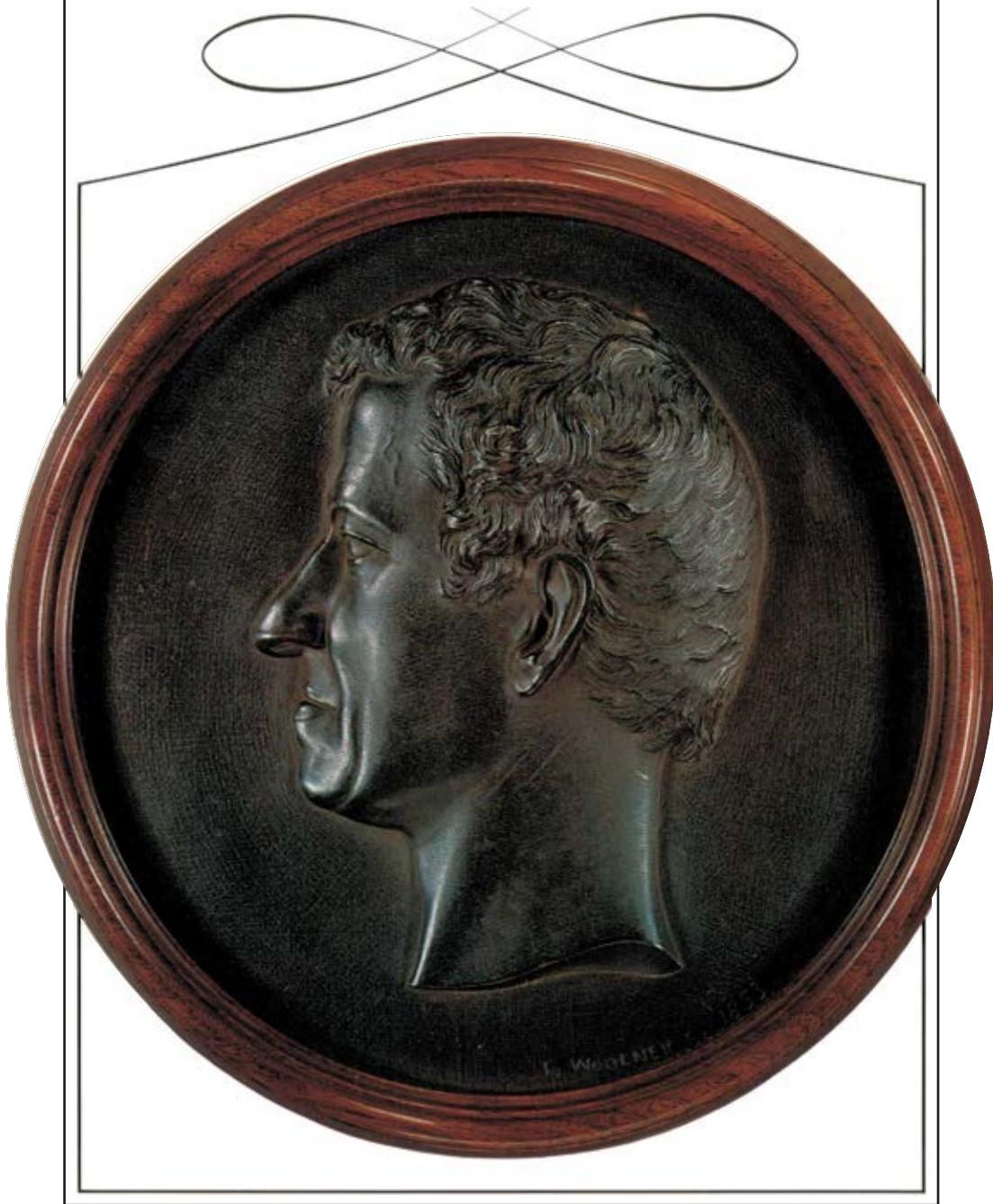


LA TROBEANA



Journal of the C. J. La Trobe Society Inc.

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La Trobeana

**Journal of the C J La Trobe Society Inc
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The C J La Trobe Society Inc was formed in 2001 to promote understanding and appreciation of the life, work and times of Charles Joseph La Trobe, Victoria's first Lieutenant-Governor. www.latrobesociety.org.au

La Trobeana is published three times a year: in March, July and November. The journal publishes peer-reviewed articles, as well as other written contributions, that explore themes in the life and times of Charles Joseph La Trobe, aspects of the colonial period of Victoria's history, and the wider La Trobe family.



C. J. La Trobe

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FRONT COVER

Thomas Woolner, 1825-1892, sculptor
Charles Joseph La Trobe, 1853

Bronze portrait medallion showing the left profile of Charles Joseph La Trobe, diam. 24cm.
Signature and date incised in bronze l.r.: T. Woolner Sc. 1853: / M
La Trobe, Charles Joseph, 1801-1875. Accessioned 1894
Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, H5489

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A Word from the President

Our final edition of *La Trobeana* for 2022 brings us an eclectic selection of well-researched articles to illuminate our knowledge of our colonial past. I am sure they will be of great interest to you all.

John Botham's article, 'The Lady of St Kilda', is an edited version of his Friends of La Trobe's Cottage Annual Lecture, delivered to an appreciative audience in September. He discusses the Melbourne connections, long shrouded in mystery, of a schooner named the *Lady of St Kilda*, which was based in Port Phillip from 1841 to 1843. John's keen research embraced a recent visit to the Outer Hebrides in search of many elusive links to the remote island of St Kilda.

Lorraine Finlay's expertly researched article, 'Her Spirit was Indomitable', is based on the twenty surviving letters of Penelope Selby to her family in London. The life of this young woman is documented from her 1839 voyage to Australia and her subsequent pioneering life, firstly near Warrandyte, and subsequently in the Port Fairy and Warrnambool districts.

Penelope's letters are an invaluable addition to other written records of emigrants in the mid-nineteenth century. She gives a vivid insight into what must have been a painful transition for this well-educated young woman from relative comfort in England to the privations and incredible hard work in her new colonial pioneering life on the land in the Port Phillip District in the 1840s.

In July of this year, Greg Hill, recognised as the leading authority on Australian Colonial and Art Pottery, gave a presentation to La Trobe Society members based on his latest book which covers the first years of pottery manufacture in the colony. This article, 'Victoria's Earliest Potteries', is a revised version of his talk in which he featured Victoria's numerous potteries established very soon after the colony was founded, including the earliest of them founded in 1842, close to La Trobe's Jolimont estate.

Anne Marsden, a familiar author in the pages of *La Trobeana* and other historical journals, has extended her research on the lives and work of educated women who arrived in Melbourne in the first years of European settlement. In this article, 'Women's Autonomy within Marriage in Early Melbourne', Anne has used contemporary newspapers and family archives to read between the lines and glimpse the women hidden in the shadows. The result is a fascinating investigation of the many factors affecting marriage partners including the position of the family within the community as dictated by religion, wealth, and the status of the husband amongst his peers.

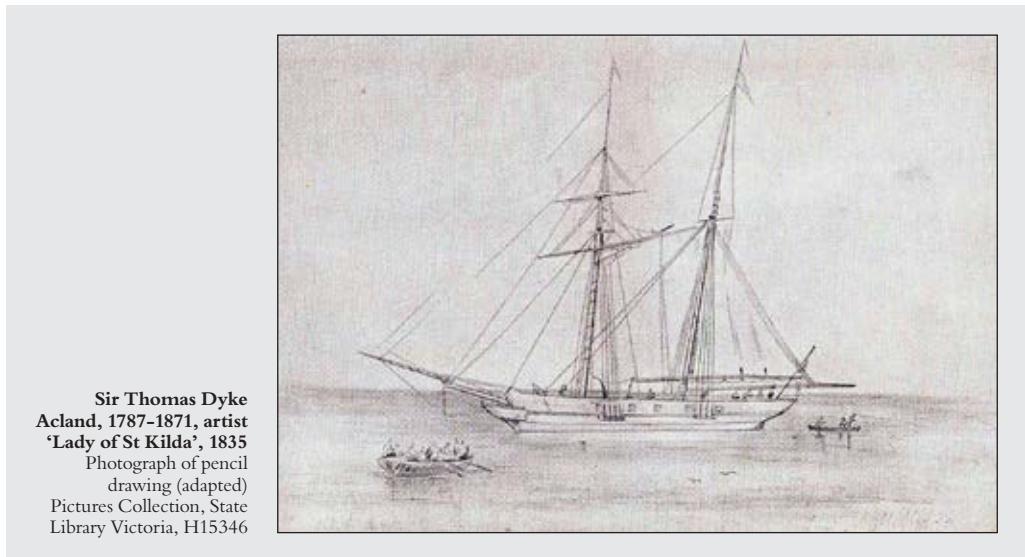
Respected historian and La Trobe Society committee member, Susan Priestley, has indulged her passion for biography to research the life of a colourful character in 1840s Melbourne. Through contemporary newspapers, she has brought to life the wayward 'Mary Mitchell, a Port Phillip Virago' who was frequently before the courts for her unacceptable behaviour making her a spectacle on the streets of Melbourne. This is a revised version of Susan's address prepared for the Society's Annual General Meeting on 8 November at the Melbourne Savage Club.

I was pleased to represent the La Trobe Society at Government House at the historic occasion of the Proclamation of King Charles III on 12 September.

It is difficult to believe that the year is almost at an end, and that the Covid woes which have affected us so detrimentally since early in 2020 have hopefully waned. I look forward to seeing many of you at the Society's Christmas Cocktails which will be held this year on 2 December at the Verdon Chambers in the Gothic Bank in Collins Street.

Season's greetings!

**Diane Gardiner AM
Hon. President
CJ La Trobe Society**



The 'Lady of St Kilda': a link between the Outer Hebrides and the Antipodes

By John Botham

John Botham is a committee member and webmaster of the La Trobe Society. He spent a career in the RAF and with the Civil Aviation Safety Authority before developing an interest in early Victorian history. He assisted with the production of La Trobe's *Jolimont, A walk round my garden* (2006) and worked tirelessly thereafter to develop an understanding amongst government and the public of the heritage importance of the La Trobe's Cottage. He is the currently the Chair of the Friends of La Trobe's Cottage.

This is a revised version of the Friends of La Trobe's Cottage annual lecture presented at the Royal Historical Society of Victoria on 14 September 2022. John visited St Kilda on the western edge of the Outer Hebrides earlier in the year.

In the late summer or early autumn of 1842, a picnic was held by the beach in a place known as the 'Green Knoll'. Many Melbourne notables were there, including Superintendent Charles Joseph La Trobe, merchant Jonathan Binns Were and hotelier and artist Wilbraham Frederick Evelyn Liardet.¹

The area was described as being 'between the Brighton estate (Mr Dendy's special survey) and the township reserve,'² and was often referred to as 'the St Kilda foreshore', since the schooner *Lady of St Kilda* was a regular and prominent

feature moored off the shore. It is not clear who was the host of the picnic. One source suggested that it was La Trobe,³ but it was more likely to have been J.B. Were, as claimed by Henry Gyles Turner,⁴ and by Liardet.⁵ Garryowen wrote:

Whilst the champagne corks were flying, someone said to Mr Latrobe [sic], 'What name shall this place have?' and Mr Latrobe, at the moment looking over the water, saw a small yacht sailing like a swan before him. The sight suggested the answer, and



he replied, ‘Well, I don’t think we can do better than name it after Captain [Lawrence’s yacht].⁶

Whatever the true story, the village was proclaimed St Kilda in the *Government Gazette* on 4 November 1842.⁷

The schooner *Lady of St Kilda* arrived in Port Phillip for the first time on 6 July 1841 carrying general cargo from England.⁸ She had experienced a difficult passage: ‘When south of the Cape of Good Hope she encountered very severe weather, her foreyard being carried away, and the gale continuing unabated, she was compelled to strike her topmasts.’⁹ The 136-ton schooner was built in Dartmouth, Devon. Designed for the fruit trade, she was built for speed. She was bought by Sir Thomas Dyke Acland, Baronet, of Killerton, Devon in 1834 and was fitted out by Robert Newman, shipbuilder of Dartmouth, with substantial accommodation for Acland’s family.¹⁰ He renamed the schooner *Lady of St Kilda*.

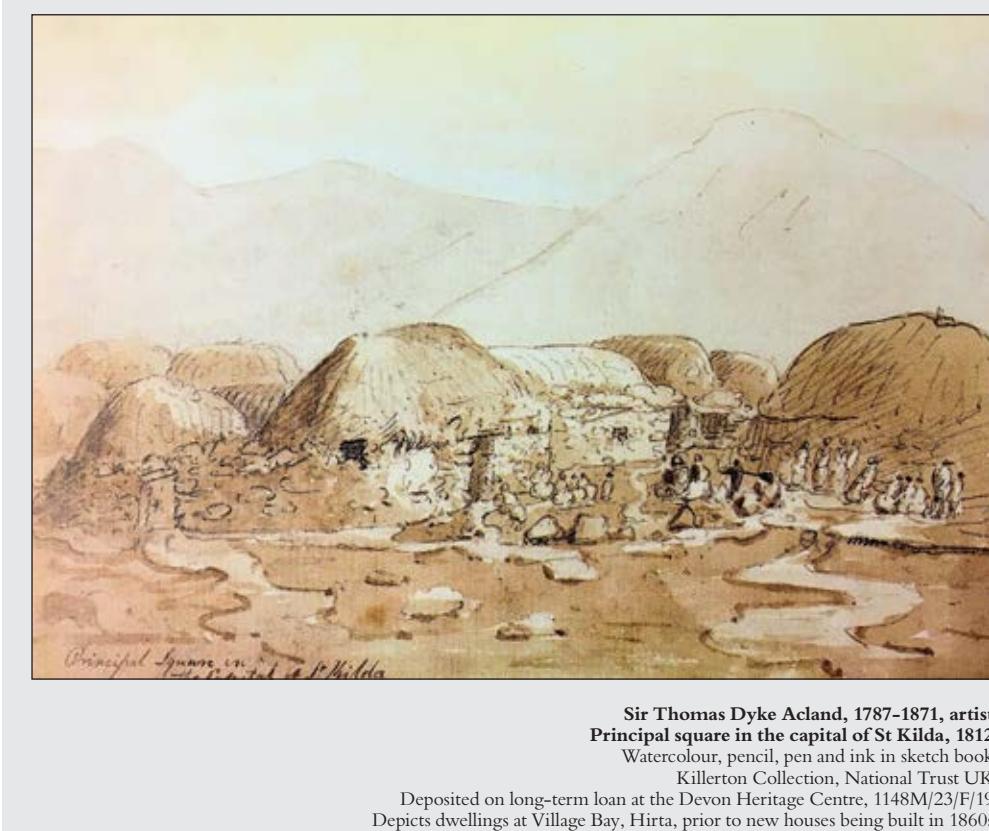
It is likely the vessel was named to commemorate St Kilda, a remote island archipelago off the north-west coast of Scotland, which Sir Thomas visited with his wife, Lydia Elizabeth in 1812.¹¹ The ‘Lady’ may have referred to the ship, his wife,¹² or according to some sources perhaps to Lady Grange, who was a virtual prisoner on St Kilda for eight years from 1734. She has the distinction of having had three funerals. After threatening to expose her husband’s plans for the 1715 Jacobite uprising, her husband, James Erskine of Grange, had her

removed to the Island of Skye, faked her death and arranged a mock funeral. Later she was moved to the more remote island of Hirta in the St Kilda group. In 1742, the danger having subsided, she was moved again to other islands and eventually died on Skye in 1745. In an attempt to cover up their deeds, the conspirators staged a second fake funeral on the mainland at Duirinish, while secretly burying her on Skye.¹³

During the five years after purchasing the *Lady of St Kilda*, Sir Thomas and his family made numerous voyages in the schooner.¹⁴ One included St Kilda, where Sir Thomas ‘was so shocked by the state of the dwellings that he left with the Reverend Mackenzie a reward of twenty guineas [twenty-one pounds] to be given to the first islander to build a new home’.¹⁵ At times the vessel was commanded by Lieutenant James Ross Lawrence, on half-pay from the Royal Navy.

In 1840, Sir Thomas sold the schooner to Jonathan Cundy Pope, of Plymouth, who subsequently disposed of part of his interest to Nicholas Were and James Duck, both of Plymouth.¹⁶ On 28 February 1841 Lieutenant Lawrence sailed the *Lady of St Kilda* to Australia, where Jonathan Binns Were, brother of Nicholas, acted as the Melbourne agent.¹⁷

Once the schooner was unloaded in Melbourne, the owners attempted to sell her. However, money was in short supply at that time, so for the rest of 1841 the vessel conducted trading voyages to Sydney and Hobart. When in Port Phillip, the schooner was normally



anchored off Williamstown. One night some of her crew went ashore and the schooner's log recorded that 'they returned to the vessel in a "very drunken and mutinous condition"'.¹⁸ Probably in order to keep the crew away from further temptation, the schooner was moved on 18 January 1842 to the other side of the bay and anchored off a landmark then known as the 'Green Knoll'.¹⁹

In March 1842 the *Lady of St Kilda* was purchased by Frederick Manton of Manton and Co, mercantile agents, and Frederick's cousin, Gildon Manton, took over as Captain from Lieutenant Lawrence. Gildon Manton made several voyages in the *Lady of St Kilda* to Newcastle for coal, one in the record time of three days,²⁰ and then on to China.²¹ On 31 October 1843 she was resold and moved to Sydney.²² On a voyage to Tahiti in 1844, she was sold again and around November was totally wrecked on one of Tahiti's coral reefs.²³

Back in Port Phillip, the first portions of the new village were laid out by surveyor Thomas Nutt in February 1842, his plan being inscribed 'for a Village to be called St Kilda'.²⁴ An earlier plan had the name Fareham struck out and St Kilda substituted.²⁵ The land had first been licenced in 1839 to Captain Benjamin Baxter who grazed cattle and built a stockyard and hut,

but then moved to Baxter's Flat, now Baxter on the Mornington Peninsula. His successors were George Thomas and John Enscoe of the shipping agents Thomas, Enscoe & James.²⁶ The sale of the first twenty-two allotments was advertised in the *Government Gazette* of 9 September 1842 with the auction held on 7 December.²⁷

Lieutenant Lawrence purchased the first lot of just over two acres (0.8 hectare) for £233 12s.²⁸ His land was on the corner of what became Fitzroy Street and The Esplanade, and he later named the street on the third side Acland Street after his friend and employer Sir Thomas Dyke Acland.²⁹ At the time of the sale, the streets were not named, but the initial twenty-two allotments were bounded by today's Fitzroy, Robe and Grey Streets and The Esplanade. Fitzroy Street was named after Sir Charles Augustus FitzRoy, who was Governor of New South Wales from 1846 to 1855, and thus Governor of the Port Phillip District until Separation in 1851.³⁰ Grey Street was named after Sir George Grey, the Lieutenant-Governor of South Australia from 1841 to 1845, and Robe Street after Frederick Holt Robe who was Lieutenant-Governor of South Australia from 1845 to 1848.³¹

Lieutenant Lawrence captained several ships based in Port Phillip, and in April 1848 La Trobe appointed him first Superintendent



George Washington Wilson, 1823–1893,
photographer

The St Kilda parliament, 1886

Glass plate negative
Photographic Collections, University of Aberdeen

of the Cape Otway lighthouse, while it was still under construction.³² On 1 May the cutter *Mary* cleared out from Port Phillip on passage to Cape Otway with Lieutenant Lawrence and thirty tons of cases, including the lighthouse glass lens and 1,260 gallons of oil for the lighthouse lamp. It called at King Island on the way to erect a tablet in memory of the *Cataraqui* disaster of 1845.³³ Lawrence later moved to Nelson in New Zealand and he died on 29 April 1861 at sea in the South Atlantic on board the barque *Bride* en route to London.³⁴

The naming of the suburb of St Kilda can now be linked through the *Lady of St Kilda* to the islands of St Kilda in Scotland. But where did that name originate? St Kilda consists of Hirta, the only inhabited island, and three smaller islands, Soay, Dun and Boreray. The nearest land is the island of North Uist in the Outer Hebrides, forty-five miles (seventy-two kilometres) to the east.

There has been much discussion about the origin of the names St Kilda and Hirta. Hirta, or similar, was used exclusively in literature until the late seventeenth century. The name St Kilda was used on maps in the sixteenth century, but as the name of an island close to the west coast of Lewis. It later appeared to be transferred to what is now known as St Kilda. The name St Kilda was used in literature from around 1700, but Hirta continued to be used locally.³⁵

There are many theories about the origin of the name Hirta. The Irish ‘Hiort’ meaning ‘death’, the Gaelic ‘I’ (island) and ‘ard’ (high), or the old Norse ‘Hirt’ (shepherd) are some of the contenders. The name St Kilda may just have been inadvertently transferred to the islands, or it may have been a corruption of Hirta. The locals’ Gaelic accent could make it sound more like Kilda, so some time in history Hirta was possibly written down by a visitor as Kilda. One theory is that it was named after a well called Culdee. Wells were often named after saints, so it became St Kilda over time.³⁶

The people of St Kilda who had been living on Hirta for over a thousand years were crofters, but unlike crofters elsewhere they ate the flesh of the tens of thousands of seabirds that returned year after year to breed on the cliffs of the islands.³⁷ They supplemented their diet with crops of potatoes and oats, fish from the turbulent waters and meat from sheep and cattle, but seabirds were their primary food source. In the 1840s they harvested over 33,000 seabirds in a season.³⁸ The carcasses were boiled, the flesh eaten and the oil and feathers collected for payment of rent and the purchase of items from the mainland. The feathers were used to stuff bedding, and the oil was used as fuel and medicine. The islanders lived in small stone houses, blackened on the inside from soot from the open fire in the middle of the room. The men held a meeting every morning, called by visitors ‘the parliament’, to discuss the work for the day. The women tended the animals and

**Unknown photographer
McQueen Family, 1890**

Private collection, courtesy of Win Bryant
Seated right Malcolm McQueen, seated
left Finlay McQueen, standing centre
Christina McQueen
Malcolm survived the voyage on
the *Priscilla* in 1852–53, when aged
twenty-four



spun the wool, and the men wove the wool into tweed in the evenings. It was long hard work to survive in the harsh climate.

The islands were owned by MacLeod of MacLeod on Skye. Enlightened paternalism was the basis of the society and the system worked well with the crofters providing feathers, oil and tweed profitable to MacLeod, and MacLeod providing support to the islanders, such as supplies in hard times and equipment such as tools and boats.

Until 1705 the St Kildans were a happy people, fond of song and poetry, totally unaware of the seven deadly sins. This all changed when the Reverend Alexander Buchan arrived as first missionary from the Presbytery of Edinburgh ‘to root out the pagan and Popish superstitious customs’.³⁹ He and his wife did much to help the community, but the imposition of a stern faith reduced the quality of life for the islanders.

Times changed again in the nineteenth century. The population was declining – down to one hundred inhabitants in the 1840s – food was harder to acquire and increasing contact with the outside world unsettled the younger generation. St Kilda was not the only part of Scotland experiencing difficulties at this time. Potato blight had reached the west of Scotland and land clearing was displacing tenant farmers. The Highland and Island Emigration Society was formed in 1851 to solve the problem by facilitating migration to Australia. The scheme was supported by the British government in accord with the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners and proved very popular.⁴⁰ During 1852, 2,569 people from Skye emigrated to Australia in twelve ships, nine of which came to Victoria.⁴¹

Among the emigrants were thirty-six people from St Kilda who made the first leg by ship to Portree in Skye. The *Inverness Advertiser* reported how the people from St Kilda’s ‘appearance and their gentle and uncomplicated manners attracted considerable attention when they arrived in Portree to join the *Priscilla* at Liverpool’.⁴² A fortnight later they boarded a steamer for Broomielaw in Glasgow, arriving on 1 October. The ship *Princess Royal* then took them to Birkenhead (Liverpool). It was recorded by the Highlands and Islands Emigration Society that John MacLeod, the landlord, had paid for their outfits and the deposits for their travel.⁴³

They spent nearly four weeks in the immigration depot before boarding the barque *Priscilla* on 13 October 1852 carrying 261 passengers bound for Port Phillip. There was a flood of emigrants from Scotland around October 1852; over thirty-four ships carrying about 12,000 emigrants, principally Scottish, left the depot at Birkenhead bound for Australia.⁴⁴

The voyage was disastrous for the St Kildans. On St Kilda, they were isolated from many diseases circulating on the mainland, therefore they had little immunity when disease broke out on board. For the first two weeks after sailing, sea sickness was the main concern, but more serious ailments began to afflict the emigrants. The first death occurred on 31 October and on 6 November the first St Kildan Rachel McQueen died, followed by Mary Morrison on the 9th, Roderick McDonald on the 11th, and on the 14th his wife Marion died, along with Donald McCrimmon. On the 17th Catherine McDonald left two orphans. On the 20th, Finlay McQueen died followed by his wife the following day, leaving seven orphans. Christine McCrimmon died that day, two more



Unknown photographer
The evacuation of St Kilda, 1930
Reproduced by *The Scotsman*, 29 August 2018

of her siblings the next day and the last sibling on the following day. Once out of the tropical heat, the pace eased with only four deaths in December and January, all very young children.⁴⁵

On 19 January 1853 the *Priscilla* anchored at the Point Nepean quarantine station that La Trobe had set up the year before for the clipper *Ticonderoga*. Four more St Kildans died there. The quarantine station was less than ideal; there were many quarantining ships moored, too little accommodation and no security to keep people in and apart from each other – many of the *Priscilla* quarantining passengers obtained employment with farmers and lime burners, one even absconding and marrying a lime-burner in Melbourne.⁴⁶ Matters were further complicated by the St Kildans' native language being Gaelic. There is a memorial at the Point Nepean quarantine station to those who died there and the names of the four St Kildans are engraved on the stone.

Twenty St Kildans died in all, most from measles and/or dysentery. The Kildans lost fifty-five per cent of their number, whereas eight per cent of other passengers died. Whole families were wiped out, including Donald and Ann McCrimmon and their four children, Marion, Margaret, Donald and Chrissy. Finlay and Catherine McQueen and two of their seven children also succumbed.⁴⁷ On 20 February, Dr Thomas Hunt, the health officer at the Sanitation Station, Ticonderoga Bay (Port Nepean), reported that the McQueen family 'originally consisted of 9 individuals of whom the father, mother, and one child are dead leaving

6 orphans, viz, Donald aged 18 recovering from Scarlatina [scarlet fever], Meron [Marion] aged 10 now suffering from Phthisis [tuberculosis] consequent upon Scarlatina, Catherine aged 12, Nanny [Annie] aged 8 ill of anasarca [swelling of the body], Niell [Neil] aged 6 and Finlay aged 4 dying of marasmus [malnutrition]'. Finlay died the following day. Dr Hunt went on to say in his letter to the Immigration Department that the orphans 'have had the misfortune to lose all their clothes by the burning of the bush hut in which the four younger ones were living so that they having nothing but the few filthy rags which scarce cover them left. They are all at present on board the "Lysander", and as I see no probability of any of them being able to leave the Station for months, if ever, I have the honor to request that the requisite supply of wearing apparel may be forwarded them'.⁴⁸

Annie McQueen, one of the surviving children of Finlay and Catherine, having survived the fire in her bush shelter, ended up in Little Collins Street working for a Mr Driscoll and his family. She married Alfred Corner six years later and they had ten children with descendants still in Victoria.⁴⁹ Hector Ferguson died at the quarantine station, leaving his wife Mary alone, their three-year-old daughter and Mary's mother having died on the voyage. Mary married Henry Moses King in 1854 and they had four children.⁵⁰

On 23 February, after five weeks in quarantine, the sixteen survivors moved up to Hobson Bay.⁵¹ The adults would have met potential employers in the immigration depot



Charles Joseph La Trobe, 1801-1875, artist
Fisherman Point, St Kilda [Melbourne], c.1852

Pencil and sepia wash on paper

Collection: National Trust of Australia (Victoria)

Deposited on long-term loan in the Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria

and employment would have been arranged. Most of the families settled on Port Phillip's eastern shore from Brighton to Mordialloc where they would have been provided with housing and rations by their employers.⁵² For instance, Donald McQueen went to work in this area making bricks. He married a woman from the Isle of Raasay and established himself as a market gardener.⁵³

Ewan and Margaret Gillies, having lost their one-year-old daughter Mary, moved to South Brighton where Ewan was employed as a brickmaker. He appeared to have little patience with the work, only staying for six months before heading to the goldfields. After some success there and a try at farming, he set off for the goldfields in New Zealand. His wife also lost patience and remarried, thinking she had seen the last of him. On return two years later, he left for America and spent six successful years on the Californian goldfields, then returned to Melbourne to collect his children and took ship for London and Glasgow en route for St Kilda. He tried twice to settle again on St Kilda, but eventually lived out his days in North America.⁵⁴

One of the less unfortunate families was another McQueen family, Finlay and Christina McQueen. Their sons Malcolm and John survived, only their daughter Rachael dying on the *Priscilla*. Finlay was also employed making bricks in Brighton, but he died in June that year.⁵⁵ His son Malcolm (see page 9) was contracted to make bricks for the Mordialloc Hotel and married Mary McSwain in 1856. They had seven children and the eldest, Finlay, became a

minister of the Presbyterian Church. In 1928, Finlay and his sister Christina sailed to Plymouth and on to St Kilda to visit his father's former home. He 'was shocked by what he saw. Never for a moment had he imagined people could live in such squalor. He attempted to persuade the younger St Kildans to return to Australia with him; but the bird harvest, the islanders claimed, had been a good one that year and the crops were sufficient for another long winter.'⁵⁶

The disastrous winter of 1929 finally brought matters to a head, with the islanders struggling to survive. The ravages caused by mainland contact had accelerated population decline and the island economy was becoming unviable. There were only thirty-six people still resident and many of the young men were planning to leave.⁵⁷ In 1930 they gave up and asked to be evacuated to the mainland. The Scottish Government initially provided homes and jobs for them, but many struggled in their new environment and many died from tuberculosis. Some regretted having left their island home and returned to St Kilda during the summers.

Now the island, proclaimed a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1986, is owned and managed by the National Trust for Scotland. It has a military base, the church and manse have been restored, and a museum has been opened in one of the cottages (picture p.13). Present-day visitors, arriving from cruise ships or yachts, can see the ruins of the islanders' houses and explore the bleak but spectacular environment that was once home to the hardy original

St Kildans. Though St Kilda no longer has permanent inhabitants, its namesake in Victoria has thrived, from the beach party in 1842 where La Trobe gazed across to the moored *Lady of St Kilda*, through to a metropolitan suburb with a population of over 20,000 people enjoying elements of the beachside lifestyle. La Trobe

certainly continued to enjoy St Kilda. In 1848 he wrote to Ronald Gunn, who shared his natural history interests, about some unfamiliar marine life he found ‘on St Kilda beach after a storm when I always take a stroll’.⁵⁸

Endnotes

* I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the Collections officers at *Killerton*, the former Acland family home in Devon.

1 John Butler Cooper, *The History of St Kilda: from its first settlement to a city and after, 1840 to 1930*, compiled by order of the St Kilda City Council, Melbourne: Printers Proprietary Limited, 1931, Vol.1, pp.6–7; Alexander Romanov-Hughes, ‘The Yacht ‘Lady of St Kilda’’, <https://portphillippioneersgroup.org.au/the-yacht-lady-of-st-kilda/> (accessed 3 August 2022).

2 *Sydney Herald*, 14 March 1842, p.2.

3 *Argus*, 14 June 1913, p.8 (‘the story is... it is said...’).

4 See Cooper, Vol.1, p.7, quoting from Henry Gyles Turner (‘well known banker and literary man’ of *Bundalohn*, St Kilda, and author of *A History of the Colony of Victoria, from its discovery to its absorption into the Commonwealth of Australia*, 1904, 2 vols.)

5 Romanov-Hughes.

6 Garryowen, *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne, 1835 to 1852: historical, anecdotal and personal*, Melbourne: Fergusson and Mitchell, 1888, Vol.1, p.22.

7 *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 4 November 1842, p.1,644.

8 *Port Phillip Gazette*, 7 July 1841, p.3 and 10 July 1841, p.3.

9 *Port Phillip Herald*, 9 July 1841, p.2.

10 J. B. Cooper, ‘The Lady of St. Kilda: Sir Thomas Dyke Acland’s schooner’, *Argus*, 13 December 1930, p.7; Romanov-Hughes.

11 Andrew Fleming, *St Kilda and the Wider World: tales of an iconic island*, Bollington [Cheshire]: Windgather Press, 2016, p.181.

12 The *Lady of St Kilda*’s figurehead in the Killerton collection has a strong resemblance to Lady Acland, as can be seen in the painting *Lydia Elizabeth Hoare, Lady Acland (1786-1856) with her two sons*, by Sir Thomas Lawrence, c.1814. The fact that Lord Acland kept the figurehead when he sold the schooner suggests that it was of his wife.

13 Tom Steel, *The Life and Death of St Kilda*, new ed., London: Fontana Books, 1975, p.31.

14 Romanov-Hughes.

15 James Wilson, *A Voyage Round the Coasts of Scotland and the Isles*, Edinburgh: Black, 1842, Vol.2, p.33.

16 Cooper, Vol.1, p.5.

17 *Argus*, 14 June 1913, p.8.

18 Cooper, Vol.1, p.8.

19 Romanov-Hughes.

20 *Sydney Gazette*, 2 June 1842, p.4.

21 Romanov-Hughes.

22 *Argus*, 14 June 1913, p.8.

23 Romanov-Hughes.

24 Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 8168/P0002, SYDNEYS2; St Kilda; NUTT.

25 Cooper, Vol.1, p.11.

26 Ibid pp.22-24.

27 *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 9 September 1842, pp.1,332-1,333.

28 *Port Phillip Patriot and Melbourne Advertiser*, 8 December 1842, p.2.

29 Cooper (1930).

30 Cooper, Vol.1, p.50.

31 Ibid. The connection with South Australia has not been determined.

32 *Melbourne Argus*, 4 April 1848, p.2.

33 Ibid, 2 May 1848, p.2. (The plaque was replaced by a new one to commemorate the 175th anniversary in 2020.)

34 Romanov-Hughes.

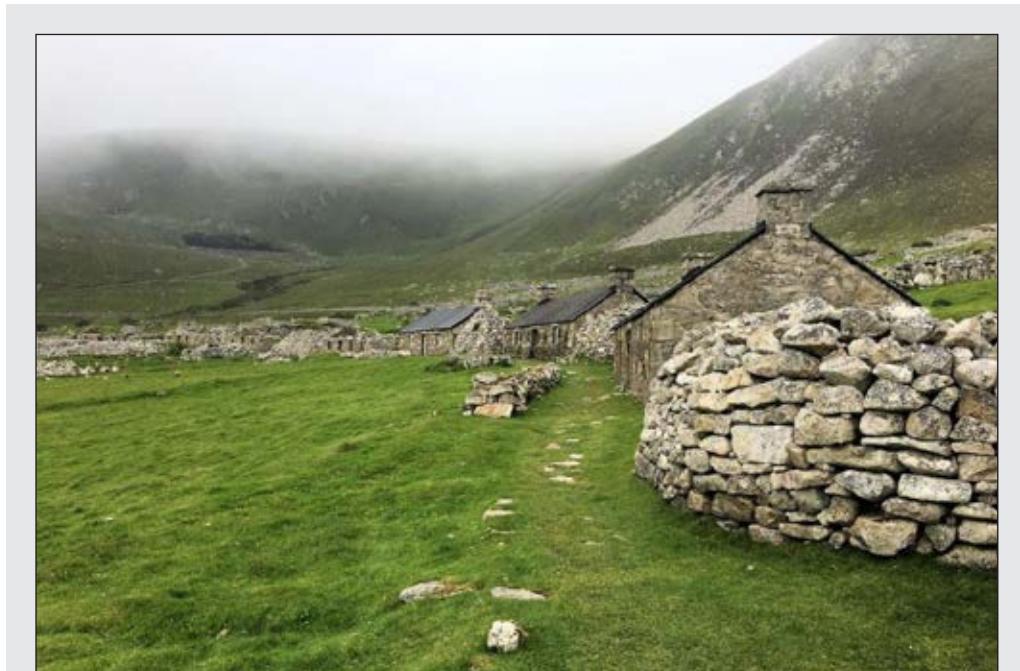
35 Mary Harman, *An Isle called Hirte: history and culture of the St Kildans to 1930*, Waternish, Isle of Skye: Maclean Press, 1997, pp.41-43.

36 Ibid.

37 Steel, p.9.

38 Ibid, pp.57-62.

- 39** Ibid, p.93.
- 40** <https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/article/scotlands-history-emigration-australia-1852-1857> (accessed 18 February 2022).
- 41** <https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/record-guides/highland-and-island-emigration-society-records#Tracing> (accessed 18 February 2022).
- 42** *Inverness Advertiser*, 2 August 1852, as cited in Lucythecat, ‘Priscilla, Liverpool to Port Phillip, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia,’ Ancestry, (accessed 7 August 2021).
- 43** <https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/article/scotlands-history-emigration-st-kilda> (accessed 18 August 2021).
- 44** *Geelong Advertiser and Intelligencer*, 6 January 1853, Supplement p.1.
- 45** Assisted passenger lists (1839–1871), PROV, VPRS 14 P0000, Book No.9, pp.46–55.
- 46** Edward Grimes, Immigration agent, to Colonial Secretary, 3 March 1853, PROV VPRS 1189 P0000 Box 113.
- 47** PROV, VPRS 14 P0000, Book No.9, pp.46–55.
- 48** Thomas Hunt to Edward Grimes, 20 February 1853, PROV VPRS 1189 P0000 Box 113.
- 49** Personal communication with Corner family descendant.
- 50** Lucythecat, ‘Priscilla: Liverpool England to Port Phillip...’, Ancestry (accessed 7 August 2021).
- 51** The bay at the head of Port Phillip was marked on the 1839 and 1862 nautical charts as Hobson Bay, not Hobsons Bay as it is known now.
- 52** Eric Richards, *From Hirta to Port Phillip: the story of the ill-fated emigration from St Kilda to Australia in 1852*, South Lochs, Isle of Lewis: The Islands Book Trust, 2010, p.26.
- 53** <https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/article/scotlands-history-emigration-st-kilda>.
- 54** Steel, pp.35–36.
- 55** <https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/article/scotlands-history-emigration-st-kilda>; PROV VPRS 14 P0000, Book No.9, pp.53, 56.
- 56** Steel, p.194. (See John P. Ritchie, *Evacuation of St Kilda*, <https://movingimage.nls.uk/film/0793>, for a filmed insight into life on St Kilda in the 1920s.)
- 57** Ibid, pp.194–196.
- 58** L. J. Blake (ed.), *Letters of Charles Joseph La Trobe*, Melbourne: Government Printer, 1975, p.32, 17 August 1848.



John Botham, photographer
View of St Kilda, June 2022

Her Spirit was Indomitable: the letters of Penelope Selby

By Lorraine Finlay

Lorraine Finlay, a member of the La Trobe Society, is the former Volunteer Property Manager of La Trobe's Cottage and a graduate of Monash University in Visual Arts and History, with an MA in Australian Studies. The history of early Port Phillip and the era of Charles La Trobe's governorship and his legacy continue to be of special interest.

Penelope Selby's twenty surviving letters to her family in London describing the journey to Melbourne and life after settling in the Port Phillip District date from November 1839 to December 1851 and are an invaluable addition to the written records of emigrants in the mid-nineteenth century.¹ Penelope, her husband and children arrived only six months after Charles Joseph La Trobe had taken up his role as Superintendent of the Port Phillip District. Penelope's descriptive accounts of her pioneering colonial experiences after establishing a dairy farm close to the Yarra River and later on properties near Port Fairy in the Western District came to an abrupt end with her tragic death in December 1851.

Penelope and her husband, George William Selby, and their two young sons Prideaux and William, left Gravesend on 15 November 1839 and arrived in Melbourne on 2 May 1840 as cabin passengers on the *China*.² Her first letter after their arrival dated 26 December 1840, from 'Station on the Yarra', was to her grandparents when she wrote of having no prospect but that of 'bankruptcy and poverty staring us in the face at home'. She was most likely referring to the dissolution of her husband's partnership with Charles Batkin in a fringe-manufacturing business in Foster Lane, Aldgate, in London's East End. The termination of the partnership was settled about six weeks prior to sailing to Melbourne.³

Her parents were William Earles, who was a clerk with the Bank of England, and Elizabeth Chester.⁴ She was the eldest child of a large family born in 1811; she was well-educated, and her letters imply that she spent a comfortable early life in Cambridge Place, London Fields in the inner London suburb of Hackney.⁵ Her younger sisters established a school, which may have been a 'Dame school' (these were usually for young children, privately run and sometimes situated in the family home). One of her brothers became the well-known painter Chester Earles who migrated to Melbourne in 1864. Chester Earles painted a family gathering in 1849 at their home in Hackney entitled *A Letter from Australia* (picture p.20). It depicts another brother Charles reading a letter from Penelope to the assembled group.⁶

George Selby was born in Finsbury in London in 1805 to William Selby and Mary Lonsdale. His father was originally from Belford in Northumberland.⁷ William Selby was also a clerk with the Bank of England. George was twelve when his father died in 1817; his mother died in 1819. His mother inherited her husband's estate and in turn left the estate in a trust fund for George and two younger sisters.⁸ William Earles (Penelope's father) was an executor of the Selbys' estate and entrusted to provide for and educate the three orphaned children. It would appear that Penelope and George knew each other from childhood. They were married on



Thomas Hosmer Shepherd, 1792–1864, artist
William Wallis, 1794–1878, engraver
Goldsmiths' Hall, Foster Lane, c.1829
Steel engraving

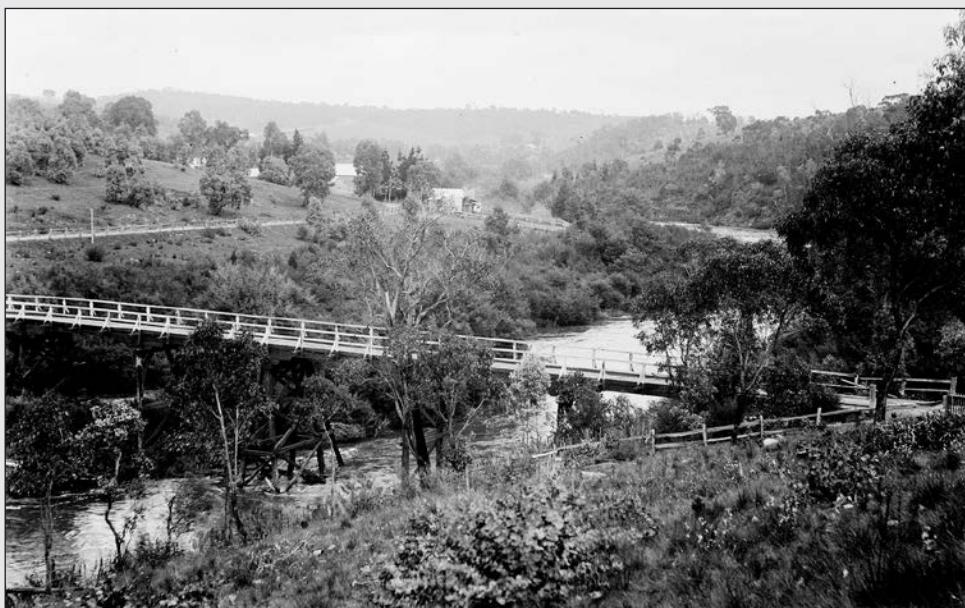
British Museum, 1880, 1113.4082
This elegant 17th century building was replaced in 1835

15 January 1834 at St Mary's Haggerston in the Borough of Hackney and were living at 9 Foster Lane, at the time of their sons' births in 1834 and 1836.⁹ Close to their residence and factory was the grand classical building of the Goldsmiths' Hall and Assay office at number 13 Foster Lane. (A building has been on the same site since 1339. A second building was constructed c.1660 and demolished in 1829; the more recent one built in 1835 still occupies the site today.) On the children's baptismal records George was described as a warehouse man and living in Foster Lane. George's role in the business could have been of a clerical nature as he reverted to this profession many years later. He is listed in 1837 as owning over £2,000 in shares in railway and steamship companies.¹⁰

Penelope's letters do not reveal when they arrived in Melbourne, how much capital they may have possessed following the end of George's business partnership or if they had any definite plans to commence a new venture. However, in a letter posted from Plymouth she described other cabin passengers on the *China* and mentions that a Mr and Mrs Kirby were 'taking out two thousand five hundred pounds with them'.¹¹ On the six-month voyage they formed a close friendship with fellow emigrants James and Joan Dawson who intended establishing a pastoral enterprise. Penelope

referred to them: 'My favourites will I think be Mr and Mrs Dawson – not very young Scotch people in a beautiful stern cabin'.¹² The Dawsons had shipped a two-room portable cottage made in London measuring 24 feet by 10 feet and 7 feet high (7.32 by 3 metres and 2.1 metres high) with them.¹³ The two families lived, with La Trobe's permission, for approximately two months in the portable in Melbourne on or close to the Government Block, bounded by Collins, King, Bourke and Spencer Streets.¹⁴

After considering their options James Dawson applied for a lease to occupy land east of the present-day township of Warrandyte.¹⁵ He then sold the portable cottage for £40. The acreage he leased was a property with an established dairy farm, a slab hut for accommodation, a milking shed and stockyard. He, with a contribution from the Selbys, bought the hut and outbuildings and stock (dairy cows and some branded cattle) from the previous owner, Captain Thomas Scott. Dawson called the property *Bonnytown*. Surprisingly, considering George Selby's former occupation in London and Penelope's inexperience, they embarked on a life on the land with the Dawsons, primarily as dairy farmers. There is no record of George Selby applying for a lease of any land at *Bonnytown* or in the vicinity, although Penelope wrote of hoping to pay all their expenses with



Mark James Daniel, 1867–1949, photographer
Warrandyte – bridge over Yarra, 1900

Glass negative

Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, H92.200/370

Looking upstream from near Anderson's Creek

Bridge built over the serpentine Yarra in 1861

income from the dairy to cover the cost of a ‘ten pound’ license. (It is possible they agreed to share the cost of the license with James Dawson who had taken out the lease in his name.) The working relationship with the Dawsons lasted for approximately six years.

George Augustus Robinson, Chief Protector of the Aborigines, recorded a visit to the area on the 29 and 30 of August 1840. He visited recent settlers, the Andersons, on their property; Robinson then rode two and a half miles (four kilometres) to the Dawsons and Selbys ‘who now occupied Scott’s old station’. He requested lodgings for the night but was told there was not a spare room. He returned the following morning to have breakfast and described the two families as living together in a small hut, on a very small run, of it being a poor place and that they had bought cattle for £200. Robinson described James Dawson as an agriculturalist or grazier.¹⁶

Penelope, in the same letter of December 1840 to her grandparents, described their situation as being ‘very comfortably settled about twenty-five miles from Melbourne on a station, not in partnership with but on the same place with Mr and Mrs Dawson’. The two families intended to erect their own house but to manage the herd of cows in common. The Selbys’ portion of land was near the junction of the Yarra River and Brushy Creek. It was

close to the river bank and she wrote that the Yarra ‘should have been called the Serpentine, it has so many bends, and this is a bend, and just the fence across on one side’. The Selbys then built their own cottage made from bark and slabs of timber from stringybark trees. A census taken in 1841 in the Port Phillip District lists George William Selby of *Bonnytown* as married with two children, having arrived free, their religion Church of England, and inhabiting an unfinished wood house.¹⁷

George and Penelope purchased forty-five head of cattle which they expected to increase to 880 head. It is unclear whether the cattle she referred to were in addition to the herd of dairy cows that was purchased from Captain Scott. In a letter to her sisters in mid-1841 she wrote of making about twenty pounds (nine kilograms) of butter a week. They were sending the butter to Melbourne once a month and selling it for two shillings per pound. Penelope listed her recently acquired skills at becoming a dairy woman as making butter and cheese and that she could now also cure meat and fatten calves and pigs, all of this being due to Mrs Dawson. Their new life and situation was far from idyllic; she grumbled to her sisters and mother about the river flooding and being ankle deep in dirt for months, the loneliness, heat, insects and smoke from wood fires. However, she declared that ‘In Foster Lane I always had to keep up a sort of appearance, while here I care not who comes.’



Henry Brinton, born 1822, artist
The Corranwarribil [Corhanwarrabul] with portrait of self and faithful Gypsy, 1846
Pencil on paper
Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, H2004.81/5
The Corhanwarrabul was renamed the Dandenong Range in 1857

She wrote of sometimes liking the place and ‘life so much’, but ‘when I am not in the best temper I wish the country had never been discovered and think how much more comfortable you are at home’. George, she said, would not exchange his present dirty work for his old life of gentility at home. In a letter dated January 1841 Penelope referred to her ‘confinement’ and again in July that she would miss Mr Wallace. Mr Wallace, a surgeon, attended her for the birth of her two sons in London.¹⁸ George had arranged for a woman to assist with the forthcoming birth for eight shillings a week. The baby died and to Penelope’s disappointment six more pregnancies were unsuccessful.

Penelope was pragmatic and not squeamish about George shooting and the family eating native birds and animals, for she listed as a supplement to their diet of salted beef, kangaroo, opossums, bronzed-winged pigeon, magpies, cockatoos and parquets. The Selbys maintained some contact in those first years with the local Indigenous people. In a letter dated 21 November 1842, she wrote ‘we seldom have visitors and even the blacks have been away for some time’. In a later letter concerning the flooding of the Yarra she wrote the ‘Blacks say as with the last flood big one coming – this is only piccaninny’.¹⁹

By late 1842 Penelope was expressing concern at the unfolding economic depression

and merchants and even squatters (pastoralists) being in a wretched state and that ‘Everything in the very worthy town of Melbourne either has or is likely to fail and the distress they say is very great’. She was worried that amongst the failing businesses was the grocer whom they had contracted to sell their butter, which would be a serious loss to them. When writing to her mother in early 1843 on the subject of falling prices for butter, now only thirteen pence a pound (prior to the depression butter had been selling at two shillings, i.e. twenty-four pence, a pound), she requested that ‘If you should chance to meet Miss Martineaux [sic] you may mention this to her, and as she is a great writer on political economy, she may write a book upon the subject.²⁰

In addition to the shared land holding at *Bonnytown*, James Dawson and George Selby also had some form of an arrangement to occupy part of the *Corhanwarrabul* run, the Woiwurrung name for the Dandenong Range, from 1841 to 1842 where they concentrated on rearing cattle.²¹

During the mid-1840s the economic conditions were still not favourable for maintaining a dairy herd and although it would have been more profitable to rear and sell cattle the limited size of land holdings around Warrandyte made this difficult. James Dawson and George Selby agreed upon the need to



Eugene von Guérard, 1811-1901, artist
Cutting out the cattle, Kangatong, 1856
Oil on canvas on board
Benalla Art Gallery, 1998-03
Separating animals from the rest of the herd

move to the Port Fairy district and decided to sell some of their stock, their houses and Dawson's 'right of run' for *Bonnytown*. In 1844 James Dawson took out a lease on a substantial holding of 30,000 acres (12,130 hectares) in the Western District, today approximately thirty-five kilometres north of Port Fairy.²² He named the property *Kangatong*.²³

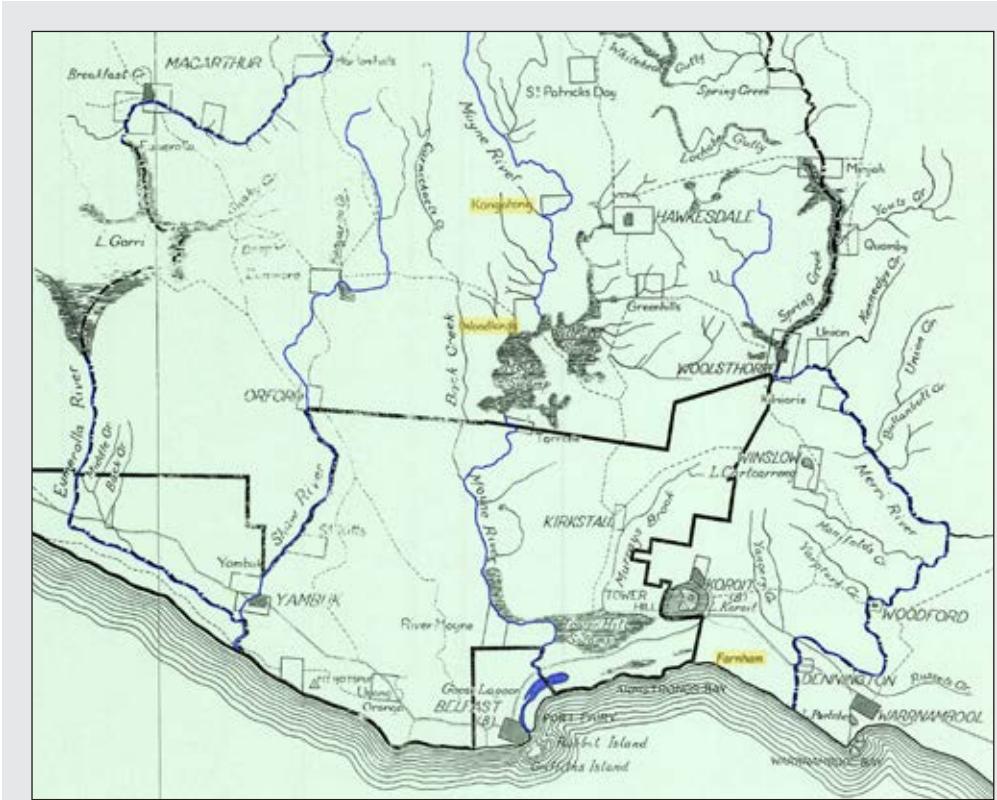
By May 1844 George Selby, with assistance, conveyed both families' possessions by bullocks and dray and drove the remaining cattle overland. Penelope and the two boys journeyed with the Dawsons to Melbourne, and then with bullocks and a special dray designed for sleeping, the group spent three weeks travelling via Geelong and across the western district to Port Fairy. Penelope and the boys were reunited with George and they then settled at *Kangatong*. (The Dawsons decided to remain in Port Fairy.)

There are no surviving letters for almost two years from February 1843 until November 1844. Although Penelope does not describe their living conditions following the relocation to *Kangatong*, she explained to her sisters their new situation as being upon 'a fine station, unfortunately not ours. Mr Dawson is the owner of it but George has the privilege of keeping his cattle on it for one or two years if he pleases free of expense'.

She then went on to elaborate that James Dawson was not on the property but that he was intending to establish 'a melting down', or

'boiling down' works at Port Fairy. During the depression of the early 1840s the export of the Australian wool clip to Britain was in decline. Dawson was obviously looking to expand his business opportunities with this new venture. Penelope and the boys stayed with the Dawsons whilst George was on a trip to Melbourne and she described the function of the establishment in detail.²⁴ She thought that it would be a fine thing for the district, as previously the settlers could not dispose of their surplus stock. On 13 May 1845, during a fifteen-day round journey to Portland and the site of the future Warrnambool, La Trobe visited the 'boiling Establishit' at Port Fairy.²⁵ Penelope may have still been visiting the Dawsons on that date while George was away in Melbourne; however, she has not recorded any impressions of the visit, nor is there an extant description of the works by La Trobe.²⁶ Dawson's boiling down business failed four months later and he was declared insolvent in September 1845.²⁷

Writing from *Kangatong* in 1846 Penelope declared that George was thinking of turning farmer and 'that we must try and see if an apprenticeship at farming will do'. A year later she expressed her disappointment to her sisters that after seven years of working they were no better off, but that 'it is better to be born lucky than rich.' Although uncertain about the prospects of the new farming venture she was exhorting her sisters to emigrate and to give up slaving away teaching at their school in London. One sister did eventually migrate. Henry



Belfast Road District, proclaimed 28th June 1853

Maps Collection, State Library Victoria (detail, adapted)

The solid black line represents the Shire of Belfast boundary, with the Borough of Port Fairy surrounding the town of Belfast on the coast. The three properties mentioned in the text are highlighted: Kangatong, Woodlands, Newlands at Farnham Park.

Lemann, the Dawsons' neighbour and a friend of the Selbys, whilst visiting London met and married Penelope's sister Mary (picture p.23) in July 1849. They settled in the district on Henry's property *Woodlands* early 1850. However, after ongoing disputes over the lease the Lemmanns returned to England by 1854.

Penelope's correspondence from late 1847 is from their property *Newlands*, Farnham Park, Port Fairy. Farnham Park was approximately fifteen miles (twenty-four kilometres) from Port Fairy and west of the newly-created town of Warrnambool. She referred to prominent merchant William Rutledge as their landlord. William Rutledge had leased 5,120 acres (2,072 hectares) in 1843 to establish a tenant farming community on land close to the Merri River. He divided the land into allotments of 640 and 320 acres (259 and 129.5 hectares). The Selbys as tenant farmers occupied one mile by a third of a mile (213 acres, 86 hectares) of which they initially cleared seventy acres (28.5 hectares). Within the acreage Penelope wrote of growing wheat and of possessing a winnowing machine, dray and a number of bullocks to collect and transport their produce to the mill. She was concerned about a shortage of workers and

hoped the government would encourage more people to emigrate to fill the need. Some of the workforce in the area she described as 'old Vandemonian convicts and a notable set they are, but I trust their days of extortion and impudence are nearly over'. Despite the hardship in coping at times with bad weather and low crop yields and problems in finding reliable workers to employ on the farm, a letter to her mother in August 1851 gives some indication of her optimism about their future on the land: 'I thought of you this morning when I was on a little hill at the end of the farm and saw the wheat looking so green and beautiful in the clear sunshine and such a pretty view beyond'.

Penelope was not isolated from world events; she mentioned an interest in politics and that they received the *Examiner*,²⁸ and other English papers. She was disturbed at the accounts of the Irish Potato Famine and later in 1848 referred to the revolutions on the Continent. Penelope taught her two boys until they could afford for them to board and attend school (the whereabouts of the school is unknown). She wrote scathingly that 'this is not the life for intellectual improvement and few children reared in the colony have hitherto had more



Chester Earles, 1821–1905, artist
A letter from Australia – the Earles family, 1849
Photograph of oil painting
Fox Talbot Museum, Lacock Abbey, Wiltshire
Collection: National Trust UK

than a charity boy's education at home, with the addition of being taught to swear, smoke and ride'.

Writing to her mother in August 1851 she described the country as being 'in a great excitement in consequence of the gold discovered' and it being discovered close to Melbourne, within a few miles of their old station on the Yarra. However Penelope was not to experience the dramatic changes the gold rush was to bring to the newly-created colony of Victoria. Her last surviving letter from *Newlands* on Sunday, 4 December 1851, was to her husband George who was visiting Melbourne, and in it she urged him to set off for Mount Alexander: 'I think if you go and if there really is a fortune to be made for nothing, it will be a pity for you not to try should you have the chance.'

George returned home, but on Friday 19 December, Penelope died after falling from her horse. She was forty years old. There were two depositions to the coroner at the inquest into Penelope's death, one by her son Prideaux stating that he had ridden the horse earlier that day in order to see if it was quiet before his mother rode it. He heard his father call to his mother to hold hard; the horse 'ran about fifteen yards' when his mother fell backwards from the saddle. The second was by Catherine Henley,

a servant, who said that at about 2pm she was watching Penelope and George get up onto their horses and ride away from the house. She lost sight of them, but then saw Penelope's horse return without her. She ran down the fields and found Penelope lying on her back and bleeding from her mouth and no longer breathing. The verdict was accidental death.²⁹ A report on her death was published in the *Melbourne Argus* on 27 December describing her husband and sons as being left to mourn the irreparable loss of one of the best of wives and mothers;³⁰ the London *Examiner* later published a short notice of her death. Penelope was buried in the Warrnambool cemetery.³¹

Her letters were saved by her family in England and eventually they came into the possession of her son Prideaux. They have inadvertently given posterity an insight into the transition from a life of 'gentility' in London to the vagaries of a colonial pioneering life on the land in the Port Phillip District of the 1840s.

Postscript

Shortly after Penelope's death George Selby advertised their farm *Newlands* to let.³² It is not known if he followed Penelope's advice and then set off in search of gold. At some stage in the early to mid-1850s George settled

in Melbourne. He and eldest son Prideaux are both listed as clerks on the electoral role of 1856, living in a freehold property at 42 Carson Street (North Melbourne) in the electoral division of Royal Park.³³ William aged twenty in 1856 was not eligible to vote. George left on a visit to England and on 27 May 1857 married Penelope's younger sister Susanna Earles in a civil ceremony in Holland at Baron du Knobelsdorff's *Chateau du Gelder*, in the town of Wijhe, in the Province of Overijssel.³⁴ The location of the marriage would have been to avoid legal issues and any social stigma attached to such a union. Under British Law it was illegal to marry a deceased wife's sister, although following an act of 1835 such a marriage could take place abroad, but not in any British colony.³⁵ George and Susanna arrived in Melbourne on 4 November 1857 on the *Anglesey*, and by about 1860 had acquired a large Italianate-style house at 56 Avoca Street, South Yarra, which they named *Lindisfarne*,³⁶ a reference to his father William Selby's origins in Northumberland. George established a business as an estate agent and dealt in property and land sales; he maintained an office at 111 Little Flinders Street West. His estate at the time of his death in 1890 comprised property and shares and was valued at £8,350.³⁷ George and Susanna had four surviving children. Their eldest son,

also named George William Selby born in 1858, became a Ferntree Gully Shire councillor, local landowner and justice of the peace; the town of Selby is named after him.³⁸

Prideaux Selby, Penelope and George's eldest son, followed the profession of both of his grandfathers and became a banker. In 1856 he was a clerk with a customs firm; by 1858 he joined the Bank of Australasia. He married Rose Anne Wise in Melbourne in 1864 and was promoted to a manager of the bank in Dunedin, New Zealand. He returned to Melbourne in the early 1870s and in 1879 was appointed as Secretary and Chief Officer of the Bank of Australasia in London. He remained living in England. He is attributed with several published articles on taxation.³⁹ Prideaux died in Croydon, Surrey, in 1908. Penelope's second son, William Selby, became an accountant. He contracted phthisis (tuberculosis) and died aged thirty-five in Avoca Street, South Yarra, on 15 June 1872. William was unmarried at the time of his death and he left an estate of £3,400.⁴⁰

Endnotes

- 1** Letters of Penelope Selby, MS 9494, Box 1134, Manuscript Collection, State Library Victoria. The twenty typed letters were copied by Lily Seymour in London in 1901 from the originals in the possession of Penelope's son Prideaux Selby. The majority of the letters were sent to her sisters and mother. Penelope sent three letters while en route to Melbourne from Plymouth, Madeira, Table Bay/Cape Town. Letters from Port Phillip date from 26 December 1840 to 4 December 1851. See also Lucy Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady: voices from the Australian bush*, Melbourne: McPhee Gribble/Penguin Books, 1984, pp.151–188 (the three letters sent while on board ship are not included in the book, nor 4 February 1851); and for a short biography, see Susan Janson, 'Penelope Selby: farmer's wife', in Marilyn Lake and Farley Kelly (eds.), *Double Time: women in Victoria – 150 years*, Melbourne: Penguin Books, 1985, pp.31–39 (this article cannot be relied upon for accuracy). The title of my article is from Frost, p.188.
- 2** *Port Phillip Gazette*, 6 May 1840, p.2; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 May 1840, p.1.
- 3** *The Gazette, London*, 30 September 1839, p.1,865. Charles Batkin and George William Selby, Fringe Manufacturers, 9 Foster Lane. Fringe making involved the production of lace, cords, fringes and tassels for furnishings and clothes.
- 4** Penelope Earles born 12 February 1811 Shoreditch; baptised at Shoreditch Church; registered at Dr Williams Non-Conformist Library, Red Cross Street, Cripplegate, London – see records on Ancestry.com.
- 5** See a note by Prideaux on the bottom of page 7 of the typed copy of Penelope's letters, 'Mother went to a school in London Fields, Hackney run by the daughter of their neighbour, Mrs Moss'.
- 6** The painting was exhibited at the Royal Academy, London in 1849 and at the Society of British Artists Suffolk Street Gallery in 1850. Chester Earles, born 1821 Hackney, studied at the Royal Academy and migrated to Melbourne in 1864. His numerous paintings in Britain and Australia are listed in Design & Art Australia Online, <https://www.daa.org.au/bio/chester-earles/biography> (accessed 25 January 2022). The Fox Talbot Museum, Lacock Abbey, Wiltshire, holds a second image of the painting with a key listing the members of the Earles family – for details see Janson, p.35.
- 7** George William Selby born 15 November 1805 in Finsbury, London. His father, William Selby was born in Belford, Northumberland in 1777. There were a number of branches of the Selby families of Northumberland. One particular line was the Selby family of Alnwick who owned a number of properties in Northumberland, but also owned *Ightham Mote* in Kent for nearly 300 years, 1591–1889. In 1845 *Ightham Mote* was inherited by Prideaux John Selby a well-known naturalist of Alnwick. Charles La Trobe leased *Ightham Mote* from late 1855 to June 1856.
- 8** The Will of William Selby, 9 October 1817, Prerogative Cover of Canterbury Wills 1384–1853, pp.354–355; Will of Mary Elisabeth Selby, 3 July 1819, London, England, Wills and Probate 1507–1858. William Earles and Mary Lonsdale (her mother) joint executors. Both wills available on Ancestry.com.
- 9** Penelope Earles and George William Selby married at St Mary's, Haggerston, Borough of Hackney, London, 15 January 1834. Prideaux Selby born 9 December 1834, baptised Christchurch, Greyfriars, London; William Selby born 23 October 1836, baptised Christchurch, Greyfriars, London.
- 10** *Account Papers of the House of Commons*, Vol. 48, 7 March 1837. George W. Selby of 9 Foster Lane, London, bought shares to the value of £1,000 in the London and Blackwall Railway and Steam Navigation Depot Company; also shares to the value of £1,500 in the Dublin and Kilkenny Railway.

- 11** Letter, Ship China, Plymouth Harbour, Sunday, November 1839, p.3. William Kirby born 1800 in Northamptonshire inherited a business and land upon the death of his mother in 1824. He and his wife Emma and eight children arrived in Melbourne on the *China* in 1840. He bought 1,640 acres (663 hectares) of land to farm on the Merri Creek near present-day Woodstock, north of Melbourne. He called the property *Fawsley*.
- 12** Ibid, James Dawson born 1806, Bonnytoun, Linlithgow, married Joan Anderson Park in Stirling, Scotland in 1837. Dawson became an advocate for Aboriginal protection and interests. He published a book in 1881 entitled *Australian Aborigines: the languages and customs of several tribes of Aborigines in the western district of Victoria, Australia*. His daughter Isabella Dawson assisted him in his ethnographic work. (Peter Corris, Dawson, James (Jimmy) (1806-1900) *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, accessed online 25 January 2022).
- 13** Murray Haughton, 'The Dawson and Selby Families at Bonny Town in the 1840s'. *Warrandyte Historical Society Newsletter*, Issue 127, February-April, 2002. Information provided courtesy of the Warrandyte Historical Society. This article includes extracts from James Dawson's biographical notes copied from a 13- page undated typescript entitled 'Pedigree of the original Dawsons of Bonnytown, near Linlithgow, Scotland.' The pages are part of a collection of memorabilia in 'The Scrapbook of James Dawson', State Library Victoria, MSF, Box 4918. James Dawson recorded that they erected his portable house on the site later occupied by the Depot for Immigrants by permission of Superintendent La Trobe for whom he had an introduction from Earl Grey of the Colonial Office. I have quoted from his recollections of the arrival of the Dawsons and Selbys, May 1840, their move to Bonnytown and then to Port Fairy in May/June 1844.
- 14** Lorraine Finlay, 'The Reynolds Family: Cornish bounty emigrants of 1849', *La Trobeana*, vol.19, no.1, March 2020, pp.35-36. A temporary immigrant depot was established by La Trobe on the Government Block in 1841. A permanent depot was built at the western end of the block in 1848.
- 15** *New South Wales Government Gazette*, Issue 55, 9 September 1840, p.864, Pasture License issued to James Dawson. The leased land comprised 697 acres (282 hectares). See the surveys by T. H. Nutt of the area in 1839, *Yarra Yarra no.1, Loddon 25-1, Bulleen, Sutton, Warrandyte, Yering*, Dept. of Crown Lands and Survey (State Library Victoria, Historical maps and plans collection). The Andersons' and Woods' station is clearly marked by the River. See also 'Mr Dawson's Station' marked as 697 acres on the Nutt map, PROV VPRS 8168 Sydney W6: Warrandyte 1841. Digital Image. The property acquired by Dawson had previously been owned by Captain Thomas Scott RN and prior to his occupation, William and John Woods.
- 16** Ian D Clark (ed), *The Journals of George Augustus Robinson*, Volume One: 1 January 1839–30 September 1840, Melbourne: Heritage Matters, 1998, pp.366-368. James Anderson had bought a herd of cattle from Sydney in 1839 and settled on land at the mouth of a creek that joined the Yarra River. The creek still bears his name. *Bonnytown* was two miles (3.2 km) above Anderson's run.
- 17** *New South Wales, Census of the year 1841: Port Phillip District*, [Sydney] 1841.
- 18** Richard Wallace, Surgeon, Hackney Road, *London Directory*, 1835, He wrote a number of articles for *The Lancet*, for example a report to the Coroner concerning the malpractice in the delivery of a baby by an unqualified practitioner, *The Lancet*, vol.1, 15 December 1838, pp.446-447.
- 19** 6 November 1844. In a letter dated 1 March 1845 written whilst staying at Port Fairy with the Dawsons, Penelope made derogatory comments about the local Indigenous people. She referred to them as naked savages and a disgusting set, plenty of them carrying away offal from the boiling down works. These remarks could be interpreted that she was indifferent to or ignorant of their loss of habitat and hunting grounds.
- 20** Harriet Martineau, 1802-1876, was a famous political economist active from the late 1820s and a Unitarian. Penelope's parents were Unitarians and may have known Harriet through their religious practices. The Dawsons were also Unitarians. Unitarians are Christians who do not believe that Jesus was a part of the Trinity nor a deity or God incarnate.
- 21** R.V. Billis and A.S. Kenyon, *Pastoral Pioneers of Port Phillip*, Melbourne: Macmillan, 1932, pp.43, 186. James Clow (Rev.) had taken out a lease for the Corhanwarrabul run in 1838; it comprised 36 square miles (9,324 hectares). Clow then established an out-station called *Glenfern* (i.e. Corhanwarrabul No.3). The run was taken over by John Wood Beilby in 1841. *Glenfern* was situated in the vicinity of the present-day towns of Ferntree Gully and Ferny Creek and extended toward Mooroolbark. An auction of the Beilby estate described his run as being at the base of Mount Dandenong, *Argus*, 12 November 1857, p.2.
- 22** Initially the town was called Belfast and the harbour Port Fairy. In 1887 the town was officially renamed Port Fairy.
- 23** Edward Wilson, *The Squatters' Directory: containing a list of all occupants of crown lands in the intermediate and unsettled districts of Port Phillip*, Melbourne: Edward Wilson, 1849. Dawson and Mitchell, Kangatong, Portland Bay District, 30,080 acres (12,173 hectares), 2,500 cattle. Patrick Mitchell was James Dawson's nephew who accompanied them to Melbourne in 1840. *Kangatong* was originally called *Cox's Heifer Station*.
- 24** Letter of 1 March 1845. She described the establishment as being about three miles from the township and that there were 'two immense vats which together will contain three hundred sheep or twenty bullocks, which are cut into pieces and placed inside. A steam pipe is inserted in the top and all the fine meat goes to waste and the tallow is kept'.
- 25** Dianne Reilly (ed.), *Charles Joseph La Trobe: Australian Notes 1839-1854*, Yarra Glen, Vic: Tarcoola Press, State Library of Victoria and Boz Publishing, 2006, p.134.
- 26** Governor Sir George Gipps acknowledged a note from La Trobe of 20 May 1845 announcing his return from this journey. (A.G.L. Shaw, ed., *Gipps-La Trobe Correspondence, 1839-1846*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1989, p.331.) Very few of La Trobe's personal letters to Sir George have been preserved.
- 27** *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 1 October 1845 p.429.
- 28** The *Examiner* was a weekly London paper founded by Leigh and John Hunt in 1808. It was a leading intellectual journal expounding radical principles.
- 29** PROV Coroner Inquest Deposition files 1840-1925, VPRS24/P0000, 1851/30.
- 30** Belfast Correspondent, *Argus*, 27 December 1851, p.2. See also *Examiner*, London, 1 May 1852, p.285.
- 31** *Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages – Victoria*, number 31880. Burials in the Parish of Warrnambool 1850,1851,1852 incorrectly recorded Penelope Selby's death on 5 December 1851 and burial on 8 December 1851; 41 years of age. Penelope was 40 years old at the time of her death on 19 December.
- 32** *Belfast Gazette and Portland and Warrnambool Advertiser*, 27 March 1852, p.1. George Selby advertised the lease of *Newlands* which had another 9 years to run. The property was described as containing 200 acres [81 hectares] of which one half had been cleared and under cultivation. Possession was available as of 1 April 1852, following the harvest. The lease included the building and fences.

- 33 *Electoral Roll, Victoria 1856*, Royal Park Division, p.113. (Melbourne: Library Council of Victoria, 1987, microfiche.)
- 34 Married 27 May 1857, *Age*, 20 August 1857, p.4.
- 35 Dianne Reilly Drury, *La Trobe: The Making of a Governor*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2006, pp.245-246, 253. Discusses La Trobe's dilemma in marrying Rose, his deceased wife Sophie's sister.
- 36 National Trust of Australia (Victoria), File No. B0222. See statement of significance.
- 37 'The Selby Estate', *Table Talk*, 3 October 1890, p.8.
- 38 L. J. Blake, *Place Names of Victoria*, Adelaide, S.A.: Rigby, 1976, p.238; VICNAMES: The Register of Geographic Names (<https://maps.land.vic.gov.au/lassi/VicnamesUI.jsp>, accessed 25 January 2022).
- 39 Philip Mennell (ed.), *The Dictionary of Australasian Biography: comprising notices of eminent colonists from the inauguration of responsible government down to the present time (1855-1892)*, London: Hutchinson, 1892, p.407.
- 40 *Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages*, 12 June 1872 No. 5709; PROV, Will and Probate of William Selby, VPRS 28/P002, 9/861. Probate granted 4 July 1872. William bequeathed shares and property to be divided amongst his family and Isabella Dawson. (Isabella was the only daughter of James and Joan Dawson.)



Victoria's Earliest Potteries

By Gregory Hill

Greg Hill, recognised as the leading authority on Australian Colonial Pottery and Australian Art Pottery, gave a presentation to the La Trobe Society at the Royal Historical Society of Victoria on 12 July based on research for his book, *Victoria's Earliest Potteries* (2019), which covers pottery manufacture in the colony of Victoria from its earliest years. The book was commended in the Local History Small Publication Award, 2019 Victorian Community History Awards. The following is a revised version of his talk, which was accompanied by a small exhibition of examples of early colonial pottery.

The scanning of newspapers and all manner of historical records and maps in recent years has greatly facilitated research into the early potteries, but discovering examples of what they made is another matter. Until about the late 1860s potteries did not mark their wares. Items in common use in the early years were nearly all salt glazed, very basic in function and manufacture, and generally identified by the convict-made ginger beer bottle sourced initially from New South Wales or Van Diemen's Land. Also important were pottery vessels used in the home dairy: large milk pans, butter and cream jars, etc.

Hagan's Pottery is the earliest recorded pottery works in Victoria. Patrick Hagan arrived in Melbourne on the *William Barras* in February 1840 from London, and had founded his pottery by 1842 in the area east of La Trobe's *Jolimont* estate running down to the Yarra River.¹ It is unusual because it only produced household pottery and did not venture into bricks, pipes or other heavy ceramic ware. In July 1842 it was noted in the local press:

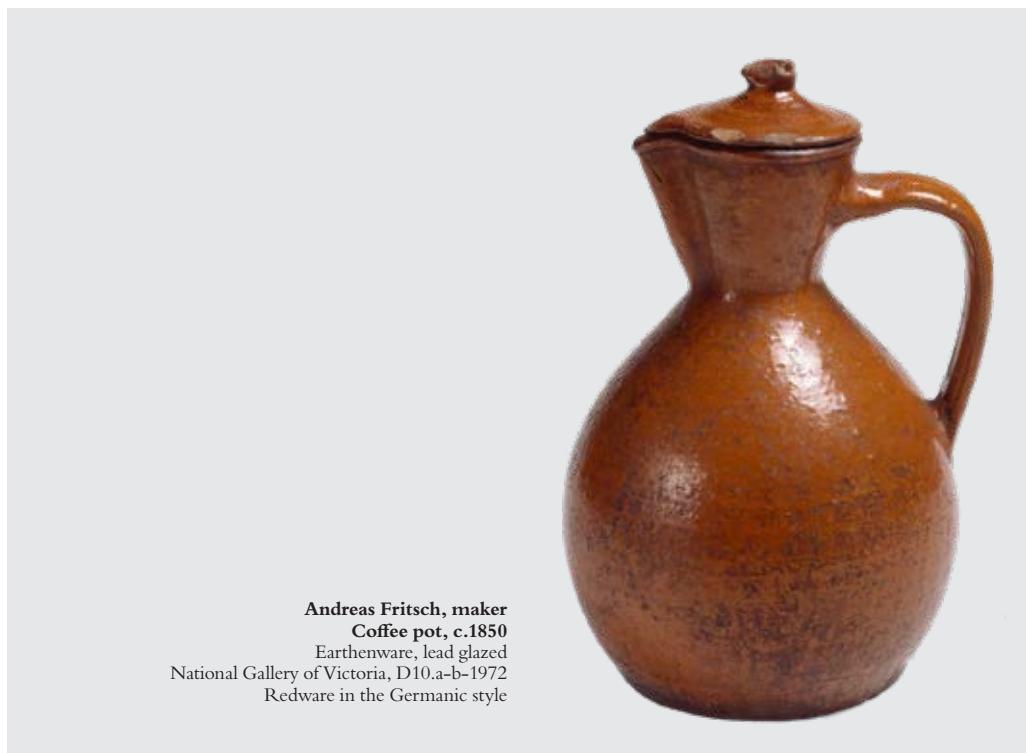
[Previously] we reported a variety of manufactures of the Province calculated to show the enterprise of our fellow colonists and the growing prosperity which might therefore be anticipated. We beg at present to add

to our list a manufactory of milk pans, flower pots, chimney tops, and every other article of similar wares necessary for the wants of an agricultural or pastoral country or for the comfort and luxury of the citizens and country gentry.²

The short period 1842–43 is the only time that evidence can be found for this ambitious undertaking of a pottery works. However, there is mounting evidence that it could be the same works later owned by Theophilus Dredge that became the Worcester Pottery, then the Richmond Pottery which was finally owned by William Marshall.

A pottery was operated by Theophilus (Theo) Dredge for a short time in 1846. He was the son of the Reverend James Dredge, formerly one of the Assistant Aboriginal Protectors from 1838 to June 1840. In January 1846 it was reported: 'We learn that some very excellent and ornamental specimens of pottery work have been worked at Mr Dredge's Pottery ground, situated beyond the Government Paddock. The speculation is said to answer admirably'.³

However, six months later Dredge was declared insolvent and the business was bought by Thomas Watson and William Purton, and renamed the Worcester Pottery. The following year they published a notice in



Andreas Fritsch, maker
Coffee pot, c.1850
 Earthenware, lead glazed
 National Gallery of Victoria, D10.a-b-1972
 Redware in the Germanic style

The Argus announcing that they have: ‘already manufactured and have on hand a large quantity of ginger beer bottles, jars, and nearly every other description of stoneware’ and that they ‘would particularly invite the attention of ginger beer brewers to their bottles, as they have already been tested and declared to be the finest and best ever used in the colony’.⁴

Shortly afterwards the name was changed to the Richmond Pottery, under the sole ownership of Watson.⁵ As part of the Separation celebrations in November 1850 the pottery is reputed to have made a gigantic pie dish, 6 by 7 feet (1.8 by 2.1 metres) in dimension, for a huge beef pie ‘borne in the procession upon a decorated dray, drawn by ten bullocks’.⁶ By 1855 William Marshall was the owner of the Richmond Pottery.

In Collingwood Augustus Andreas Fritsch operated the German Pottery from around 1850. He was born in Naumburg, Saxony in 1808 and arrived in Melbourne on the *Wappaus* in March 1849. His pottery was located at the corner of James Street and Simpson’s Road, later Victoria Street, close to Hoddle Street, and produced bricks, tiles and basic domestic ware that was typical German ‘redware’. This was a low-fired porous body, covered with a clear lead glaze that was made into vases, flower pots, jars, jugs and coffee pots. He exhibited in the first Victoria Industrial Society Exhibition held in St Patrick’s Hall in January 1851, and received a silver medal for the best specimen of colonial pottery, the first

award for this category in Victoria.⁷ In 1856 he purchased land in what is now East Burwood containing good quality terra cotta clay to supply his manufactory.

In Preston, Michael Emery established a pottery in Wood Street in 1853, naming it St John’s after the pottery in which he had worked in Sussex. He arrived in Melbourne on the *Lady Eveline* at the end of November 1852. For the first three years he employed no labour, but as time went on the enterprise grew. Initially, he employed two young nephews. The pottery exhibited its wares at the Victoria Industrial Society Exhibition in 1853, including red pottery ‘being very good of its kind’, and flower pots, vases, and chimney pots ‘well made’.⁸ The judges regarded it as worthy of commendation. At the 1856 exhibition he was awarded a silver medal in the pottery category for several highly finished specimens of pottery, ‘the flower-pots and other articles being more highly finished than those wrought at home’.⁹

In North Melbourne, Henry Brown Stevenson (an entrepreneurial Scotsman who arrived in Melbourne from Edinburgh on the *Wanderer* at the end of April 1853) set up a brickworks in 1854 on the shoreline of the swampy marshes known as Batman’s Swamp. This was near present-day Dryburgh Street. At the same time he operated as a real estate agent specialising in selling and leasing farms, and was well known for his production of agricultural drain pipes. He exhibited in the Victoria



Unknown makers

Bung jar and jug, 1850s

Collection Gregory Hill

Redware found in the Geelong area.

Left, Bung jar: earthenware, clear lead glazed.

Right, Jug: earthenware, unglazed exterior,
clear lead glaze interior.

Industrial Society Exhibition of 1854 where his articles of pottery evinced ‘great advancement in that manufacture’; they included fire bricks, drain and sewerage pipes, chimney and flower pots and other articles of pottery ware.¹⁰

South of the Yarra River, Charles Bruce Graeme Skinner, a Cambridge-educated barrister, set up a pottery business in Toorak by 1854. After arriving in Melbourne on *The Teak* in June 1852, he became caught up in the land speculation of that period. The pottery’s products were shown in the Victoria Industrial Society Exhibition in 1854, and again in 1855 when some ornamental brick work and pottery ‘elicited general admiration’, and it was observed that ‘elegance of detail should take the place of the crude fashioning of many of our dwelling houses’.¹¹

Not far from the Skinner works, Henry Atkinson Cawkwell (a cabinet-maker from Lincolnshire trained in the finer aspects of furniture-making, who arrived in Melbourne in February 1853) established a pottery business at the corner of High Street and Tooronga Road, Malvern, in 1854. For some years he operated this single-handedly, initially producing unglazed pipes, and later gutter bricks, gutter tiles, flooring tiles and bricks. His was the first Australian venture to produce encaustic and mosaic (tessellated) tiles. His tile works developed such expertise that they were compared with the English company Minton. After Cawkwell’s death in 1894 the business was bought by John Cartlidge, a former apprentice and employee, and continued as the Australian Roman Mosaics Tile Works, proprietor John Cartlidge & Son, until 1926.

The first of the Geelong potteries was owned by Charles Gundry from Somerset who arrived in Melbourne on the *London* in September 1843, and quickly moved to Geelong, where he became a retail merchant. By 1851, he owned several shops selling general merchandise, mainly in Government (Melbourne) Road, West Geelong. His pottery was operating by early 1851, apparently in nearby Isabella Street, which was the centre of Geelong’s brick production, and in September that year he won a silver medal for the best specimen of colonial made pottery at the Victoria Industrial Society Exhibition held in Geelong.¹² The pottery, however, operated only for a short time – soon afterwards he began selling china and glassware.

Another Geelong pottery was set up at Fyansford in 1855 on a thirty-acre (twelve hectare) site on the eastern side of the Moorabool River by Christopher Porter, an architect, who had arrived in Geelong in January 1853 and proceeded to invest heavily in real estate and other ventures while working in his profession. His Porter & Son pottery produced both industrial and domestic items for the local market from mid-1855. By October 1856 he was also making bricks, and later tiles and pipes. His flower pots and other products were deemed to be of excellent quality and well-made. He exhibited in the Geelong and Western District Agricultural and Horticultural Societies’ annual exhibitions. For instance at Geelong in 1857, he was awarded five first prizes, including one for dairy pottery.¹³ The enterprise operated until 1859. He designed a number of significant buildings in Ballarat and Geelong,¹⁴ before relocating to Brisbane where he became the Brisbane City Surveyor for many years.

The display of examples at the Royal Historical Society for this lecture included shards that had been found at the Porter & Son's Pottery site, along with one large section of a milk pan – a very important utensil in the dairies of the time. From reconstructing such items, it has been possible to demonstrate typical dimensions of 105mm in height by 470mm in width for these cottage wares.

The difficult task of finding examples of pottery made by these early pottery works remains for us and coming generations. *Victoria's Earliest Potteries* has made us aware of their existence, geographical positions and the type of wares produced. As virtually none of it was marked with makers' names we are reliant on two areas of research. The first is shards from their work sites as has been successfully achieved at the Porter & Son site in Geelong. This resulted in twenty-eight different articles being

found and reconstructed to varying degrees. Even with this advantage only one piece of their pottery has since been found 'in the wild'. One hundred and seventy years of use of Victorian-made pottery has not translated into survival in the twenty-first century. The second route to knowledge is the slow, meticulous and time-consuming exercise of trying to match pottery of the types likely made at these potteries, and attributing them if enough evidence warrants it. This process is augmented by auspicious, if very rare pottery survivors from the families whose ancestors began these potteries. If anyone finds a piece of soft, terra cotta pottery with a clear glaze and of simple household design, such as a milk jug, I would like to know of it.

Endnotes

Further information may be found in Gregory Hill, *Victoria's Earliest Potteries: our convict era potters*, [Langwarrin, Vic.] Gregory Hill, 2019 (182 pages).

1 *Melbourne Times*, 2 July 1842, p.3: ('at the eastern boundary of [His Honor's] estate on the banks of the Yarra').

2 Ibid.

3 *Port Phillip Patriot and Morning Advertiser*, 24 February 1846, p.2. La Trobe's *Jolimont* estate was located on the Government Paddock; he purchased it in June 1840.

4 *Melbourne Argus*, 10 August 1847, p.1.

5 Ibid, 12 November 1847, p.3. In Mouritz's *Port Phillip Directory* 1847, William Purton is listed as 'potter, Collingwood Flat'.

6 *Melbourne Daily News*, 26 October 1850, p.2. After the event *The Argus* on 8 November, p.4, gave slightly smaller dimensions for the pie dish, *viz* 'seven by five' (2.1 by 1.5 metres).

7 *Argus*, 30 January 1851, p.2, *Melbourne Daily News*, 1 February 1851, p.2. Fritsch was known as Andreas.

8 *Argus*, 24 November 1853, p.5.

9 *Age*, 12 December 1856, p.3.

10 *Argus*, 19 October 1854, p.5.

11 *Age*, 1 March 1855, p.5.

12 *Geelong Advertiser*, 25 September 1851, p.2.

13 *Bell's Life in Victoria*, 21 March 1857, p.2.

14 In Ballarat, Porter was responsible for the main Town Hall incorporating a Police Court, Mechanics' Institute and Public Library, as well as the Eastern Ballarat Town Hall, the Vegetable and Produce Market, and the Benevolent Asylum. In Geelong, the Savings Bank, Chamber of Commerce building and the Free Presbyterian Church, among other key buildings.

Women's Autonomy within Marriage in early Melbourne

By Anne Marsden

Anne Marsden, a Leeds University graduate and former science teacher, held a 2012-13 Honorary Creative Fellowship at State Library Victoria, leading to articles in *The La Trobe Journal*, *Victorian Historical Journal* and *La Trobeana*. *The Making of the Melbourne Mechanics' Institution: The Movers and Shakers of Pre-Goldrush Melbourne* (2016) and its companion volume, *And the Women Came Too* (2018), were published with the support of the Melbourne Athenaeum Library where Anne was a volunteer archives researcher.

The women in this study were from an educated class and arrived in Melbourne in the first years of European settlement. They are the women we can glimpse in contemporary records, through occasional notes in newspapers, family papers, journals and letters, generated mainly by men, but where we can lift the corner of a page and peer at the women hidden in the shadows.

The role of young women of this class was mapped out for them early in life, and they were usually well trained in household management by their mothers, often at the same time as they were finishing their school lessons. With a few exceptions these women's lives were confined to managing the children and the household, maintaining standards of behaviour carried with them from their European homeland.

We shall tease out some of the many factors affecting marriage partners, including the position of the family within the community as dictated by breeding, religion, wealth, and hence the status of the husband amongst his peers.

The marriages of the first Port Phillip administrators, that is, between William and Martha Lonsdale and Charles and Sophie La Trobe, appear companionable without the husband exerting undue pressure in the

household. The men were in their mid-thirties and the women in their twenties at marriage. This perception is reflected in the working relationship between Lonsdale, the first Police Magistrate, and La Trobe, the first Superintendent. Although La Trobe was Lonsdale's superior, they brought a cooperative nature to their difficult task, unusual in the power struggles of the early community, neither appearing to seek power at the expense of the other. Edmund Finn (early Victorian chronicler 'Garryowen') wrote of Lonsdale that he had 'a natural calmness of temperament and equanimity',¹ and of La Trobe that 'he was a thoroughly conscientious and honest man, who felt a sincere interest in the welfare of the colony, and always endeavoured to do right under difficulties of no ordinary kind'.²

In 1836, when the Lonsdales first set foot in the settlement – which would not be named 'Melbourne' until the following year – the existing small group of European settlers lived in a handful of huts and tents. Martha, who had been used to mixing socially within the Government House circle in Sydney, would have had a challenging time, adjusting to the unusual social mix and primitive conditions, especially with a small baby to care for.

The Lonsdales' eighteen years in Melbourne would see Port Phillip evolve from a settlement of 200 to a bustling city of nearly



300,000, having experienced the depression of the early 1840s, separation from New South Wales to become the Colony of Victoria in 1851, and the discovery of gold that year with its consequent influx of migrants. Martha's years of pregnancy and childbirth lasted from her early twenties to her menopause years, the couple's last recorded child born when Martha was forty-seven and William sixty.

The living conditions that the Lonsdales experienced throughout their marriage would have daunted the most courageous of souls, but reading between the lines of early records we perceive a loving and compassionate relationship. Martha must have set a quietly steadfast example to other early women facing the harshest settlement conditions, not the least of their challenges being pregnancy and childbirth without close relatives around them in a community initially lacking basic medical resources, midwives and doctors.

La Trobe would have been a great support to his wife Sophie who was ill-equipped to adapt to early colonial life. The daughter of a Councillor of State in Switzerland, it is hard to imagine a greater contrast between the grand mansion in Neuchâtel in which she grew up and *Jolimont*, the La Trobes' small prefabricated cottage in Melbourne. Sophie had chronic poor health so was rarely out in society in the settlement.

The wives of David Charteris McArthur and William Yaldwyn seemed content to take a back seat to their ambitious, upwardly-mobile husbands. These men, seeking 'a leg up' in society, spent much energy determinedly cultivating the more powerful members of the community, acquiring income and enlarging landholdings.

McArthur opened the first bank in Port Phillip in a two-roomed cottage in Collins Street, and over the years, through holding the purse-strings of the powerful in the community, made himself indispensable to the social hierarchy. He and his wife Caroline had no children, but the snippets we glean of her suggest a woman happy in the social milieu in which they operated, even one to be 'feared' by David's gun-toting companions on their pigeon shoots: 'They were very wet parties but David was kept all right for fear of the Old Lady [Mrs McArthur].'³

Henrietta Yaldwyn's marriage most certainly did not take the path she might have expected. Encumbered by small children and pregnancies, she had no option but to follow her husband William on his ill-thought-out ventures. The family emigrated to Australia, and took several 'start-up' pastoral stations to try and recoup failing family fortunes.

It might seem a given that a woman's age at marriage potentially affected her degree

of empowerment as a wife. With the scarcity of women of marriageable age in the early settlement there is evidence of young girls being 'spoken for' and married when still in their teenage years. If childbirth followed soon after such marriages, there was little potential for a young wife to develop personal maturity and interests outside domestic responsibilities. On the other hand, a woman whose marriage occurred in her twenties or later was potentially able to assert herself – within limits – contributing more fully within the partnership.

Although women of marriageable age were scarce, a mother of daughters might yet carefully manoeuvre to find acceptable husbands for them within societal mores. Social as well as religious discrimination was the norm, and hence there was competition for eligible suitors. For instance, the Presbyterian Clow family sought suitable Presbyterian husbands of appropriate age and connections for the Clow daughters.

The Clow family offers an interesting contrast of a woman married at a mature age and her daughter married in her mid-teenage years. Margaret Clow (née Morison) was in her early twenties when wooed in 1819 by a young Presbyterian minister, James Clow, five years her senior, before his departure for India to take up an East India Company position as a pastor. When James wrote from India asking Margaret to travel out to Bombay to marry him, she reportedly replied that if she were worth having she was worth coming for!⁴ James set out on a seven-month journey back to Britain, only to find that Margaret had embarked with her sister on a passage to Bombay; poor James turned around and endured another seven-month journey back to India to claim his bride. By then he was twenty-nine and Margaret twenty-four.

Eight children were born over fourteen years in India, the last in 1832, two dying in infancy. It must have been heart-breaking when it was thought necessary for their education for the four eldest to be sent back to the care of their maternal grandmother in Scotland. When James' health broke down, the family returned to Scotland in 1833 when James was forty-three and Margaret thirty-eight. There they were reunited with their older children and two more were born.

The harsh weather in Scotland after Bombay was challenging and in May 1837 the family sailed on the *North Briton* for Australia, hoping James would find a suitable parish and better health in a warmer climate. The privations of the voyage, combined with a measles epidemic, would test Margaret's reserves. The diary entries of a fellow passenger described James as 'gentle



Unknown photographer
Elizabeth McArthur

Collection: Mrs Frank Burns
(From J.M. McMillan, *The Two Lives of Joseph Docker*, Melbourne: Spectrum Publications, 1994, p.203)
Joseph Docker's daughters attended
Mrs McArthur's boarding school in St Kilda

and easy', his talents 'fair but not brilliant'. Margaret is 'less amiable', she 'often talks too much and sometimes rails'. This comment seems unsurprising when we realise that James, who was born with one hand⁵ and suffered ongoing health problems, was likely to be focussed on his pastoral work, including leading shipboard services, leaving the challenging management of their large brood to Margaret.

On the voyage south their daughter, the young Margaret, then a child of thirteen, caught the eye of a passenger, Rev. William Hamilton, travelling south to take up a parish in Victoria. He would have been aware of the dearth of unmarried women in Australia,⁶ and may also have considered that marriage with a very young woman would facilitate her training in the duties of the wife of a Presbyterian minister. Reading between the lines of a letter from Clow to Hamilton, in which he was asked not to have further contact with Margaret until she was fifteen, it seems that a degree of affection and compatibility had developed between the young Margaret and William during the voyage: 'We are confident... that her attachment to you is as pure and strong as it ever was, and you have nothing to fear from a change of her affections... At present she is busy with her lessons and her share of domestic labour.'⁷ Rev. William Hamilton and Margaret Clow were married the day before her sixteenth birthday, setting off for Hamilton's parish in Goulburn, New South Wales. It is a little comforting to know



Unknown artist, Scotland
Mary (Mamie) Graham, 1857
Photograph of an oil painting, detail
From *Pioneer Merchant: the letters of James Graham*,
Melbourne: Hyland House, 1985, p.135

that Margaret's filly and three heifers would accompany her to the manse.

At the other end of the scale we have the rarer instances of women older than their husbands. Elizabeth Kirby was in her early thirties when she married twenty-five-year-old Donald McArthur, though her age was given as twenty-six on disembarkation in Sydney in 1835.⁸ We can only speculate that this apparent deception on linking her fortunes to the McArthur family in Edinburgh when they were about to embark on emigration to Australia, allowed her to escape a likely future as a spinster and possible employment as a governess, then regarded as being in the same class as a household servant. In Australia Elizabeth gained respect and a powerful role in the early community as an educator.⁹ She forged ahead, discreetly separating from her husband who found it difficult to make his way in Port Phillip.

Margaret Bowman has written of the interesting marriage of George Gilbert and Anne (née Bird), who was previously married to Sir John Byerley. George and Anne were married in London in 1839, when George was twenty-three and Anne forty-six.¹⁰ Anne had wide life experience, having lived in Paris with Byerley, where they had two children. Bowman wrote: 'Whatever their personal relations, the marriage between George Gilbert and Anne Byerley appears to have been a mutually advantageous partnership... Anne would benefit from having a male partner while... without her capital, George... would have been unable seriously to

consider settlement in the Port Phillip District.¹¹ In Melbourne, George worked as the Secretary/Librarian of the Melbourne Mechanics' Institution where he and his family had living quarters. Here Anne had space to conduct a school (which the La Trobe's eldest daughter Agnes attended for a time).¹²

The level of fecundity affected a woman's situation within marriage, it then being assumed that a woman was responsible for lack of an heir. A man without children may have been pitied by his contemporaries, but many women were held hostage to their childbearing. Although they may have been aware of the benefits of breastfeeding as a contraceptive, albeit unreliable, the attraction of a wet nurse for those who could afford one might at times have outweighed this. The married life of Mamie, wife of James Graham, a successful merchant and early politician, was spent in a near-constant state of pregnancy and postpartum recovery.

Mamie and James were married soon after her seventeenth birthday and a son was born just nine months after their wedding. Their last child was born when she was forty-four, her years of childbearing spanning twenty-seven years. Records show that she gave birth to at least twenty-six living children and it is possible there were unrecorded miscarriages and stillbirths. But life was not all babies: 'Young as she was on her marriage... [Mamie] seems to have taken over the running of a household, and her duties as wife and mother, in her stride. Aided by servants she made jam, looked after her children, entertained friends to dinner, and visited her friends and relations in the town'.¹³

Marriages of convenience, albeit with respect on both sides, may have been expedient in the unusual circumstances of early Australia. Caroline Bowles was aged thirty, and James Simpson in his mid-fifties, when they married on 1 February 1845 in Melbourne. Caroline had arrived in Australia in 1836 with her sister Henrietta, whose husband William Yaldwyn, had 'started up' pastoral stations in New South Wales and Port Phillip, eventually arriving in Melbourne Town in 1839. A lively young woman, Caroline had proved fearless in facing, and seemingly enjoying, daunting obstacles during her travels.¹⁴ James Simpson, who arrived in Van Diemen's Land in 1835, was immediately appointed by Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur to government positions. In 1836, as reported by Arthur, Simpson 'had been infected with the Port Phillip mania',¹⁵ and had travelled with the Port Phillip Association's group of private adventurers to Port Phillip, where he was allotted land near the Werribee River. He moved to the settlement which would be

named ‘Melbourne’ the following year and was appointed arbitrator of disputes, afterwards a magistrate. He worked closely with William Lonsdale, the Police Magistrate.

Hence, Caroline and James became part of the small community’s social circle which included the Lonsdales and the Yaldwyns. Although Caroline returned to England with the Yaldwyn family in March 1841, she and James remained in touch, keeping their developing relationship hidden, even from her immediate family apart from Henrietta and William. By the time William Yaldwyn was commissioned to transport a group of ex-Pentonville prisoners out to Australia on the *Royal George* in July 1844, James and Caroline had decided to marry and William agreed to take her on the ship back. This arrangement was kept under wraps and in fact caused wild rumours of a relationship between William and Caroline to spread among friends and family in England who had been told Caroline was travelling to Germany.¹⁶

Lower in the hierarchy in our group of educated women was one who earned a wage. Mary Wintle, wife of the first Melbourne gaoler, George Wintle, was seven years older than her husband, giving birth to three sons and at least one daughter in Victoria when she was in her thirties. From about March 1845 she was also on the government payroll as ‘matron’ overseeing female prisoners,¹⁷ which gives her strong claim to be Victoria’s first female public servant. She received a government pension of £50 per annum after George died in April 1870, not long after he had been superannuated on half-pay, but before other claims and expenses had been properly assessed.¹⁸ Mary outlived him by nearly eight years, being remembered as ‘greatly valued by all classes for the kindness of her disposition’. She was buried in the family grave at Melbourne cemetery, where two sons who ‘met sudden and accidental deaths’ are also memorialised.¹⁹

The impact of marriage and the expected female role restricted the ability of some enterprising women to have a career or earn money from their talents. In the case of Georgiana McCrae (née Huntly, the illegitimate daughter of the Marquis of Huntly, later the fifth Duke of Gordon) her marriage put an end to her ability to accept profitable painting commissions. Georgiana’s portraits, as dictated by contemporary social mores, were restricted to women and children.²⁰ Her cultured upbringing had included tuition in London by French refugees from the Revolution, and studies at the Royal Academy in London, where her talents were fostered by leading artists of the day, including John Varley and John Glover.



Georgiana McCrae, 1804–1890, artist
Self-portrait, 1829
Watercolour and pencil
National Gallery of Victoria, 2009.387

Georgiana was married at twenty-four to Andrew McCrae, whose work as a lawyer in Scotland or England was deemed sufficient to support his family, and it was not appropriate for Georgiana to earn money through portraiture, though miniatures were considered acceptable.²¹ Other hurdles in her path included Andrew’s decision to emigrate from London to Australia in the hope of bolstering his unsuccessful career. There, he continually uprooted the family, eventually settling at Arthur’s Seat down the bay from Melbourne, where the house now known as McCrae Homestead was built. While still in Britain, Georgiana had given birth to a daughter, who died young, and four sons; four more daughters were born in Australia. Shortage of money, exacerbated by Andrew’s heavy and often irresponsible borrowing, dogged the family throughout the marriage, and although Georgiana was offered portrait commissions which would have helped with their dire financial situation, that was completely discouraged by Andrew and the wider McCrae family, especially two of his sisters Thomas Ann Cole and Margaret Thomas.

Georgiana eventually gained some independence following the discovery of gold in Victoria when the family left Arthur’s Seat, Andrew being appointed Police Magistrate in Gippsland in 1851. However, there was no suitable accommodation for the family. Georgiana, now aged forty-seven, rented a house in Melbourne’s La Trobe Street, with her younger children, aged ten, seven and four, and six-month old Agnes. But when she was fifty-three Georgiana applied for a judicial separation.

This was quite counter to social expectations and shocked many members of the McCrae family.

One can only begin to tease out the many and confusing influences affecting wives in the community of early Melbourne where traditional attitudes prevailed. We have found some examples of wives forging ahead and gaining a level of autonomy, especially where financial independence could be achieved. But, what courage they needed!

Endnotes

- 1 Garryowen, *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne, 1835 to 1852: historical, anecdotal and personal*, Melbourne: Fergusson and Mitchell, 1888, Vol.1, p.39.
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- 5 Ibid, p.11.
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- 7 Letter from James Clow to William Hamilton, 30 July 1839, State Library Victoria MS 9570, Box 334/1(b).
- 8 McArthur family in Australia, <https://www.telfordfamily.com> (accessed 1 March 2022).
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- 13 Sally Graham, in James Graham, *Pioneer Merchant: the letters of James Graham 1839-54*, [edited by] Sally Graham, Melbourne: Hyland House, 1985, p.125.
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- 16 See also Anne Marsden, 'Beyond the Public Gaze: the marriage of Caroline Bowles and James Simpson in pre-goldrush Melbourne', *La Trobeana*, vol.19, no.3, November 2020, pp.37-44.
- 17 Michael Cannon, *Old Melbourne Town before the Gold Rush*, Main Ridge, Vic.: Loch Haven Books, 1991, p.340.
- 18 'Our Pension List', identical reports in *Ballarat Star* and *Bendigo Advertiser*, 11 November 1871, p.2; Report of the Board appointed to Consider the Claims of Certain Widows and Families of Deceased Public Servants', *Victoria Parliamentary Papers*, 1874, A.No.7, pp.459-466.
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- 21 The National Gallery of Victoria, State Library Victoria and the National Gallery of Australia hold examples of Georgiana McCrae's miniatures.

Mary Mitchell, a Port Phillip virago

By Susan Priestley

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On Saturday 18 December 1841 youthful George Arden gave readers of his *Port Phillip Gazette* a racy account of some of the previous day's cases brought before magistrates at Melbourne's police court, a somewhat primitive building in Market Square on the western hill, set back from Collins Street and from Market Street on the east.¹ One case concerned Mary Mitchell who was:

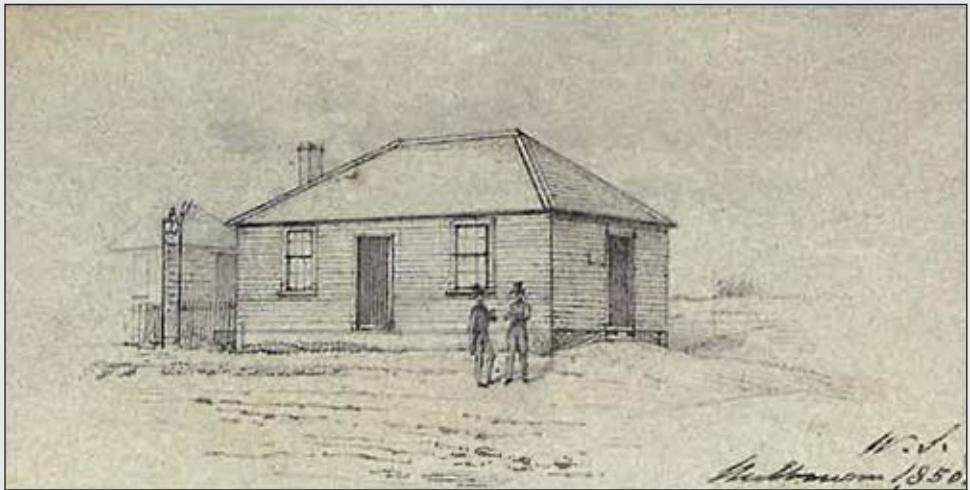
charged with wrangling in the public streets, and taking constable Robertson by the collar, and spinning him round like a piece of roasting beef; such conduct being in contravention of the constitution of the constabulary, and all that kind of thing, the Bench ordered her to pay twenty shillings, on which she exhibited a most ferocious disposition, and was carried from the bar doing high strikes.

There was more:

Bridget Fay, spinster, sister to the above virago, was charged with pitching into the breast of constable Robertson, as

though it had been that of a young pullet, and this on the ground of sisterly affection, and feeling inclined for a spree. The Bench, having duly weighed all the circumstances... sentenced her to pay five shillings.²

Whether these highly charged women were indeed blood sisters or simply claimed a sisterhood of disposition remains a matter of conjecture. No further Bridget Fay reports have been found, at least in the Melbourne press, but there are some pointers to Mary's marital partnership, perhaps an informal one. In July 1841, six months before the street wrangle, 'John Mitchell and wife' were charged with assault by Henry Douglass 'in seizing him by the collar, and hitting him on the nape of the neck with a saucepan, John [being] drunk at the time'. Douglass was a land surveyor living in Collins Street, according to *Kerr's Directory* of 1841, who had just declared himself insolvent, so the dispute may have started over payment.³ Collaring the victim, which meant seizing if not lifting him by the collar, is common to both wrangles, so either or both attackers must have had some height/weight advantage, while the saucepan suggests that a kitchen fire was close at hand. At the



William Strutt, 1825–1915, artist
Old Police Office, Melbourne (1840), 1850

Pencil and wash

Victoria the Golden, plate 7, Parliamentary Library of Victoria
Located in Market Square, eastern side of William Street,
between Collins Street and Flinders Lane

police court hearing, the charge against the wife was dismissed, since legally she was ‘held to act under the coercion of her husband’, but John Mitchell was fined forty shillings.⁴ That two-pound fine was promptly paid, as were those imposed for the street wrangle six months later, indicating that the Mitchells had cash on hand in 1841.

The nature of their business was revealed in late January 1842, seemingly having been under police observation for some time, perhaps prompted by the Douglass incident. The *Port Phillip Gazette* applauded a decision of the ‘Police Bench... [to put down] another of those pests which go under the denomination of Eating and Lodging Houses... John Mitchell, residing in one of the rookeries opposite the *Herald* office in Elizabeth-street... [had] a roaring game as a sly grog seller’. An informer had ‘insinuated himself into the domicile... and insisted on doing the amiable to the ladies by sending out for half a pint of rum’.

However, rather than being ‘sent for’, the rum was fetched from a stock room after money was placed on the table. With the sly grogging charge clearly established, Mitchell ‘was sentenced to pay a fine of £30 *instanter*’. This being ‘inconvenient’, a search warrant was issued for the premises, and ‘the constabulary headed by P.C. Waller went to execute it’. Once there, ‘Mrs Mitchell pitched into Waller [making] his face glow like the embers of a charcoal fire under a grid iron’, and was promptly fined another pound. Her rage likely erupted when it was clear the constable knew where the household

money was stashed. That the rum had been procured for the ladies further suggests that ‘ladies of the night’ frequented the Elizabeth Street eating house.⁵ Its location among cramped tenements, dubbed ‘rookeries’ or ‘slums’ since the eighteenth century, indicates how the rapid subdivision of central Melbourne blocks after the initial land sales in 1837 had enabled the full range of time-honoured urban activities to find a footing.⁶

Within months of the business shut-down, Mary Mitchell had attained her own police court notoriety. On 23 May 1842 the *Melbourne Times*, a short-lived paper produced by Ryland John Howard, summarised the previous week’s cases. The long list included ‘Mary Mitchell, drunk, 10 days imprisonment’;⁷ it became a regular route. In February 1843 she was gaoled for a month for public drunkenness just two days after being released from a previous spell inside. Again in March, being ‘well known to police from her strong opposition to teetotalism’, she was committed under the *Vagrant Act* for three months for being found drunk in the streets for the thirty-fifth time since the passing of the *Licensing Act*, which had come into effect in January 1839.⁸

As A.G.L. Shaw has explained, drinking spirits (not beer) and ensuing antisocial behaviour was commonplace at all levels of Port Phillip society, but less so than in the great metropolis of London, for instance.⁹ The penalties for public drunkenness under the *Licensing Act* were similar to those under the earlier *Vagrant Act*, as was explained in a piece from the *Sydney Herald*



Robert Hoddle, 1794–1881, artist
Melbourne, Port Phillip, from Surveyor-General's Yard, 1840
 Pencil and watercolour
 Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, H258
 The Gaol may be seen to the right on Collins Street

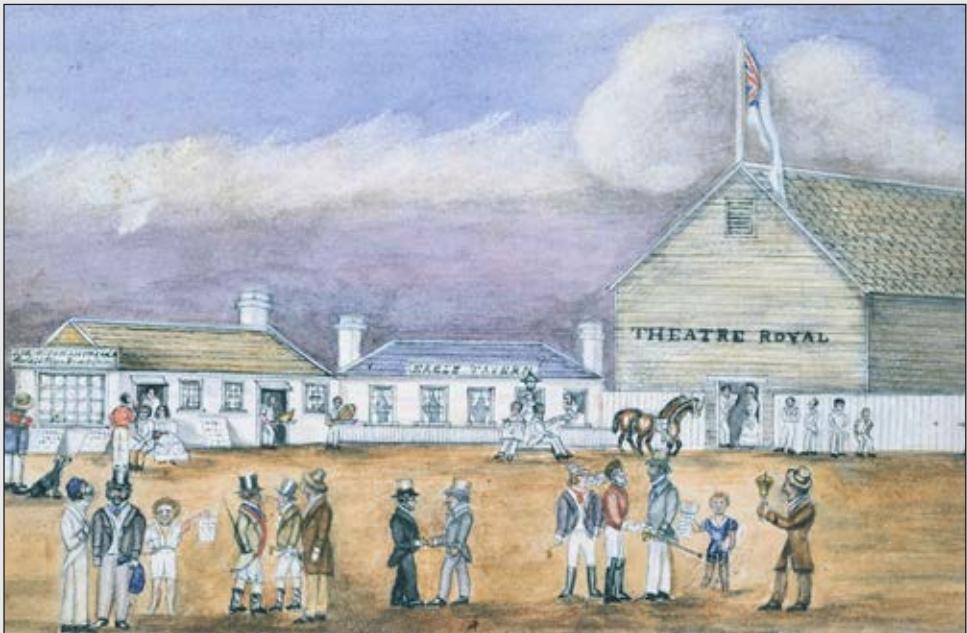
replicated in the *Port Philip Gazette*. After the first conviction, ‘the magistrate may inflict a penalty of not less than five shillings, or more than one pound, and if that be not paid, the drunkard shall be confined in a cell for twenty-four hours, or worked on the treadmill for twelve hours, and on every subsequent conviction the sentence shall be multiplied... so that when a person has been convicted twenty times, he may be sent to the treadmill for twenty days’.¹⁰

Since women offenders were not sent to the treadmill, Mary’s extended prison terms in 1842 and 1843 would have been spent in the gaol erected late in 1839 on the north side of Collins Street near the King Street corner. It was a ‘brick-built, shingle-covered, rough-and-tumble sort of affair, subdivided into three apartments, with two small cells for solitary confinement... Two huts in the vicinity served [as] guard room and quarters for the keeper’.¹¹ That official was George Wintle, the original gaoler appointed to Port Phillip, with his wife Mary supervising the females.¹²

No report of infringements by the ‘old offender’ have been found during 1844 and 1845, perhaps because press coverage had shrunk during the economic depression and/or because the couple had left town seeking gainful work away from the constabulary’s prying eyes. They certainly returned. John could well be the John Mitchell who faced the Melbourne Police Court in early September 1845, charged with refusing to work and ‘maliciously injuring

the property’ of his master, Francis Hobson of the London Inn, which was also in Market Square on the corner of Little Flinders Street (now Flinders Lane). The *Port Phillip Gazette* under its new editor and part owner Thomas McCombie made entertaining drama of the case of ‘The Dancing Cook’.

In his kitchen capacity John had been ‘directed to prepare an *omelet* of the most exquisite flavour for an epicure who had just arrived from the interior’. When he demurred on the grounds that it was after hours and he had just got dressed to visit a few friends and entertain them with a dance medley, he was given ‘a peremptory edict’ to prepare the dish, whereupon the ‘exasperated’ cook threw down ‘a bright Britannia metal coffee pot, and danced *La Polka* on it, to the wonder and dismay of his master. This done he turned several *pirouettes* and... vanished out of the kitchen; he was subsequently apprehended in a state of intoxication’. Asked about the charge, John declared it to be ‘all a flam... I have a right to study the polite arts, if I have a penchant that way, besides it was after hours’. His suggestion that the magistrate should ‘nonsuit’ the case on a point of law and be rewarded by John dancing ‘a Fandango for you to the tune of “All round my Hat”’ (a popular London music hall song) was dismissed as ‘impertinent’. A fine for drunkenness was imposed, as well as ‘10 shillings for the injury done to your master’s property, in default of which you will be committed for one month’. The cashless cook nevertheless had the last word: ‘There being no mill [Melbourne’s



Wilbraham Frederick Evelyn Liardet, 1799–1878, artist
The Eagle Tavern and Theatre Royal (1842) 1875

Watercolour with pen, ink, gouache and pencil
Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, H28250/28

The Theatre Royal (formerly The Pavilion), located in Bourke Street, south side between Swanston and Elizabeth Streets, was considered disreputable.

treadmill was perennially out of order], I'll trip it on the light fantastic toe; gallopades, quadrilles and the polka will be all the go in the gaol for a month to come. Good morning!'¹³

Mary Mitchell's next recorded court appearance was nearly a year later, in June 1846, but this time on summons brought by a neighbour rather than the constabulary. G.D. Boursiquot's *Port Phillip Patriot* made drama of it: 'A little woman who stated her name to be "Miss Harriett Cross" jumped into the witness box and carefully unfolded a package which she drew from under her shawl [revealing] a brickbat of no ordinary dimensions, which had, she averred, been thrown at her with great violence on the previous evening by her neighbour Miss [sic] Mary Mitchell, and struck her on her "head's antipodes"'.¹⁴

Miss Cross whose bottom was so bruised was most likely the bounty immigrant who arrived in January 1841 as a twenty-two-year-old housemaid.¹⁵ In 1846 her domicile was 'in the immediate vicinity of the old play house', otherwise called the Pavilion, which Garryowen knew as 'a ramshackle structure adjacent to the Eagle Tavern' in Bourke Street near the southwest corner of Swanston Street, afterwards the site of the more famous Bull and Mouth Hotel.¹⁶ The neighbourhood had attained an unfortunate celebrity mostly due 'to the peculiar

characteristics of its inhabitants, which are diametrically opposed to good order, sobriety, &c', by implication an incipient slum.¹⁷

A sale advertisement from March 1847 gave on-the-ground details of the area as fourteen land lots, with buildings on just five of them. The Eagle Tavern had four large rooms, 'a spacious verandah, detached kitchen and out offices', its long bar being adjacent but separate with entrances from both the set-back tavern and from Bourke Street. A right-of-way, now called Union Lane, ran through to Little Collins Street. Fronting the lane were three weatherboard two-roomed cottages, one with a brick-built kitchen, while on the corner of the lane fronting Little Collins Street was 'a substantial brick building, divided into four cottages... one with detached brick kitchen and out offices'. Beside it was a 'small two-roomed cottage'.¹⁸ Builders' residue must have littered the vacant ground, which was the setting for the 'exciting exhibitions' about which two police sergeants testified in June 1846: 'Miss Mitchell's doors and windows were smashed by brickbats, which she afterwards distributed indiscriminately amongst her neighbours, under the conviction that by "pitching into" all, she was sure to a certain extent, to punish the actual perpetrator. The magistrates, after a fruitless attempt to conciliate matters, sent Mary a printed invitation to wait upon them at ten o'clock this morning.'¹⁹

On that occasion, advocate John Stephen ‘exerted all his persuasive eloquence to soothe the irritated feelings of both parties’, but without success. Magistrate and Mayor Henry Moor ‘deemed it useless for *him*’ to try, so the case was deferred ‘for a week to procure the attendance of a material witness’.²⁰ Whether the witness declined to attend or the parties settled out of court, nothing further was reported. A speculation is that the prompt for brickbats battle was one of Mary’s loud drunken celebrations, not in the street but in the thin-walled cottage fronting Little Collins Street.

During 1847 she was frequently before court and hence in the newspapers, the accounts all refreshed through elevated language and some puns: ‘Freaks of the Soft Sex – Elizabeth Briggs and Mary Mitchell, two old offenders for giving unequivocal proof of an ardent attachment for more ardent spirits, were severally requested to contribute the sum of ten shillings to her Majesty’s exchequer, but their assets not being sufficient to meet this unexpected liability, they were compelled to retire for a short time from public life’.²¹

Two months later it was: ‘A Rank Incorrigible – Yesterday a lady named Mary Mitchell, a constant attendant at the Police Office, whose face justified the supposition that she had been drunk from her birth, was brought before the magistrates on the old charge of drunkenness. Mary had nothing to say in her defence, and the magistrates, with a view to effect a permanent reformation, sentenced her to three weeks imprisonment’.²²

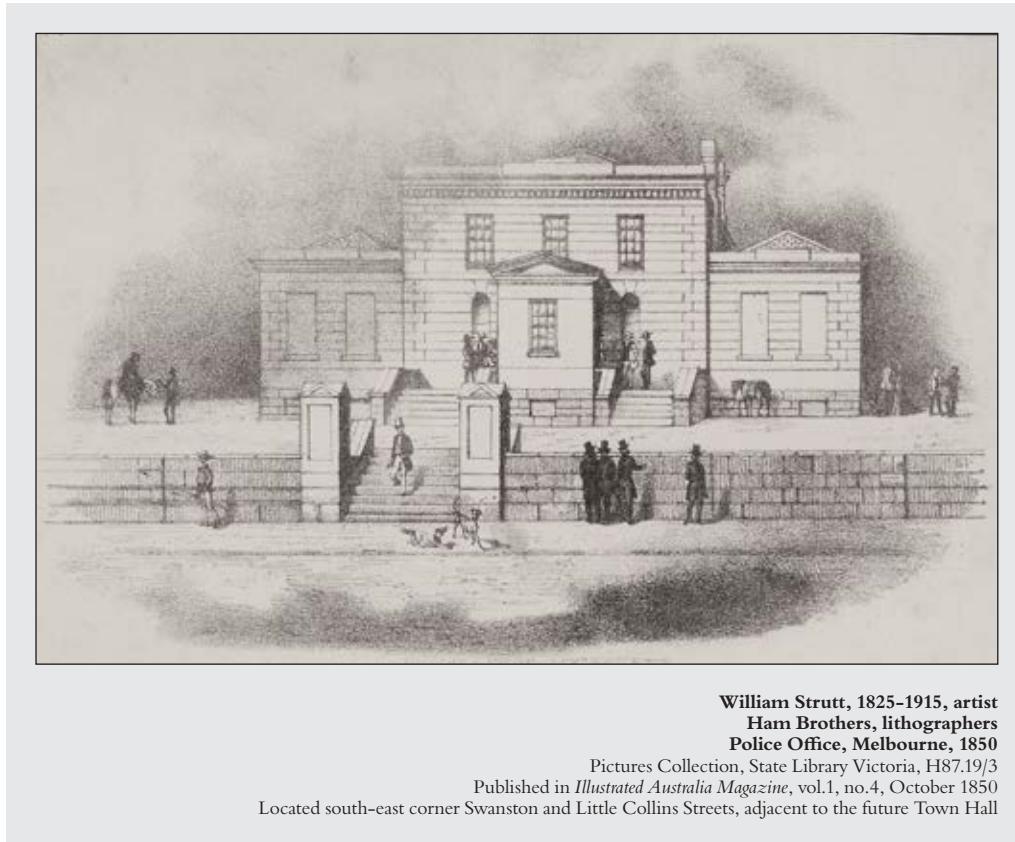
Evocative detail in the *Gazette* identified the magistrates as J.F. Palmer and W. Hull, city councillors rostered in accordance with civic duty. Making her third appearance in as many months, Mary was charged with getting ‘muddled’ on the previous night: ‘She attempted to excite the pity of the bench by declaring that she had just come out of the Bush; consequently very little ‘licker’ overcame her... and though many were the briny tears she shed, and many the promises of future amendment, and... [her] determination to adhere strictly to the principles inculcated by Father Mathew... the worthy magistrates [nevertheless] sent her to chew the cud of reflection, and practise teetotalism in her Majesty’s gaol for three weeks.’²³

For a repeat occasion in August, the newcomer *Argus* reported more baldly: ‘Mary Mitchell, a miserable specimen of female depravity, again made her appearance... upon the old charge of intemperance, with the slight addition of assaulting the constable who took her in charge’. According to the *Patriot*, she

had scratched ‘the visage of the watch-house keeper at the Eastern Hill’.²⁴ The *Argus* report continued that on ‘examining the indents, it was discovered that this was her tenth appearance, and that during the months of March and April, she had been twice committed to gaol for a term of three weeks under the Vagrant Act’. The magistrate appeared puzzled as to what to do with ‘the unfortunate creature’, but ultimately sentenced her to one month’s imprisonment.²⁵ Five months later her public behaviour was even worse, and moreover in mixed company: ‘Mary Mitchell, for being drunk and assaulting the police, was fined in the sum of £10 with the option of taking 3 months instead: the latter, we believe, was preferred. William Allen, for being drunk and exposing his person [that is, urinating] was fined the sum of £10 or three months imprisonment. Mary Mitchell, for a similar offence, was sentenced to be imprisoned for three months’.²⁶

At a hearing early in 1848 some relief emerged. After promising to go out of town, ‘an old promise... as often broken as made’, she was let off with a fine of five shillings for being ‘drunk and committing a malicious injury’. At that moment her husband appeared.²⁷ The *Argus* elaborated with heavy irony: ‘A Happy Couple – Rather a good-looking young woman named Mary Mitchell, whose dissipated habits have repeatedly brought her in unpleasant contact with the authorities, and who was recently committed to gaol on a charge of vagrancy, was brought before the magistrates on Friday, when her husband who had just arrived from the bush, stepped forward and claimed her as his own, appearing not a little proud of his bargain, whom he declared to be the best woman in the world, with the exception of being partial to a glass... this slight failing he was about to obviate by taking her forthwith to the bush, where she would be out of the way of temptation. This being the case the remaining term of Mrs Mitchell’s imprisonment was cancelled, and “the best woman in the world” with her lord and master left the office’.²⁸

A spell in the bush seemed indeed to be salutary. It was the end of January 1849 before another court appearance was reported. Among those charged with taking “a drop of comfort” to a reprehensible extent on the previous night was a lady named Mary Mitchell, with whose name every Constable in the force was perfectly familiar... [But] no one could imagine the portly figure then before the court was the identical once haggard and miserable... object who had... been wont to appear so repeatedly before the “beaks”. Such however proved to be the case, Mrs Mitchell informing the bench that... [she had] abstained from ardent spirits for the good



and sufficient reason that she couldn't obtain them [in the bush and now]... felt like a lassie of "sweet seventeen".²⁹

It was only on coming to town the previous day and meeting 'numerous acquaintances' that she was induced to have a 'nobbler' with one, and a 'nobbler' with another, till at last 'she had some faint recollection of courting balmy sleep in a gutter where she was subsequently found by one of the guardians of the night'. Since there had been no court appearance for over a year, she was let off with the lowest penalty.

The old pattern resumed. A month later, reduced to 'a horrid-looking bloated specimen of the soft sex... [she was] found in the gutter taking her rest... not moved but utterly immovable by the spirit... and conveyed to the watch-house'. On promising to leave town immediately she was let off with a fine of five shillings, or in default forty-eight hours gaol. Quite unabashed, she at once requested that 'a messenger might be despatched to her "old man"' to relieve the anxiety which she was confident he must feel at her protracted absence; to take her love, and tell him she had been so unhappy without him; and last not least to bring the amount of the fine and a trifle over for a few nobblers, as she felt remarkably seedy. One of the "blues" immediately hastened off with the lady's message, being deluded by the prospect of some

recompense, and in a few minutes returned with an answer from the brute (an endearing name for a husband while living) that he'd see her — [? damned] first.³⁰

John's exasperation perhaps faded and the couple apparently left inner Melbourne. Eight months later, in October 1849, Mary Mitchell was a 'miserable-looking' resident of Collingwood, facing the police court 'to answer a double charge... It appeared that, while intoxicated, she had raised uproar in the village, and was taken into custody. She escaped with a fine of 10s'.³¹

The 'inveterate toper' faced court twice during February 1850. On the first occasion she was 'very leniently dealt with... upon representing that she was off per first ship to California', where the gold rushes were in full swing. On the second, 'it being satisfactorily shown that this was her sixth offence within twelve months, she was sent to gaol for three months'.³² Before any magistrate new to the bench, she could make an effective plea, as in July 1850 when Robert Jacomb 'dismissed her with a reprimand, [while warning] of three months imprisonment if she again came before him'. Just a week later he proved true to his word.³³ Recharged shortly after her release, she 'begged on her knees to be forgiven, and Mr [Henry] Condell inflicted the lowest penalty, with a caution that the next

offence would be more heavily punished'.³⁴ Any prison term after August 1849 may have been spent in the watch-house lock-up attached to the 'new' police court in Swanston Street.

John Mitchell's circumstances during 1850 came to light inadvertently through a court case, not before magistrates but in a Supreme Court trial for highway robbery, where he was the victim. After reaching Melbourne from Western Port in charge of a flock of his master's sheep, he had wanted to sell his own mare. At McCormack's pub in Queen Street on 15 May John Rich expressed interest in the horse but doubted its ability to draw a vehicle. Mitchell said he bet five pounds that it would draw, and pulled the appropriate note from his pocket to place on the table. The deal agreed, Mitchell accompanied Rich and his mate to the Angel Inn where the mare was stabled in a back shed. Once there Rich suddenly seized him by the throat and the other man grabbed his hand to stop him drawing a knife from his pocket. Knocked to the ground, he was swiftly robbed of the £5 note, thirteen £1 notes and sixteen shillings and nine pence in silver coin. He immediately reported the matter to the police who afterwards arrested Rich with the coins and four £1 notes still on him. At the trial in July before Justice William à Beckett, Rich's claim that the money was from the sale of a horse at Kirk's Bazaar in no way convinced the jury, who did not leave the box before giving a verdict of guilty. The set sentence of five years 'on the roads' was on the judge's recommendation reduced to three because excessive force had not been used. Nevertheless, John Mitchell was quite deprived; not much money was left from that particular spell in the bush.³⁵

A single 1851 Melbourne press reference to John Mitchell, possibly the Virago's mate, was in the list of nine males fined in early May for offences on Crown land, an abundance of which yet remained on Melbourne's outskirts. The fines were for 'stealing dead wood' or 'cutting wood without a licence' or 'damaging Crown lands by removing loam therefrom'.³⁶ Those fined included 'a youth named William Mitchell and his brother James', which may indicate some family connection. However, that is hard to establish conclusively, since the surname and the personal names were all quite common. Similarly hard to determine is whether John's wood collection was intended for sale or for household use – perhaps in another eating house on Melbourne's ever-spreading fringe.

Collingwood Flat edging Melbourne's north-eastern boundary along Hoddle Street was the stated setting in January 1851 for really outrageous conduct by the 'Virago... [and] old

offender'. One Saturday evening, Mary Mitchell had 'kept the neighbourhood... in an uproar, smashing windows and tearing down palings in all directions and using obscene language'. Local bricklayer Henry Hughes became a prime target when he attempted to restrain her, whereupon 'she attacked him like a tigress, tore his clothes to ribbons and bruised him from head to foot. The only excuse for such unladylike conduct was that Mrs Mitchell was as usual very drunk'. Hughes had her charged with assault, foul language, damage to property, and 'destroying his wearing apparel to the value of 12s'. The frenzied outburst cost her fifty shillings, or in default one month's imprisonment,³⁷ but had minimal effect. In mid-March 1851, she was 'brought before the bench... charged with being drunk for about the fiftieth time... [and] was committed for three months as a Vagrant'.³⁸ Again in October: 'Two incorrigibles named Elizabeth Levitt and Mary Mitchell were yesterday sent to gaol for five days each as habitual drunkards'.³⁹

Apart from another drunkenness fine in mid-February 1852,⁴⁰ the Melbourne press makes no further mention of the 'incorrigible' one, but by that time police court trivia was generally ignored, pushed aside by the flood of gold-associated news. Imposing a prison term equivalent also became a less feasible option for magistrates since gaol staff, like workers at all levels, were abandoning jobs and joining the stream of newcomers to try their luck at the diggings.

Origins and outcomes – alternative possibilities

In early March 1852 one *Mary Ann* Mitchell faced the police court at Geelong for being drunk in public and using obscene language, incurring a fine of 40 shillings or one month's imprisonment.⁴¹ According to a Geelong columnist in the *Argus* of 4 March 1852 she was 'a lady whose very coarse features were adorned with a very pretty bonnet'.⁴² The drunkenness and obscenity evoke shades of Melbourne's Virago, while the bonnet suggests she had funds and knew the advantage of presenting well in court. At another Geelong court hearing in early December 1852, one *Mary* Mitchell was fined five shillings for drunkenness, and George Ogilvie ten shillings. Ogilvie who had 'seen better days and was possessed of a good education' tried to argue that he was not drunk, 'attributing his unsteadiness to an overdose of tobacco which he had inadvertently smoked from a very large pipe'. That was dismissed when the lock-up sergeant attested that his conduct had continued to be 'violent and disorderly in the extreme'. Two weeks later, *Mary* Mitchell as well as two men received minimal fines for drunkenness.⁴³



George Salter & Co., maker
Brass roasting jack, c.1900
National Trust of Australia, LTC 185
Located at La Trobe's Cottage

In late January 1856 *Mary* Mitchell reappeared on the drunkards list at Geelong and was fined twenty-shillings. At the same hearing one William Mitchell was sent to gaol for seven days, it being his third offence. Four other men were fined, another failed to appear and forfeited his £10 bail bond, while two other women being 'habitual drunkards' were sent to gaol.⁴⁴ That raises questions: Was the Geelong *Mary* and *Mary Ann* the same person, and might that person be the Virago, or at least a slightly reformed one, since the 1856 *Mary* was not labelled 'habitual drunkard'. And where was John Mitchell? Was a change in his affections or circumstances the spark for her Collingwood Flat frenzy in January 1851?

A long careful sift through media and official sources, mostly digitised through Ancestry.com, has convinced me that the origins of the Virago and her mate may never be resolved, lying as they do somewhere in the early nineteenth-century decades of migrant settlement in New South Wales, Van Diemen's Land/Tasmania and at Port Phillip/Victoria, where surviving records are far from complete.

Two burials at the Eastern Cemetery in Geelong may offer the firmest threads of evidence as to what became of the pair, although uncertainty lingers: John Mitchell was buried on 29 September 1852, Mary Ann Mitchell on 1 January 1858. For neither burial is there a matching Victorian death certificate, so age

and family connections are unrecorded, but an official 'Inquest held on the body of John Mitchell' gives some insight into the last six months or so of that life.⁴⁵ He had been one of 98 passengers on the schooner *Gold Seeker* from Hobart, which had anchored off Williamstown on Wednesday 28 September. Witness Thomas Kearney 'farmer, residing in Van Diemen's Land', attested that he had employed Mitchell for about six months and during that time he was in good health, sober and industrious. With two others – Samuel Dalrymple and John Buckhurst, both labourers residing in the City of Melbourne – he had joined with Kearney for an expedition to the goldfields. Kearney went ashore at Williamstown and brought back a pint of rum for the four to share during the evening, the party retiring to their respective quarters between ten and eleven o'clock. Mitchell who 'seemed quite fresh with liquor... went into the hold which was full of cartwheels [and eleven] horses... it smelt very badly'. Woken at about six o'clock next morning, they heard that a man was dead. Dalrymple found Mitchell lying on his face on a cart wheel where he had evidently vomited. Lifting and turning him on his back, the body still felt warm, but the 'air in the hold was very hot and oppressive'. With no sign of blood about and since nobody heard any disturbance during the night, the twelve jurymen agreed that 'nothing particular' had caused his death, hence it was 'by the visitation of God'. Dalrymple and Buckhurst signed their witness statements with a mark (X), as did six of the jurymen. A possible identification for John is the twenty-one-year-old tailor from Plymouth who arrived as a bounty immigrant on the *Westminster* on 13 December 1839, and immediately found work on his own initiative. He could both read and write.⁴⁶

That his body was taken for burial at Geelong may indicate that his Melbourne friends knew of some connection there. Was that the Mary Ann Mitchell with the coarse features and pretty bonnet fined in Geelong the previous March? Mary Ann Mitchell's burial on the first day of 1858, usually a holiday, may indicate that her body was simply found with no indication of when or how she died, other than in late December 1857. If she was the Virago, she would lie in the same unmarked area of the cemetery as John. Her origins however remain veiled; what is certain is the expressive vigour of her life at Port Phillip, encapsulated in being 'carried from the bar doing high strikes' when fined for collaring constable Robertson and spinning him round like a piece of beef on a roasting jack.

Endnotes

- 1** P.L. Brown, 'Arden, George, 1820?-1854', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol 1, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1966, pp.26-27. The new police court, opened in August 1849, was in Swanston Street near the Eastern Hill watch-house, the whole site since occupied by Melbourne Town Hall. For a summary see Garryowen, *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne 1835 to 1852; historical, anecdotal and personal*, Melbourne: Fergusson and Mitchell, 1888, Vol.1, pp.95-98, 105-106.
- 2** *Port Phillip Gazette*, 18 December 1841, p.3.
- 3** *Port Phillip Patriot*, 31 May 1841, p.2.
- 4** *Weekly Free Press and Port Phillip Advertiser*, 3 July 1841, 'Police Intelligence' taken from *Port Phillip Herald* [no date].
- 5** *Port Phillip Gazette*, 29 January 1842, p.3.
- 6** *Historical Records of Victoria*, Vol.3: *The Early Development of Melbourne*, ed. by Michael Cannon, associate editor Ian MacFarlane, Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Office 1984, chapter 7.
- 7** *Melbourne Times*, 28 May 1842, p.3.
- 8** *Port Phillip Gazette*, 11 February 1843, p.3, under 'News and Rumours'; 18 March 1843, p.4.
- 9** A.G.L. Shaw, *A History of the Port Phillip District: Victoria before Separation*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996, pp.78-79, 232-233. Casked beer was bulky to transport, while local brews were inferior because of the difficulty of lowering the temperature during fermentation. (Charles Joseph La Trobe was patron of the Port Phillip Auxiliary Temperance Society: formed in 1837 and renamed the Melbourne Total Abstinence Society in 1842.)
- 10** *Port Phillip Gazette*, 5 January 1839, p.3.
- 11** Garryowen, Vol.1, p.185.
- 12** See Anne Marsden, 'Women's Autonomy within Marriage in early Melbourne', in this issue of *La Trobeana*, p.28.
- 13** *Port Phillip Gazette*, 6 September 1845, p.2.
- 14** *Port Phillip Patriot*, 11 June 1846, p.2.
- 15** List of Immigrants per *John Bull*, PROV, VPRS 14/P000, Book No. 2.
- 16** Garryowen, Vol.1, pp.451-455. Performers and audience alike were prone to intoxication.
- 17** *Port Phillip Patriot*, 11 June 1846, p.2.
- 18** *Argus*, 12 March 1847, p.3.
- 19** *Port Phillip Patriot*, 11 June 1846, p.2.
- 20** *Ibid*, 12 June 1846, p.2.
- 21** *Ibid*, 19 January 1847, p.2.
- 22** *Ibid*, 26 March 1847, p.2.
- 23** *Port Phillip Gazette*, 27 March 1847, p.2.
- 24** *Port Phillip Patriot*, 21 August 1847, p.2.
- 25** *Argus*, 20 August 1847, p.2.
- 26** *Port Phillip Gazette*, 2 October 1847, p.2.
- 27** *Ibid*, 8 January 1848, p.2.
- 28** *Argus*, 11 January 1848, p.2.
- 29** *Melbourne Daily News*, 1 February 1849, p.2.
- 30** *Ibid*, 9 February 1849, p.2.
- 31** *Argus*, 27 October 1849, p.2.
- 32** *Melbourne Daily News*, 7 February 1850, p.2.
- 33** *Argus*, 13 July 1850, p.2.
- 34** *Ibid*, 31 October 1850, p.2.
- 35** Trial reports in *Argus*, 17 July 1850, p.4, *Geelong Advertiser*, 17 July 1850, p.2; *Port Phillip Gazette*, 18 July 1850, p.2. Also instanced in Paul R. Mullaly, *Crime in the Port Phillip District 1835-51*, Melbourne: Hybrid Publishers, 2008, p.521.
- 36** *Argus*, 5 May 1851, p.2.
- 37** *Melbourne Daily News*, 15 January 1851, p.2; *Port Phillip Gazette*, 16 January 1851, p.2.
- 38** *Argus*, 26 March 1851, p.4.
- 39** *Ibid*, 16 October 1851, p.2.
- 40** *Ibid*, 19 February 1852, p.2.
- 41** *Geelong Advertiser and Intelligencer*, 3 March 1852, p.2.
- 42** *Argus*, 4 March 1852, p.2.
- 43** *Geelong Advertiser and Intelligencer*, 13 December 1852, Supplement, p.[1]; 27 December 1852, Supplement, p.[1].
- 44** *Geelong Advertiser and Intelligencer*, 1 February 1856, p.4.
- 45** PROV, VPRS 24, 1852/256, Male; brief *Argus* account reprinted in *Geelong Advertiser and Intelligencer*, 4 October 1852, p.2; *Gold Seeker* arrival, *Argus*, 29 September 1852, p.4.
- 46** *Historical Records of Victoria*, Vol.4: *Communications, Trade and Transport*, ed. by Michael Cannon, associate editor Ian MacFarlane, Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Office, 1985, pp.371, 379.



La Trobe's Cottage report

The most successful season of Sunday openings followed the re-opening of La Trobe's Cottage in November 2021 with a 65% increase over pre-Covid visitor levels. There seem to be a number of factors which contributed to this: breaking out of Covid, the return of interstate and international visitors, increased publicity on social media provided by the National Trust, and the availability of pre-booking. Reception is now routinely outside, just inside the double gates, under the gazebo. This provides a welcoming entrance for visitors and a pleasant spot for volunteers to rest between tours.

New items were put on display: a pair of La Trobe's chairs, re-covered with funds provided by the Friends of La Trobe's Cottage, and a spoon given to the family's housekeeper Charlotte Pellet by La Trobe, kindly donated by Charlotte Pellet's descendant, Joy Harley. A watercolour of the Cottage painted by Albert Mockridge (1937), acquired many years ago by the National Trust, is now on display, and a cradle of the period has been placed in the bedroom, where the La Trobe infants would have slept.

Following our Spring Garden Day on 2 October, we are hoping for more busy Sundays this summer. A theme chosen for each month provides improved publicity opportunities

– themes include the garden, La Trobe's art, prefabricated houses, and a focus on family life in La Trobe's time. There are a few group tours booked, Monday to Saturday, but the combined tours with Government House have not yet resumed. At present, Government House accommodates one National Trust tour of twenty people per month.

Rodents and mould were concerns inside the Cottage during the winter months. Rats caused only minor damage, despite their constant presence in the Cottage, but mould affected the two original La Trobe family portraits hanging in the dining room. The National Trust curatorial and maintenance staff are working with the Volunteer Management Team on these matters. The Friends of La Trobe's Cottage will be providing the funds to repair and replace rotting timbers on the exterior of the servants' block, which have been causing increasing concern over recent months.

Some volunteers have left, and some new volunteers have been recruited, but there is still a need for help with managing the openings and the online payment system. La Trobe's Cottage is open on Sundays, October to April, 1-4pm.

Helen Botham
Liaison Coordinator

Forthcoming events

Bookings are essential for all events, except the Sunday service.

2022

DECEMBER

Friday 2

Christmas Cocktails

Time: 6.00 – 8.00pm

Venue: Verdon Chambers,
ANZ Gothic Bank,
Collins Street, Melbourne

Topic: Viewing of the Bank's original
Royal Charter, and a presentation on the
ANZ Bank's art collection.

Admission: \$85.00

Sunday 4

La Trobe Sunday Service

Time: 11.00 am

Venue: St Peter's Church, Eastern Hill,
15 Gisborne Street, East Melbourne

All welcome

2023

MARCH

Sunday 19

La Trobe's Birthday Celebration

Time: 4.30 – 6.30 pm

Venue: La Trobe's Cottage Garden

Speaker: Catherine Gay, PhD candidate,
University of Melbourne, and National
Trust volunteer guide.

Topic: The Cottage Samplers

Admission: \$15.00

Sparkling wine and birthday cake

APRIL

Tuesday 18

Joint La Trobe Society/RHSV

AGL Shaw Lecture

Time: 5.30 – 7.30 pm

Venue: Royal Historical Society of
Victoria, Cnr William and A'Beckett
Streets, Melbourne

Speaker: Dr Ashleigh Green, La Trobe
Society Fellow 2022

Topic: Law and Order Under La Trobe:
The First Prisons of Port Phillip

Bookings

For catering purposes, bookings are essential

Email: secretary@latrobsociety.org.au

Or phone Dianne Reilly on 9646 2112

(please leave a message)

or mobile 0412 517 061

For the latest information on
upcoming events, please refer to
the Society's events page
www.latrobesociety.org.au/events

From the Collection, Australian and New Zealand Banking Group



Nicholas Chevalier, 1828-1902, artist
Mount Cook and the Southern Alps, West Coast, New Zealand. c.1866
Oil on canvas



Jacques Carabain, 1834-1933, artist
Port of Melbourne, 1887
Oil on canvas

Back Issues

Back issues of La Trobeana are available on the Society's website, except for the last issue.

The back issues may be accessed at www.latrobesociety.org.au/LaTrobeana.html
They may be searched by keyword.

Contributions welcome

The Editorial Committee welcomes contributions to La Trobeana which is published three times a year.

Further information about the Journal may be found on the inside front cover and at www.latrobesociety.org.au/LaTrobeana

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BACK COVER

La Trobe Family coat of arms

INSIDE FRONT COVER

Charles Joseph La Trobe's coat of arms,
taken from his bookplate

