



# La Trobeana

The Newsletter of the La Trobe Society of Australia

Grevillea La Trobeana Engraving by Edward La Trobe Bateman - La Trobe Collection, State Library of Victoria

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## FORTHCOMING EVENTS 2004

### Exhibition

A special viewing with the curator (and member of the La Trobe Society) Michael Galimany, of the State Library's permanent pictures exhibition in the new Cowen Gallery has been arranged for La Trobe Society members and friends on **19 February 2004** at 6.00 – 8.00 pm.

This will be the opportunity to meet the CEO and State Librarian, Anne-Marie Schwirtlich.

RSVP: See enclosed Flyer

### Charles Joseph La Trobe's Birthday Party

Come and celebrate La Trobe's 203rd birthday **Saturday 20 March 2004**

Time: 5.30 pm

Venue: La Trobe Cottage      BYO Picnic

Further information will be sent beforehand.

### Joint RHSV/La Trobe Society AGL Shaw La Trobe Lecture

**Tuesday 5 June**, 5.30 pm at RHSV

Speaker: Mr Paul Fox 'The First Primrose from England: sentiment and reality in gardening, early Port Phillip'



## MINIATURE MYSTERY

Leafing through Jacques Petitpierre's chapter on La Trobe and his successive marriages to Sophie de Montmollin and her widowed sister, Rose de Meuron (see Jacques Petitpierre, 'Les deux hymens neuchatelois du premier Gouverneur de l'État de Victoria', in *Patrie Neuchateloise*, vol. 4 Neuchâtel: Messeiller [1955], pp. 129–68), I was struck by two of the illustrations. Their captions describe them as portrait miniatures of Charles Joseph and Sophie La Trobe's younger daughters, Eleanora and Cécile. Reproduced in their ornate nineteenth-century frames, they are charming paintings, clearly the work of a talented professional artist. My thoughts immediately flew to a favourite book, *Georgiana's Journal* (3rd edn (Waterloo, NSW: Brooks, 1978), which is an edited (and somewhat rewritten) transcription of the journals kept by Georgiana McCrae during her early years in Melbourne—where she arrived in 1841—and later at Arthur's Seat on the Mornington Peninsula. A professional portrait painter in Scotland before her marriage, Georgiana painted several miniatures of friends and acquaintances in Melbourne (but without charging a fee, having been forbidden by her husband to do so).

Georgiana became a good friend of the La Trobe family, and in her journal she recorded having painted portraits of the two older girls, Agnes and Nellie (Eleanora) in January 1844 (pp. 151–53).

I am convinced that the miniatures illustrating Petitpierre's chapter (pp. 143 and 144) are the ones painted by Georgiana McCrae. Although Petitpierre captions the portraits 'Eléonore La Trobe' and 'Cécile La Trobe à 7ans' [at seven years of age], it is quite possible that the wrong names were written on the backs of the paintings in later years. The date given by Petitpierre, 1850, also differs from Georgiana's account, but in that very year, she painted a portrait of the La Trobes' only son, Charlie (p. 236), so perhaps the dates of the sittings were later confused. Georgiana seldom named or dated her portraits; the details were probably added by a family



The Land Purchase Grant was signed and sealed by the Governor of New South Wales, Sir George Gipps, on 24 August 1841. The land purchased was named 'Jolimont' after Jolimont in Switzerland, outside Neuchâtel, where La Trobe and his Swiss wife, Sophie (née de Montmollin) had honeymooned.

The Jolimont land was described as sloping gently from north to south, well grassed, and running down to the tree-fringed bends of the Yarra. The front prefabricated house was situated approximately in the centre of the block facing the Yarra River.

La Trobe's time in Melbourne ended in May 1854, and one of his concerns before leaving was the use to which he would put his estate. He had resisted the temptation to be reimbursed by the Governor of New South Wales for his purchase of the property, so when he left Melbourne, he had to make plans for its immediate rental and eventual sale. He acknowledged that the land and improvements at Jolimont:

... constitute at present my whole fortune ... and I must therefore see it turned to account in one way or other. It is handed over to my attorneys in a position that it be at once sold or leased, wholly or in part.

The 1854 lithograph of Jolimont shows the layout of the grounds, houses and garden (Figure 3).

La Trobe's wishes were made clear in a Power of Attorney executed with his solicitors. In March 1854 when he instructed his attorneys, La Trobe had no idea that the rental and gradual sale of the property would be his only income for the next nine years.

He had stipulated that the property would be 'advantageously disposed of in one lot' to enable him to purchase a home in England. However, that was not to be.

The question of La Trobe's influence on the subdivision of this land has been debated for some time, and continues to be debated. The first mention of this issue arises in E W Moorhead's article 'Excursion to Jolimont' in the *Victorian Historical Magazine* Vol. 27, 1956. Moorhead, rightly, concluded that La Trobe was never connected with Jolimont Square, having left Melbourne four years before it existed. In recent times, when discussion of the Square has arisen, surveyors, planners and local residents have argued that La Trobe was influential in the Square's development. This is clearly not the case.

Survey work on the estate began in July 1854, and in March 1857, Charles Laing was paid to mark out the land for sale. Advertisements for the sale of land then appeared in the *Argus*, *Leader* and *Age*.

The first subdivision was made by a sale to Sir James Palmer, surgeon and politician. Research undertaken by F J Kendall and Miles Lewis suggests



**Figure 3 1854 Lithograph of Jolimont**

Source: Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria

Palmer had agreed with La Trobe's solicitors prior to the public sale, that he would purchase some of the land. In March 1857 he purchased lots 2, 3 and 4, and in May he purchased lots 5 and 6. The total purchase price was £5,500.

It is clear that Palmer had plans for a development at Jolimont as early as 1857. His application to the Melbourne Town Council for a building permit is dated 4 September 1857. The application is specifically for 'foundations for imported houses'. Charles Laing, who had earlier been involved in surveying the site for McArthur and Powlett, La Trobe's solicitors, was involved in the early survey work, 'marking out the ground for allotments' and laying out the concept of the square for Palmer. However, Laing died on 29 September 1857, only weeks after Palmer's application for building permits was submitted to the Melbourne Town Council. Original plans for the first subdivision have not survived. Palmer had lived in Golden Square in London, and he possibly modeled his development on the London idea of a square. However,



**Figure 4 Edward La Trobe Bateman sketch of Jolimont.**

Source: La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.

erecting five timber prefabricated houses on the site was a far cry from the fashionable idea of a London square. The five houses must have been completed in late 1858 or mid-1859 as they were recorded in the Rate Books compiled at the end of July 1859. By 1864, Palmer's development became known as Jolimont Square.

In 1869 a portion of Palmer's land had been sold to Miss Mary Ross Vernon and Miss Lucy Ann Vernon; that portion of land has been known as 117 Wellington Parade South from its earliest days. The land, located in the north-west corner of the square, contained twenty-two perches or thereabouts. A 'Notice of Intent to Build' was lodged on 25 September 1869, and a large villa, known as 'Mornington' was constructed. It is likely that the stone wall surrounding the square was built at this time, as the boundary of the wall extends only partially along Wellington Parade South, past their property.

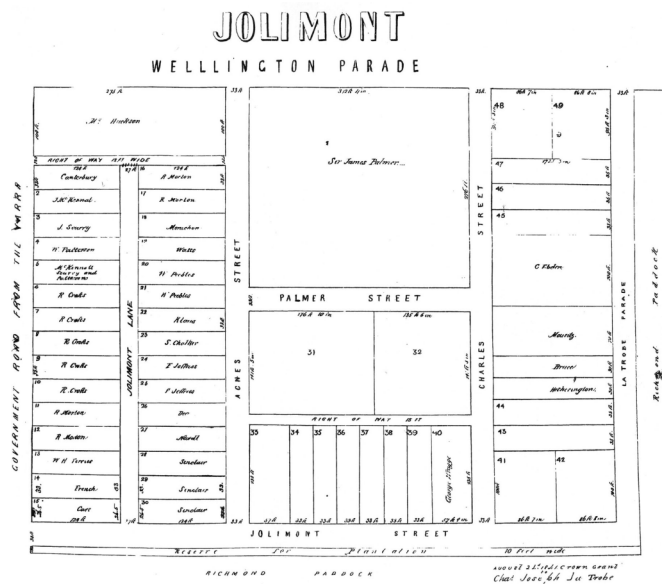
Sir James Palmer died on 23 April 1871, and under the terms of his Will, Robert William Pohlman and David Charteris McArthur (La Trobe's attorney) were appointed attorneys to sell Palmer's lands.

The Certificate of Title describes the land as 'containing one acre three roods and fifteen perches or thereabouts'. From the date of purchase of Jolimont Square in 1885, a Mrs Ball lived in Jolimont, but not in one of the houses in Jolimont Square. It was not until 1893 that Tabitha Ball moved into Jolimont Square, initially occupying 'Highgate' at No. 15. Jolimont remained solely owned by Mrs Ball until 1902 when it was transferred into the names of her five children: Effie Eliza, Amy Frances, Susan Caroline, Agnes Gertrude and Harry Joseph.<sup>1</sup> The certificate of Title describes the land 'containing one acre three roods and fifteen perches or thereabouts'.

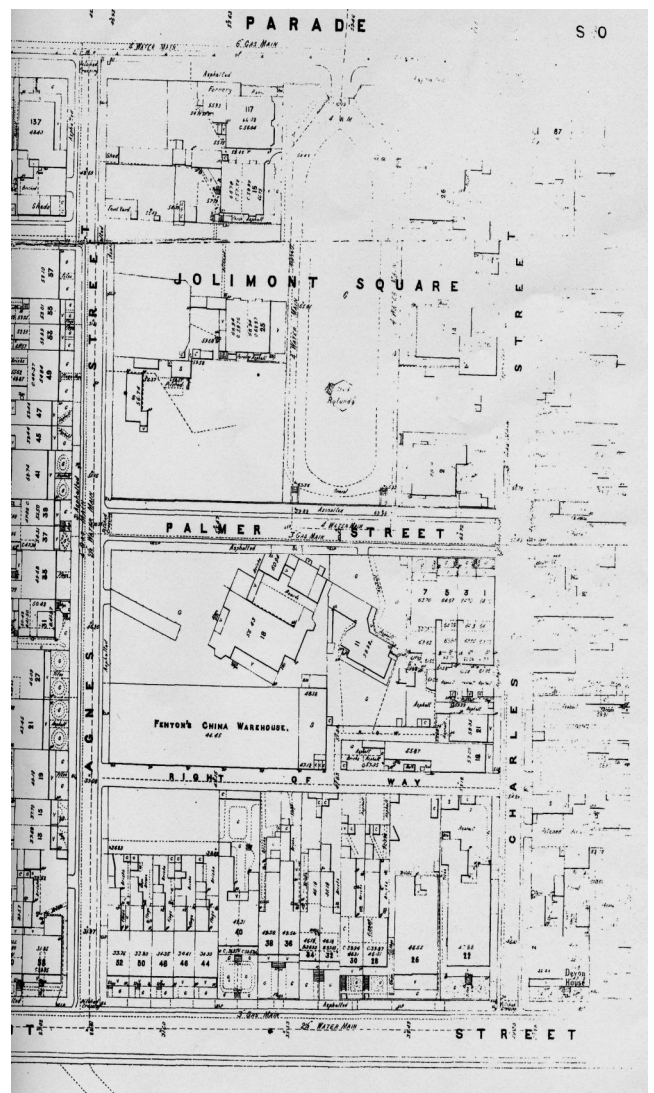
On 3 March 1903, this group, excluding Amy Lewis, then re-purchased the Vernon sisters' home, 'Mornington', built in 1869. This consolidated Jolimont Square back into the original land purchased by Palmer and into one ownership. In 1904 'Redcourt' was constructed. In 1916 Susan Ariell and Harry Joseph Ball became the owners of the entire property as Tenants in Common in equal shares. While the brother and sister lived in 'Mornington', the remaining houses within the Square were leased to tenants.

Tabitha Ball died in September 1919 and her estate was bequeathed in trust to her five children. At the time of her death, she also owned eight properties in Fitzroy and Carlton. Her personal estate included 4,100 Ball & Welch Shares. Her Real and Personal property was valued at £14,264.

In 1924 the remaining family members sold the property to the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society of Victoria. Harry Joseph Ball died on 16 June 1926.



**Figure 5 1865 Plan of Allotments**  
Source: Graham-La Trobe Papers, University of Melbourne Archives



**Figure 6 1895 MMBW Plan**  
Source: :Graham-La Trobe Papers, University of Melbourne Archives

The eldest daughter, Effie Ball, remained a Director of Ball & Welch until her death in 1945.

What of the rest of the estate? As we know, it was subdivided into residential allotments, and we think the plans were drafted by Charles Laing prior to his death.

What of the heritage left by La Trobe, the first owner of Jolimont? Within the original twelve and a half acres we see the main streets commemorating the La Trobe family. They were named - Agnes, after his daughter, Charles after his son. Sophie Lane, originally Jolimont Lane, was named after his wife. The association with La Trobe remains with the naming of the streets within the precinct. Sir James Palmer is also remembered for his part in the development of Jolimont Square. The street dividing the square, originally Torrington Street (very likely after the London Square), was renamed Palmer Street.

Dr Fay Woodhouse  
Senior Historian  
Allom Lovell & Associates

### References

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### **SIR JAMES FREDERICK PALMER (1803-1871)<sup>2</sup>**

The third character in the story of Jolimont Square is James Frederick Palmer, a man who made great, fundamental and sustained contributions to the development of Melbourne and the Colony of Victoria, but who is today largely forgotten. His name is perpetuated by several minor streets in inner Melbourne,<sup>3</sup> and by Palmer Hall at the State Library of Victoria.<sup>4</sup> Yet in the great institutions he helped establish, including the State of Victoria itself, his legacy pervades much of modern life, at Parliament House, at the Melbourne Town Hall, at the State Library, at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, at the University of Melbourne, and in the state education system.

<sup>2</sup> Gross, A. 'Palmer, Sir James Frederick (1803-1871)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol.5, pp. 392-393

<sup>3</sup> In Jolimont itself, in Richmond, South Melbourne, Collingwood and FitzRoy.

<sup>4</sup> Presently (2003) reduced to doing duty as the cloakroom.



**Figure 7 Sir James Frederick Palmer (1803-71)**  
Image courtesy Parliament of Victoria Library

James Frederick Palmer was born at Great Torrington in Devon on 7 June 1803, the son of John Palmer, an Anglican clergyman. His father's mother was the sister of Sir Joshua Reynolds, one of the foremost British painters of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Palmer's early education is not clear, but having decided on a career in medicine, he was articled to Dr John Gunning (1773-1863), the distinguished military surgeon. Gunning was (at least nominally) staff surgeon to St George's Hospital from 1800 to 1823, and held surgical posts in the army, including Inspector of Hospitals for British forces in Europe. He was present at the Battle of Waterloo, and it was he who amputated Lord Raglan's right arm. After Waterloo, Gunning remained in France and set up practice in Paris.

Having completed his articles, Palmer was appointed a house surgeon to St George's Hospital in 1824, and later became senior surgeon at St James' Dispensary. He gained his MRCS in 1826. In 1831 he married Dr Gunning's third daughter, Isabella.

During this time, Palmer edited the works of the great anatomist John Hunter (1728-93), publishing them in five volumes (four text and one plates) from 1835 to 1837. Hunter had been elected surgeon to St George's in 1768, and died there of a heart attack on 16 October 1793. Although Hunter wrote a number of highly important texts, and made voluminous notes about his cases and experiments, only three of his works

were published in his lifetime. Most of his original scrawled notes were destroyed by his brother-in-law Sir Everard Home in 1823, and they survived only because they had already been faithfully and laboriously transcribed by his amanuensis William Clift.<sup>5</sup> The full publication of Hunter's major works, just as his memory seemed in danger, was therefore very timely. And despite numerous shortcomings, Palmer's edition has remained the standard collected edition for almost 170 years.

Although his career appeared now to be on the verge of success, in the late 1830s Palmer failed to secure two medical appointments. These rejections seem to have caused him considerable distress, and he decided to emigrate to the colonies. He arrived in Sydney in September 1840, but by November was in Melbourne<sup>6</sup>. He registered on the first roll of the Medical Board of New South Wales on 21 February 1842, and is listed as a surgeon by Kerr, his address given simply as 'Flinders Street'.

But by now, Palmer's interests were turning away from surgery. He obviously saw opportunities in the colony which promised more lucrative and engaging rewards than stitching wounds and amputating limbs. He abandoned surgical practice to become a cordial manufacturer, then went into business as a wine merchant. And he started to dabble in politics.

His business interests provided him with enough income to ensure prosperity. He established a ferry across the Yarra at Hawthorn, known as 'Palmer's Punt'. The proceeds from this service enabled him to build a substantial house at Hawthorn, which he called 'Burwood'.<sup>7</sup> From 1847 to 1854 he held pastoral interests in association with James Henty and (Sir) Francis Murphy, another surgeon who had abandoned practice for more profitable fields.

On the establishment of representative government, Palmer was elected as a Member for Western Province. The Chamber elected him President, and he remained in the chair until his retirement from political life in 1870.

Palmer was also at one time chairman of the local branch of the Liverpool & London Fire & Life Assurance Co. He ventured into land speculation, as Jolimont Square and Palmer Parade (Richmond) attest. At his death, his estate was valued for probate at £13,000.

<sup>5</sup> Many of these notes were subsequently edited and published by Richard Owen in 1861.

<sup>6</sup> This is the date of arrival given by Palmer with his signature on an address presented in 1867 by the Old Colonists' Association to the Duke of Edinburgh (Graham, H.B.: "Happenings of the now long past: the Centenary of the Medical Society of Victoria", *Medical Journal of Australia* 1952/II, p.217).

<sup>7</sup> After Palmer's death, Burwood passed to the theatrical entrepreneur George Coppin, and then to Sir William MacPherson, who renamed it 'Invergowrie' (*ibid.*).



**Figure 8 Palmer's Punt Richmond, c.1851**

Source: La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria

Palmer's forays into politics saw him elected Mayor of Melbourne in 1845-46. In 1848 he entered the national arena by being elected a representative of the Port Phillip District in the New South Wales legislature. This experience proved abortive, due to the difficulties of travel, but it does seem to have set Palmer on the road to establishing an independent legislature in Melbourne. In 1851 the Colony of Victoria was granted independence from New South Wales, and an interim Legislative Council was created. Palmer was elected to this chamber, and was appointed Speaker, a post he held throughout the Council's five-year lifespan. He served on the select committee which drafted the Victorian Constitution in 1853.<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 9 Sir James Plamer's home, 'Burwood', later 'Invergowrie'**

Source: La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria

Palmer was knighted in 1857. In supporting the recommendation, La Trobe described him as 'a gentleman by birth, education and profession. .... I always respected him as honest'. Palmer's professional migration from surgery to politics did not spell an end to his interest in medicine. He was one of the founders of the Port Phillip Medical Association (later the Medical Society of Victoria), although he failed to attend its first meeting on 16 May 1846, and his membership seems to have quickly lapsed. In contrast, one of his most enduring loyalties was to the (Royal) Melbourne Hospital, of which he was the virtual founder, and which

<sup>8</sup> Wright, R.: *A blended House: the Legislative Council of Victoria 1851-1856* (Melbourne, Department of the Legislative Council, 2001), p. 60.

he served to the end of his days. He moved the motion to found the hospital at a public meeting on 5 March 1845. He served on its fundraising and building committees. As Mayor, he assisted at the laying of the foundation stone. He served as vice-president of its board from 1851 to 1865, then as its president until 1871.<sup>9</sup> He resigned the presidency, on grounds of ill-health, on 3 April 1871, less than three weeks before his death.<sup>10</sup>

The other area in which Palmer was keenly interested was education. Late in 1851 a Board of National Education was established, with Palmer as its chairman. In May 1852, the Board, consisting of Palmer, Hugh Childers, Thomas Power, C.H. Ebdon, George Rusden and William Westgarth, met with the Lieutenant-Governor to petition for land on which to erect a school. Within fifteen minutes La Trobe had granted them the land bounded by Spring, Albert, Flint (now Nicholson) Streets and Victoria Parade, reserved in perpetuity for educational purposes.<sup>11</sup> By 1854 an imposing edifice, designed by A.E. Johnson, was complete. It housed the Board's offices, schools for boys, girls and infants, and a training college for teachers. This was the beginning of a system of universal secular education which eventually evolved into the modern state school system. As the Board's program expanded, the National Model and Training Schools became the hub of a statewide educational network. Palmer presided over this empire of learning until 1870. Two years later, responsibility for education was taken over by the state government.

Two other important institutions owe a debt to Palmer, the University of Melbourne and the State Library of Victoria. With Childers, Redmond Barry, W.F. Stawell and others, Palmer sat on the select committee which constituted the University,<sup>12</sup> and he served on its first council.<sup>13</sup>

He was a member of the powerful Medical School Committee from 1864 to 1870. He was equally involved with the library. He was one of the founders, and remained an original trustee of the Melbourne Public Library.

He was a devout Anglican and an active lay member in the Church of England. He was a founder and principal parishioner of Christ Church Hawthorn.



**Figure 10 Model School, Spring Street, 1857**

Source: La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria

Sir James Palmer died at 'Burwood' on 23 April 1871, and was buried three days later in the Melbourne General Cemetery. A memorial window by Ferguson & Urie, depicting the virtues Faith, Hope and Charity, after a design by Sir Joshua Reynolds, was installed in the north transept of Christ Church Hawthorn.

Palmer does not seem to have had a large circle of friends, although he moved widely in the upper levels of Melbourne society. His associates were men like C J La Trobe, Hugh Childers and Sir Francis Murphy, the first Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

These men were held together by common aims and ideals, whether in business or the public realm. Palmer does not seem to have been exceptionally talented, or graced with artistic flair. Unlike Barry, he seems to have held little interest in art. But he did have boundless energy and was bursting with ideas. He has been described as an 'unpluggable wordspout'.

Palmer was respected by his contemporaries for being honest, earnest and reliable. It is indicative of his sense of public duty, that in 1851 he had his own very profitable ferry at Hawthorn replaced with a timber bridge (later replaced by the present iron structure), so that the public would benefit from free access to Kew and the areas beyond.



**Figure 11 Parliament House**

Source: La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria

<sup>9</sup> Gregory, A.: *The ever open Door: a History of the Royal Melbourne Hospital 1848-1998* (South Melbourne, Hyland House, 1998), pp. 5-12, 21, 25-26.

<sup>10</sup> *Australian Medical Journal* 16 (1871). pp.126-127.

<sup>11</sup> Allan, J.A.: *The Old Model School* (Melbourne, MUP, 1934), pp. xix-xx.

<sup>12</sup> Scott, E.: *A History of the University of Melbourne* (Melbourne, MUP, 1936), p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Russell, K.F.: *The Melbourne Medical School* (Melbourne, MUP, 1977), p. 1.

As his obituary put it:

Sir James Palmer can hardly be said ever to have been a popular man, but he had deservedly the reputation of being an honourable citizen earnestly advocating what he believed to be for the good of his adopted country.

Melbourne has inherited two Palmerian axes, along which the perceptive can discern his work. There is the private one, along Flinders Street, where he had his surgery in the very early days of Melbourne, through Jolimont and along Bridge Road (and adjacent Palmer Street) to his home in Hawthorn. And there is the public one, along Swanston Street, encompassing the Town Hall, the original Melbourne (later the Queen Victoria) Hospital, the Public (State) Library and the University of Melbourne. Parliament House sits apart from these axes, but it too is a part of the jigsaw of clues, like Jolimont Square, to the legacy of James Frederick Palmer.

*Geoffrey Down*

*Curator*

*Royal Australasian College of Surgeons*

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Contributions of articles for the Newsletter are welcomed. They should be directed to the Hon. Editor, Dr Fay Woodhouse at:  
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*La Trobeana* is the Newsletter of the La Trobe Society Inc. It appears twice yearly, with news of forthcoming events, and reports of interest to the membership. Contributions are always welcome.

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#### **VALE PETER WEST**

It is with great sadness that we record the death of Peter West. Peter and his wife, Betty La Trobe West, were foundation members of the La Trobe Society. He will be greatly missed for his gentlemanly manner and his participation in and enjoyment of La Trobe Society functions. Our sympathy is extended to Betty and all his family.



**Figure 12 Peter Gordon West**  
**28 September 1922 – 5 December 2003**

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