)
- 17 Andrew McEwin, *The Best Method of Saving Seeds* (1871) and a section in *Chapman's Settler's Hand-book to the Farm and Garden, arranged for the seasons & climate of New Zealand* (1870), both published by Geo. T. Chapman, Auckland.
- 18 George McEwin, *Catalogue of Plants introduced into South Australia by George Stevenson Esq., and grown at Melbourne Cottages, North Adelaide* (c.1840–43), *The South Australian Vignerons and Gardeners' Manual* (1843), and *A Description of the Adelaide Botanic Garden* (1875), all self-published, Adelaide.
- 19 *Australasian*, 11 June 1832, p.4.
- 20 Grace Arthur Barr, Life history of John Arthur: Melbourne's first botanical gardener, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library Victoria, MS 10315.
- 21 Barr recorded that John Arthur was head gardener for the Duke of Argyle for five years, followed by a similar appointment at Dumbarton Castle. On the day of departure he piped out the *David Clark* to the tune of *Lochaber No More*.
- 22 *Argus*, 30 January 1871, p.3.
- 23 La Trobe was an honorary member of the Melbourne Club; in 1844 he was invited to become a full member, with no ballot being taken. (John Barnes, *La Trobe: traveller, writer, governor*, Canberra, Halstead Press in association with State Library Victoria and La Trobe University, 2017, p.180.)
- 24 *Port Phillip Patriot and Melbourne Advertiser*, 30 September 1841, p.3.
- 25 *Port Phillip Gazette*, 20 April 1842, p.2.
- 26 Barr.
- 27 R. T.M. Pescott, *The Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne: a history from 1845 to 1970*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1982, pp.17–20.
- 28 *Port Phillip Gazette and Settler's Journal*, 17 March 1847, p.2.
- 29 Weston Bate, *A History of Brighton*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1962, pp.52, 111–112, 331.
- 30 *Age*, 9 January 1942, p.6.
- 31 Personal communication, Marion McNally (McMillan descendant) 17 April 2016. (La Trobe spelled as Latrobe.)
- 32 The Armstrong family; Thomas Armstrong (not related); John and Janet Barr; siblings Francis and Janet Rogerson; and, following the death of John Arthur, his widow Elizabeth and children.
- 33 Mick Woiwod, *Kangaroo Ground: the highland taken*, [Yarra Glen, Vic.]: Tarcoola Press, 1994, p.46.
- 34 Dianne Reilly (ed.), *Charles Joseph La Trobe: Australian Notes 1839–1854*, Yarra Glen, Vic.: Tarcoola Press, State Library of Victoria and Boz Publishing, 2006. Preface by Bruce Nixon, pp.6–7. (La Trobe's West Indian reports 1837–1838 may be accessed via the La Trobe Society website, Ed.)
- 35 History of Kangaroo Ground Presbyterian Church, <http://kgpc.pcvic.org.au/history-2.html?showall=&start=1> (accessed 10 March 2018). Dimensions of building given as 30 x 18 feet (9.1 x 5.5 metres).
- 36 G. Blackburn, *History of the Yarra Glen District: Yering, Burgoyne-Yarra Glen, Yarra Flats, Tarawarra, Christmas Hills, Steel's Creek, Dixon's Creek*. Yarra Glen, Vic.: Yarra Glen State School Centenary Committee, 1968, pp.26–27.
- 37 Encyclopedia of Yarra Glen and District, <http://www.yarraglenhistory.com.au/a-z/Y/yarra-flats-common-school-no956> (accessed 10 March 2018). Dimensions of building, from a letter of 6 October 1868, given as 36 x 18 feet (11 x 5.5 metres).
- 38 *Australian Notes*, p.190.
- 39 *Argus*, 9 January 1849, p.2. Woodhead was not a David Clark passenger.
- 40 *Australian Notes*, p.190.
- 41 L.J. Blake (ed.), *Letters of Charles Joseph La Trobe*, Melbourne: Government of Victoria, 1975, p.39.
- 42 Beilby was not a *David Clark* passenger.
- 43 *Age*, 6 June 1865, p.6.
- 44 *Argus*, 19 May 1853, p.9.
- 45 *Banner*, 9 May 1854, p.9.
- 46 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 May 1854, p.3.
- 47 *Age*, 15 November 1939, p.10.