

# LA TROBEANA



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

Vol. 7, No. 3, November 2008

ISSN 1447-4026

*La Trobeana*  
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***La Trobeana***

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FRONT COVER

**Thomas Woolner, 1825 – 1892, sculptor**  
**Charles Joseph La Trobe**  
**1853, diam. 24.0cm. Bronze portrait medallion showing the left profile of Charles**  
**Joseph La Trobe. Signature and date incised in bronze I.I.: T. Woolner. Sc. 1853:/M**  
**La Trobe, Charles Joseph, 1801 – 1875. Accessioned 1894**  
**La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.**

## CONTENTS

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<b>A Word from the President</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Call for Assistance – Editorial Committee</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Forthcoming Events</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Christmas Cocktails</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Government House Open Day</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>La Trobe’s Birthday 2009</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>A Word from the Treasurer</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>From Charles La Trobe to Charles Gavan Duffy: selectors, squatters and Aborigines</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The Walmsley House at Royal Park: La Trobe’s “Other” Cottage</b>	<b>12</b>
<b><i>Provenance</i>: The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria</b>	<b>19</b>



# A Word from the President

It is hard to believe that the year is nearly at an end. Typically, it has been a productive year for our Society.

This is the third issue for 2008 of *La Trobeana*, a journal of which we are rightly proud. The Editor, Dr Fay Woodhouse, is to be congratulated on the interesting and relevant journal she produces, and on the high publication standards she achieves.

Judging by the many comments I receive from the membership, the Society is going from strength to strength, with the second La Trobe Society Fellowship at the State Library, this time sponsored by the Shoppee Family and being undertaken by Dr Wayne Caldw.

A highlight of the year was the inaugural La Trobe Society Dinner at the Lyceum Club. I am only sorry that I was unable to be there to hear Geoffrey Edwards' illustrated address on the colonial collections at the Geelong Gallery. However, I do look forward to seeing many of you at the Christmas Cocktails function at the Melbourne Savage Club on Friday 5 December. It promises to be a delightful evening. And then, we can look forward to more La Trobe Society interest in 2009!

Season's Greetings to you all,  
Rodney Davidson  
President



## Call for Assistance – Editorial Committee

For the past six years I have been editing *La Trobeana*. In this time, as members are aware, the Committee has taken the publication from a simple 16-page newsletter to the fine publication that it is today. Its new format and design is attractive, stylish and easy to read. As you can see, *La Trobeana* presents a much wider range of material including major articles, member news and book reviews. Since upgrading to the Journal format and design, we have commissioned articles and published much ground-breaking material.

However, while I will remain involved with *La Trobeana*, the time has come for me to step back from the hands-on development and production of the journal and to allow others with ideas and ability to make a valuable contribution to this Journal and the Society.

The Committee is seeking expressions of interest from members interested in forming an Editorial Committee of four. It's time for *La Trobeana* to become a collaborative effort. Themes, articles and authors will be discussed and tasks agreed by members of the Editorial Committee. But this will not be an onerous task for Committee members – we aim to enjoy ourselves and at the same time feel personally and intellectually challenged.

As co-ordinator of the Editorial Committee, I would welcome the opportunity to speak to any member with the slightest inkling of becoming involved and joining the Committee. I can be contacted on 04270 42753 or 9898 6558. Please feel free to phone with any ideas, queries or suggestions.

With best regards  
Dr Fay Woodhouse  
Honorary Editor  
**La Trobeana**

## Forthcoming Events

### Christmas Cocktails

Don't forget that, in La Trobe Society tradition, members will continue our perambulation of Melbourne's distinguished Clubs to celebrate Christmas in 2008.

This year, our esteemed member, Mr Shane Carmody, will host our Christmas Cocktails at the Savage Club in Bank Place. On Friday 5 December we will assemble as a merry group, keen to hear of the progress made by the 2008-09 La Trobe Society Fellow, Dr Wayne Caldwell. He will speak to us about his study, *Perceptions of Place: the European experience of Gippsland, 1839 to 1844*, which examines two opposing sets of perceptions about Gippsland, firstly as seen by explorers and squatters, and secondly, by the colonial government which attempted to impose law and order in the province.

The Melbourne Savage Club at Bank Place, established in the late nineteenth century, is one of Melbourne's delightfully eccentric clubs, with a flavour all of its own. We look forward to our evening of festivities.

Cost: \$60.00

RSVP: 28 November 2008 Phone: 9646 2112  
(leave a message)

### Correction ...

In the August edition of La Trobeana, the Editor mistakenly identified Cecily Adams and John Adams as Mr & Mrs Shoppee. My apologies to the Shoppees and the Adams for this error.

Fay Woodhouse



RHSV Lecture – Cecily and John Adams and  
Professor John Barnes

## Government House Open Day

Monday, 26 January 2009

We wish to alert members to this event which is free and is an opportunity to view the State Apartments, the Private Apartments and the Governor's Study.

Visitors are invited to tour the house and picnic in the grounds. Entertainment is provided for children and refreshments are available for purchase. Musical performances will be held in the grounds and the house.

Gates open at 10:00 a.m. until 3.00 p.m.  
Government House Drive, Melways Map Ref. 2G, A11

Parking is available in Birdwood Avenue and St. Kilda Road. For further information contact Alex Hodgson or Chris Cregan on 9645 4211

## La Trobe's Birthday 2009

Plans to celebrate Charles Joseph La Trobe's 208<sup>th</sup> birthday are underway. Our celebration will be held on Saturday 21 March from 5pm so mark this date in your 2009 diary. Details will be advertised early in the New Year.



## A Word from the Treasurer

Finances of the society are strong with an amount invested in an online Westpac account paying good interest.

Our sources of income are small amounts from functions and Christmas Card sales; membership subscriptions only cover *La Trobeana* and postage etc. The flyers for this year's card and the invitation for the Christmas Cocktails at the Savage Club were sent out earlier this month and we ask for your support in both cases.

Some membership renewals are outstanding and I appreciate that they may have been overlooked in these turbulent times but if you could remit them it would be much appreciated.

Looking forward to seeing you again at the Christmas Cocktails and wishing you all Season's Greetings.

John Drury  
Honorary Treasurer

# From Charles La Trobe to Charles Gavan Duffy: selectors, squatters and Aborigines

By Dr Val Noone

*It was our great pleasure to welcome Dr Val Noone to the stage on Tuesday 3 June to present the 2008 La Trobe Society/Royal Historical Society AGL Shaw Lecture. The importance of this lecture is reflected in the fact that we have reprinted it below in full.*

Like all those who study and write about Victoria I want to express appreciation to Professor Alan Shaw for his enormous contribution both as an historian and also as a supporter of the libraries and societies on which we all depend. I am greatly honoured to be invited to give this 2008 AGL Shaw Lecture.

My lecture is about Victoria in the 1850s when, in the words of Professor Alan Shaw, “the land question was giving no end of trouble”.<sup>1</sup> I intend to explore the role of Charles Gavan Duffy, an Irish rebel who became premier of Victoria, in two important struggles over land in the rapidly growing colony between 1859 and 1862.<sup>2</sup> The first is not well known, namely Duffy’s 1859 meeting with a delegation of Aborigines from the Goulburn River district. The second is famous and still controversial, namely his leadership in what is known as the 1861–2 Duffy Land Act. Up to now, writers and speakers about both events have treated them separately.<sup>3</sup>

I will begin with some background on Duffy. This will be followed by sections on each of the two moments under consideration, after which come some reflections.

## Duffy a ‘major acquisition’

Charles Gavan Duffy, a key figure in the Young Ireland movement, was born in 1816 in Monaghan town in the province of Ulster, the son of shopkeepers John Duffy and his wife Ann née Gavan.<sup>4</sup> Charles trained as a journalist and lawyer. In 1842, at the age of twenty-six, Duffy co-founded, with Thomas Davis and John Dillon, the culturally-focused, politically-nationalist, religiously-tolerant journal *The Nation*. During the winter of 1843–44 he was imprisoned at the same time as Daniel O’Connell, and tried for sedition. After his release he joined the critics of what they saw as O’Connell’s compromise politics.

At the height of the Famine, departing from his usual parliamentary mode of action, Duffy supported the Young Irelander armed rising led by William Smith O’Brien. For that he was tried for treason felony four times but, with clever legal work, got off. His description of the Famine as “a fearful murder committed on the mass of the people” has been long remembered. During the early 1850s Duffy took on the leadership of the Tenant League and, as Member of Parliament for New Ross, was a founder of the Irish Parliamentary Party.

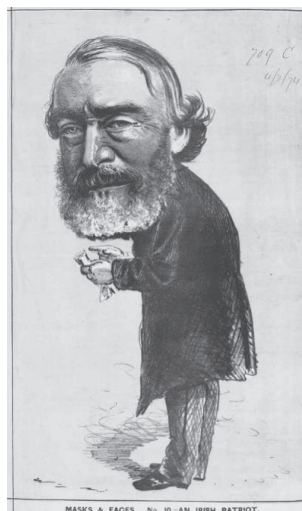


Figure 1 An Irish Patriot (Caricature of Sir Charles Gavan Duffy). Lithograph. Victorian Patents Office Copyright Collection. 1874. La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria. H96. 160/2532.

Some setbacks led Duffy to choose emigration to Australia: during 1855, he concluded that his work for land reform and for an independent block of Irish parliamentarians at Westminster had, for the time being, failed. Firstly, Irish MPs such as William Keogh and John Sadler took cabinet positions and thereby broke ranks with the Duffy-led caucus of Irish parliamentarians at Westminster. Second, Archbishop Paul Cullen, then of Armagh, at that time opposed the Tenant League and favoured closer cooperation with the ruling British party. In August 1855, when the Vatican issued a ruling that favoured Cullen over Duffy, Duffy resigned from parliament.

Within five months of leaving Westminster, he and his family were living in pleasant Hepburn Street, Hawthorn, in Melbourne’s inner east. In summary, Duffy spent 24 of his 87 years in Victoria. Before he retired in 1880 he would become premier for twelve months in 1871–2, knighted in 1873 and speaker of the House of Assembly from 1877 to 1880. In 1880 he moved to Nice in southern France.

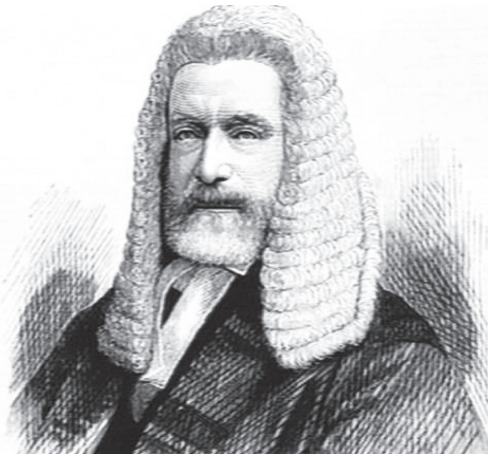


Figure 2 Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, Speaker of the Victorian Assembly. Wood engraving. Australasian Sketcher, 1 September, 1877. La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria. A/S01/09/77/84.

While pondering his options in late 1855, Duffy, consulted widely about the wisdom of moving to Victoria. One of those he spoke to was Charles Joseph La Trobe, just twelve months back in Europe after his term as superintendent and lieutenant-governor in Victoria. Duffy recalled that “My constant friend John Forster invited me to meet Mr Latrobe [sic], the first Governor of Victoria”. Forster, a literary figure remembered for his biography of Charles Dickens, was in his mid forties, La Trobe in his fifties and Duffy, now a former rebel and a former member of parliament, was 39.

To date I have found out only a little about the meeting of Duffy and La Trobe. Duffy himself tells us that La Trobe “confirmed all the favourable statements” which Duffy had heard about Victoria.<sup>5</sup> La Trobe, a sensitive person of Moravian education who sought to encourage moral values in public life, was concerned about the question of land and also about the impact of European settlement on Indigenous Australians. Did he and Duffy speak of the land and Aboriginal issues which had been major problems during La Trobe’s administration? Duffy, Irish and Catholic, shared with La Trobe humanitarian concerns and, by 1855, respect for constitutional means of change, but Duffy was formed by a contrasting political life experience. As we shall see Duffy would later work with two of La Trobe’s prominent critics on these matters.

Duffy was influenced also by his meeting with Quaker William Howitt and his wife Mary. Indeed, Duffy had read Howitt’s 1838 book condemning the European treatment of native peoples, *Colonization and Christianity*.

Despite encouraging invitations to settle in Sydney, Duffy chose Melbourne, telling some

audiences he would do farming or law but telling Smith O’Brien that he had a political career in mind.

Sailing on the *Ocean Chief* late in 1855, Charles aged 39, his wife Susan Hughes and their children arrived at Melbourne on 25 January 1856 to an enthusiastic welcome from the Irish community and local democratic reformers. *The Age* described him as a “major acquisition” to the campaign “to unlock the land”.<sup>6</sup>

The Victorian Irish community, with contributions from others such as NSW politician Henry Parkes, gave Duffy enough money for the Hawthorn home and also for land in the Belfast district (today called Port Fairy). This qualified him for a seat in the Victorian parliament as a member for the Villiers and Heytesbury electorate. Though he quickly found legal work, by the end of that first year in Melbourne Duffy had entered the elected Victorian House of Assembly, which had met for the first time earlier that year.

The Victoria to which Duffy came was a tumultuous colony of rapid economic expansion alongside mass agitation over democracy and land issues. Gold production was high, exports of wool profitable and construction of a large city and regional infrastructure thriving. Miners at Eureka had been militarily defeated in December 1854 but their demands for representation and land continued in different forms.

In this situation, Duffy joined the opposition benches under the leadership of O’Shannassy during pro-squatter William Haines’ term as premier. Duffy was the only member who had also served in the House of Commons and so he often gave advice on parliamentary procedure. He was an early advocate of Australian federation. In March and April 1857 he was part of the fifty-day government, known as the first O’Shannassy ministry.



Figure 3 Unknown artist. Charles Joseph La Trobe, [1851]. Engraving. Collection: Parliamentary Library, Victoria.





Figure 4 Eugene von Guerard, Eureka 2-4 February 1854. Pencil on cream paper, La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria. H12527, B46747

Throughout his years in Victoria, opponents described Duffy as a Papist, a sectarian bigot, an Irish traitor to the crown and so on. This campaign was particularly successful in bringing down his government in 1872. However, these charges ignored his earlier clash with Archbishop Cullen and his advocacy of constitutional practices. Duffy was a Catholic liberal at a time when Vatican policies were moving in the opposite direction. One of his biographers, León Ó Broin, judged that none of this turned Duffy sour and that, indeed, he rose above such smears.

An eminent historian of Victoria, Geoffrey Serle, has pointed out Duffy's international stature. For instance, political philosopher John Stuart Mill chaired Duffy's 1855 farewell committee. Serle has suggested, however, that Duffy's "colonial career was an anti-climax":

... a largely disinterested reformer, with little inclination for moneymaking. ... There was nobility in the man and great charm but also pettiness, petulance and egotism. And his Irish background condemned him to fight battle after battle against prejudice which could never be borne down.

This lecture suggests that a couple of other points can be added to Serle's picture.

### Duffy decrees reserve for Goulburn River Aborigines

Let us turn now to Duffy's meeting with a delegation of Goulburn River Aborigines. He was in charge of the Victorian Department of Lands from March 1858 until February 1859. To the credit of this O'Shannassy government,

it set up a select committee of the Legislative Council "to enquire into the present conditions of the aborigines of this colony and the best means of alleviating their absolute wants". Scot Thomas McCombie, 1841 immigrant, journalist, gold miner, politician and merchant, was chairman of the select committee.<sup>8</sup> As Diane Reilly Drury has shown, McCombie had used the Port Phillip Gazette newspaper to pour scorn on La Trobe. Now in the second O'Shannassy administration, McCombie had come to an important position of influence. Fergus Farrow's informative entry in the Australian Dictionary of Biography nonetheless ignores McCombie's role on this select committee.

McCombie's report, submitted to parliament on 1 February 1859, combined a paternalistic framework with a strong call for humanitarian aid and, notably, the granting of some land.<sup>9</sup> The report recommended especially the setting-up a new system of reserves for Aboriginal people. It also recommended funds be given to Christian missions among Aboriginal people. McCombie denounced the way that earlier Aboriginal reserves had been given to squatters by previous administrations. At the Argus, the editor (was it still Edward Wilson?) who supported McCombie saw the matter in terms of acting to prevent what we would call genocide but which he called 'extirpation'.<sup>10</sup> McCombie's motion on aid and reserves was passed by the parliament.

The Aboriginal community knew this and moved to take advantage of it. Five weeks after McCombie's select committee had submitted its report to parliament, a delegation of Aboriginal leaders came to see Duffy in his capacity as

Minister for Lands.<sup>11</sup>

On Monday 7 March 1859 a deputation of seven Aborigines came to Duffy at the Crown Lands Department in Melbourne to ask for a piece of land on the Acheron river, they called it Nak-krom, between the Goulburn River and the Great Dividing Range.<sup>12</sup> Newspaper reports described them as members of 'the Goulburn tribe'. Broome describes them as members of the Kulin nation. The members of the delegation were five Daungwurrung men from the upper Goulburn, Bearinga, Murran Murran, Pargnegean, Kooyan and Burrupin. They were accompanied by two Yarra-Valley men, Simon Wonga, thirty-five, and Tommy Munnering, twenty-four, sons of Billibellary who had sought land back in 1843. The *Argus* reported that they were all tall and seated themselves 'with an air of grave courtesy'. They were accompanied by the 66-year-old Protector of Aborigines, William Thomas, who assisted with interpreting and presenting their case. Thomas had been influential in getting the McCombie report to support reserves. The deputation asked for 'a tract of land in their country set apart for their sole use, occupation and benefit' and Thomas tabled a document supporting this.

One of their arguments, which was bound to please their hearers, was that they planned to combine hunting with cultivating the soil. They said:

... blackfellows and lubras go look out food, but some always stop and turn up ground, and plant potatoes and corn.

They had found a way to adapt to the new comers in power while preserving some of their way of life.<sup>13</sup>

While Thomas did not know that precise piece of land, he named two nearby settlers, Snodgrass and Kerr, whom he described as 'great friends of the Aborigines' and magistrates. Thomas recommended that 4800 acres be given on the basis of thirty-two heads of households getting 150 acres each and that it be kept as one lot under the direction of 'the chief', Bearinga.

Drawing on the recent parliamentary regulation mentioned above, Duffy ruled in favour of the Aboriginal application and granted them the land subject to there being no local difficulties. He said, among other things:

It is, in the opinion of myself and my colleagues, in the highest degree desirable to give to the aborigines some chance of escaping the ruin and destruction which have fallen on so many of their race.

Thomas replied by pointing out that the number of men in this tribe had fallen from 600 to thirty-two over the previous twenty years. Duffy was moved to ask Thomas to personally go up and oversee the grant of land. He also ordered suitable provisions be issued to the deputation for their return journey.

The role of Edward Wilson, radical editor of the *Argus* from 1848 to [1853?], was important in Duffy's development and deserves a mention here. Diane Reilly Drury described him as one "of La Trobe's greatest traducers". Duffy called him "one of the most remarkable men in Victoria". In November 1856, Wilson had written to Duffy urging him to take on reforming leadership in parliament. Wilson listed in detail 26 projects for Duffy, the first of which was "justice to the Aborigines". Influenced by William Howitt, Thomas McCombie, Edward Wilson and above all the delegation in front of him, Duffy granted the Daungwurrung claim.

In a recent lecture, Yorta Yorta leader and Melbourne University political scientist Dr Wayne Atkinson described this as the first successful Indigenous land rights claim in Australia.<sup>14</sup>

However, the claim was soon derailed. The Acheron grant lasted until 23 June 1860, about a year. Peter Snodgrass (1817–1867), one of the settlers whom Thomas expected to be helpful, worked against the grant. He was at that time the MLA for the area, working in parliament to improve the situation of the squatters.<sup>15</sup> In his electorate of Anglesey he used his position to allow two squatters, Hugh Glass and Captain Contain Nash, to use the Acheron run.<sup>16</sup> Thomas protested that the government had broken its "covenant" but a newly-appointed central board to look after Aboriginal matters seems to have been confused and ineffective. We will talk more about Snodgrass, Glass and Nash later.

The Daungwurrung were forced by officials to move four miles along the river to the Mohican run, also known as Jones' station, in much colder country. Many of the people refused to make the move. By mid-1863, the government abandoned the Mohican station and some forty of the Daungwurrung people went to join other groups on 2300 acres at Coranderrk near Healesville.<sup>17</sup>

At the very time that Snodgrass, Glass and others were conspiring to block the Aboriginal claim to Acheron station, Duffy was in a political fight with the squatters, O'Shannassy and others over the rights of potential small farmers to free selection. Not long after speaking with the

Aboriginal deputation, Duffy resigned from his cabinet position of Minister for Lands over this. Thus, when Thomas, on behalf of the Goulburn River people, returned to the Lands Department to pursue the matter Duffy had moved out of the office and was busy with the politics of land reform with specific reference to the small selectors. In addition, there were elections later that year and by October a different premier and cabinet. In summary, with many other pressing duties Duffy did not manage to follow through on the Acheron land claim.

### **Parliament passes Duffy Land Act**

Let us now move ahead two years to the Duffy Land Act. Between his resignation as Minister for Lands in early 1859 and his return to that post in November 1861, the dominant issue in Duffy's politics, and that of most people in Victoria, was agitation for a land bill that was favourable to the working class and to their opportunity to own a small farm. During this phase Duffy supported the radicals around Moses Wilson Gray and Collingwood's chartist MP Charles Jardine Don. This continued a link that he had from before his arrival in Victoria. In speeches on the New South Wales Constitution Bill in the House of Commons in May and June of 1855, Duffy had spoken against the squatters of NSW and Victoria. Moreover, Duffy had travelled to Melbourne on the same ship as Gray.<sup>18</sup>

From the latter part of 1857, while in opposition, Duffy had lent his name to an important extra-parliamentary agitation, namely the Land Convention, which held a people's parliament.<sup>19</sup> The Convention, modelled on Duffy's Irish Tenant League, organised a petition for free selection that gained 70 000 signatures: at the time squatters numbered 720.<sup>20</sup> Eugene Doyle judged this "an unprecedented threat to the monopolistic designs of the squatters".

However, at the end of the winter of 1860, when the protest became more militant, Duffy backed away from the radicals. On 27 and 28 August large crowds gathered at the Eastern Market on the southwest corner of Bourke and Exhibition Streets in the city. On the second night, after a rally and torchlight procession in which many wore red badges and some leaders talked of getting rifles, they attempted to break into Parliament House.<sup>21</sup> Their demand was that the governor change his mind and issue a dissolution of the Nicholson-led parliament, call an election and allow the possibility of a Duffy-Heales government. As demonstrators

smashed windows and clashed violently with police, the lord mayor read the *Riot Act*. With the Melbourne garrison of British soldiers, the 40th Regiment, away in New Zealand fighting the Maoris, the challenge to the established order was serious.

From then on, as John Ireland, Doyle and others have argued, Duffy and the squatters moved to make a compromise within the parliament.<sup>22</sup> It is as if Duffy supported the demands of the masses but balked at the possibility of a violent attack on bourgeois society. Doyle calls this the 'unmaking of a radical reformer'.

Next comes a crucial period, the third O'Shannassy ministry of November 1861 to June 1863, when Duffy as Minister for Land put through the land act that came to carry his name. While Duffy's rhetoric was close to that of the Land Convention, this was a compromise government built on O'Shannassy's links with the squatters and Duffy's with the reformers.

The "Act to consolidate and amend the laws relating to the sale and occupation of Crown lands" was passed on 18 June 1862. On the surface this was a move to give the small selectors a good opportunity. Duffy claimed that "a homestead is rendered accessible to every resident in Victoria".

While scholars are divided about how much to blame Duffy for what happened subsequently, most have judged that the squatters evaded the provisions of the law and secured their tenure.<sup>23</sup> (Leslie Duly, John Ireland and others have written fine theses on the land acts; it is a pity that the best of them have not been published.) A common form of law-breaking was "dummying" whereby a squatter paid someone else to apply for a selection of land on his behalf. A week after the act came into force, the *Geelong Advertiser* asked "Is Mr Duffy a rogue? Is he a fool? Or is he a compound of both?"<sup>24</sup> Duffy himself blamed those who drafted the wording of the legislation for leaving many loopholes. In the coming years Duffy supported amendments to his act to remove the loopholes. In this perspective, Duffy's act can be seen as a stumble forward along a difficult path.<sup>25</sup>

### **Conclusion: the mirage of good colonization**

For his study of Duffy in Victoria, Eugene Doyle chose the title, 'Through Irish eyes'. This raises some interesting questions because other Irish eyes, say John O'Shannassy from the right and



Figure 5 T Thomas Adams Hill, photographer. Hugh Glass. c. 1857-c.1863. Albumen silver print. La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria. H2005.379

Wilson Gray from the left, looked at the same realities with contrasting perspectives.

The other Irish immigrant chosen for mention here, Hugh Glass, emerges in this research as a common foe of both selectors and Aborigines. A financial and property speculator and organiser of squatters, Glass was born at Portaferry, County Down, Ireland. He had migrated to Victoria in 1840, saw himself as a squatter, and specialised in buying and selling stock and stations. That is, one of the key people in robbing the Daungwurrung of their preferred land at Acheron was an Irish migrant who was also a key leader of the squatters against the selectors. At this stage of the research, there is no evidence that spokespeople among the Aboriginal groups and among the land reform organisations linked their cases nor that they had a united front against him. They may have. However, Duffy had certainly experienced Glass's opposition to his attempts at constructive reforms on behalf of both Aborigines and selectors.

Margaret Kiddle, who wrote that outstanding book on the squatters, *Men of Yesterday*, came to strong conclusions about Glass.<sup>26</sup> (By the way, it is fifty years this year since Margaret Kiddle died.) Kiddle described Glass as "by the 1860s the greatest squatter in Victoria", a view shared by June Senyard in her *ADB* entry on Glass.<sup>27</sup> In Glass she found elements of greatness but also devastating evidence of corruption. She showed that Snodgrass, the MLA who helped defeat the Acheron land claim, was a paymaster for Glass' Victoria Association that bought votes and politicians. Kiddle also traced Glass' fall from public grace, arrest and 1869 suicide by taking "hydrate of chloral".

Thus, Doyle's characterisation of Duffy as viewing land issues in Victoria through Irish eyes embodies a truth but needs qualification. On a related point, Doyle asked whether Duffy missed a vital difference between Ireland and Victoria, namely, that much of Victoria was unsuited to small family farming such as Duffy and the Tenant League advocated. Doyle, like Serle before him and many since, asks whether or not the idea of a small subsistence family farm was "one of the most tragic Australian delusions".<sup>28</sup>

Another connection between Duffy's Irish and Australian experiences concerns settler-Indigenous relations. The findings presented here challenge the view of historian Bob Reece that Duffy seemed "to have taken no interest at all" in Aborigines.<sup>29</sup> While there is room to criticise Duffy in regard to Aboriginal affairs, this paper has tabled evidence that he did take an interest. At least in February 1859, Duffy heard "the whispering in our hearts", to use the title of Henry Reynolds' book. Broome remarked that Duffy was moved by the Aboriginal land seekers, "perhaps as a result of his involvement in land and tenancy protests in Ireland".<sup>30</sup>

Yet, on the evidence that I have seen to date, Duffy seems to have acted on the assumption that there could be good colonisation. When in government, his daily work consisted of directing tasks such as mapping and road-making which entrenched British rule and made Aboriginal lands available for the settlers, while taking steps to make the administration more humane.

In her excellent study of La Trobe, Dianne Reilly Drury concludes that while La Trobe had humanitarian aims in his policies towards Aboriginal people, he was assimilationist and in the face of the opposition from the squatters, "he eventually gave up".<sup>31</sup> Stephen Knowlton in his study of Duffy in Australia repeats the quip used by some Irish radical critics of Duffy that his name was Charles Give-in Duffy.<sup>32</sup> In this regard, Duffy and La Trobe may have had something in common. Drury judged that Michael Christie's assessment was apt, namely that "the philanthropists failed to grasp and the politicians refused to admit" that "colonialism was essentially an exploitative process".<sup>33</sup>

In that moment, when Duffy asked Thomas about the drop in numbers of "the Goulburn tribe", did memories of Cromwell's 1649-50 campaign in Ireland, or the deaths during the Great Famine, occur to him? Wayne Atkinson has recently compared the setting-up of reserves for Aborigines to Cromwell driving the Irish off

their lands in the east and resettling them in Connaught.<sup>34</sup> Atkinson argues that those who tried to set up reserves for Aboriginal people in Australia were following a model used by the English in North America. However, he shows, that model in turn drew on the Cromwellian clearances and forced resettlement of the infamous “To Hell or Connaught” campaign of 1649-50.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s moving apology on 13 February this year for “the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments” marks a new and different stage in the history of settlers and Indigenous Australians. However, the issue of land rights still needs attention. One glaring example remains the 2002 refusal of the courts to grant the Yorta Yorta claim on crown land on the Murray River in northern Victoria, a claim they have pursued on 17 occasions. This study of Charles Gavan Duffy’s role leaves us wondering also about 4800 acres near the junction of the Acheron and Goulburn Rivers.

In nineteenth-century Victoria, Charles Gavan Duffy and his contemporaries faced two issues that are with us yet: reconciliation of Indigenous land rights with the demands of settlers; the rights of small farmers in the face of mounting agribusiness amalgamations. Their efforts are worth remembering and analysing. Ω

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- 7 Christie, op. cit., p. 157.
- 8 Fergus Farrow, ‘McCombie, Thomas (1819–1869)’, *ADB*, vol. 5, pp. 132–133.
- 9 *Argus*, 1 February 1859, supplement, p 1; 2 February 1859, pp. 4, 6; 3 February 1859, p 4.
- 10 Editorial, *Argus*, 3 February 1859, p 4.
- 11 *Argus*, 8 March 1859, p. 5. Barwick, op. cit., pp 39-50. Broome, op. cit., p. 123. Acheron correspondence and Thomas papers in Aboriginal Protectorate records, PROV, cited in Christie, op. cit., pp. 157–60, 166–68. The *Argus* said that ‘the names of the natives were Beaning (a chieftain), Wonga, Munnarin, Murrin Murrin, Pamgean, Baruppin and Koo-gurrin’. I have used Broome’s spelling.
- 12 Aldo Massola, *Coranderrk*, Kilmore, Lowden, 1975, pp. 7–16, includes a map of the Acheron claim. He calls it ‘Niagaroon’.
- 13 The members of the deputation, indeed, had an explicit request for ‘a tract of land on both sides of a creek which falls into the Goulburn River, named Nak-krom’, Thomas declared. He explained, to Duffy and the world, that “the blacks stated [that this land] was of little use to white people, but kangaroos and opossums were abundant there. [The Nak-krom] creek is in the county of Anglesey, has dividing range to the south, Goulburn River to the north, Mud Creek and township to the west and Rubicon Creek to the east.”
- 14 Wayne Atkinson, ‘Indigenous land rights’, lecture, Department of Political Science, Melbourne University, 28 March 2007.
- 15 Alan Gross, ‘Snodgrass, Peter (1817–1867)’, *ADB*, vol. 2, pp. 455–456.
- 16 I have not confirmed the identity of Nash at Acheron but my guess is that he was Captain Contain Nash, father-in-law of Hugh Glass.
- 17 Compare Val Noone, ‘Rebellion at Coranderrk’,

Introducing a new centre spread occasional feature showing examples of La Trobe's watercolours and sketches



Mt Wellington, 1847

Watercolour on paper

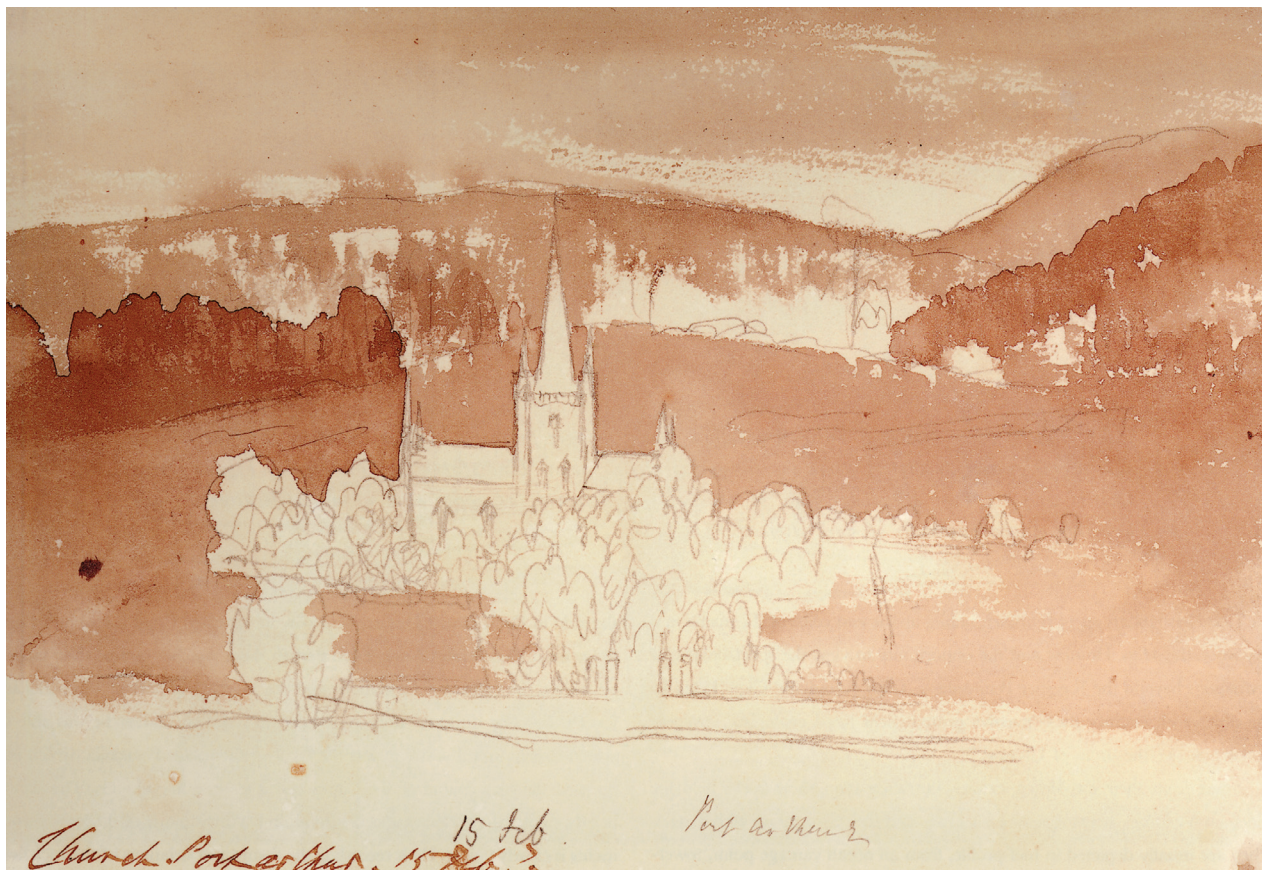
18.4 x 26.3cm

Inscribed (*l.r.*) Mt. Wellington

Collection: La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria

H 92.360/34

The two images in this issue were sketched during La Trobe's four months in Van Diemen's Land as Acting Governor in 1846-47



Church, Port Arthur, 1846

Sepia wash and pencil on buff paper  
17.2 x 24.6cm

Inscribed (I.I) Church. Port Arthur; c. 15 Feb. Port Arthur Fluted Cape.  
(indecipherable)

Collection: La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria

*Retrieval*, no. 12 (March–April 1973), p. 724, which erroneously said that the Coranderrk people had died out. I would like to thank Daniel O'Donovan who took me on my first visit to Coranderrk.

- 18 Trinity College graduate Gray, the leader of the Convention, was one of the most interesting Irish migrants in Victoria in these decades. He had been a member of O'Connell's Repeal Association and Duffy's Tenant League, and was judged by historian Eugene Doyle to be "a man of uncommon virtue".
- 19 Doyle, *op. cit.*, p. 181.
- 20 Stephen H Roberts, *History of Australia's Land Settlement Acts 1788–1920*, Melbourne, Macmillan and MUP, 1924.
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- 22 John Ireland, 'The Victorian Land Act of 1862 revisited', MA thesis, Department of History, University of Melbourne, 1992, pp. 26–38; Doyle, *op. cit.*, pp. 42–73.
- 23 Roberts, *op. cit.*; Ireland, *op. cit.*; Leslie Clement Duly, "Land selection acts of Victoria 1859 to 1869", MA thesis, Department of History, University of Melbourne, 1959.
- 24 *Geelong Advertiser*, 17 September 1862, cited in Ireland, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
- 25 Duly, *op. cit.*, p. 267. Leslie Clement Duly, author of an astute thesis on the Duffy, Grant and other land acts, concluded that the program of the Land Convention was gradually implemented even if the members of parliament did not realise that was so.
- 26 Margaret Kiddle, *Men of Yesterday: A Social History of the Western District of Victoria 1834-1890*, Melbourne University Press, 1967 (revised edition), first published 1961.
- 27 J E Senyard, 'Glass, Hugh (1817–1871)', *ADB*, vol. 4, pp. 254–255. Tony Dingle, *The Victorians: settling*, Fairfax, Sydney 1984, p. 62.
- 28 Doyle, *op. cit.*, p. 66, 94–5.
- 29 Bob Reece, 'The Irish and the Aborigines', *Irish-Australian studies: papers at the Ninth Irish-Australian Conference, Galway 1997*, Sydney, Crossing Press, 2000, pp. 192–204.
- 30 Broome, *op. cit.*, p. 123.
- 31 *Op cit*, p 198.
- 32 Stephen Knowlton, 'The enigma of Charles Gavan Duffy: looking for clues in Australia', *Eire-Ireland*, 1996 no 3 (3 & 4), pp 189-208.
- 33 Drury, *op cit*, p 201. Compare Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native', *Journal of Genocide Research*, (2006), 8 (4), December, pp 387-409.

- 34 Wayne Atkinson, 'Yorta Yorta elder and Guinness descendant take a trip to Ireland', *Táin*, no. 43 (September–November 2006), pp. 20–22; and 'Searching for the origins of reserves through the lenses of Cummeragunja: the Irish connection', unpublished paper for the Fifth Galway Conference on Colonialism, National University of Ireland, Galway, June 2007.



## The Walmsley House at Royal Park: La Trobe's "Other" Cottage

By Simon Reeves

*Over a recent coffee and chat with Simon Reeves about his current work as an architectural historian with Heritage Alliance, I was fascinated to learn that he had researched the origins of an 1850s prefabricated house in Melbourne. The fruits of his research are reproduced below in the following lively and engaging article.*

For many decades, a modest corrugated iron shed on the south-eastern edge of Melbourne's Royal Park has been a source of endless fascination for local residents, park visitors and casual passersby alike. A small metal plaque on one wall, which attests to the fact that the building was manufactured by 'Walmsley' of London Road, London, has given it the nickname of the *Walmsley House*. To identify the elusive Mr Walmsley, and unravel why a small iron house bearing his name and address might have found its way to the other side of the globe, one must go back to Melbourne's earliest days under Lieutenant Governor Charles La Trobe.



**Figure 6** This battered metal plaque provides the only clues to the origins of a prefabricated iron cottage that has stood on the edge of Royal Park for almost 150 years. Photograph: Simon Reeves, 2008

A perennial problem during La Trobe's superintendency was the provision of adequate and cost-effective mass housing, and prefabrication was an early and obvious solution. Even La Trobe himself was initially



accommodated in a prefabricated timber dwelling, which had been brought out from England with him and his family in 1839. More than a decade later, when faced with the issue of housing the increasing number of public servants in the new colony, La Trobe accepted the recommendation of his Colonial Architect, Henry Ginn, to obtain some prefabricated iron houses from England. In 1853, Ginn prepared plans and specifications for a four-roomed cottage, measuring 32 feet (9.75 metres) by 28 feet (8.5 metres), and an order for 36 units was duly dispatched to the Colonial Agent in London. In June of that year, the British building press reported that a local manufacturer, one John Walker, was then in the process of manufacturing 36 iron houses 'for the residences of emigrants sent out by Government to Australia'.<sup>35</sup> Directories confirm that an iron worker of that name had a factory at Millwall on the Isle of Dogs in London's east. Indeed, the nameplate of John Walker – identified as a manufacturer of Millwall, Poplar – can be seen on the few iron houses in Australia that miraculously survive from La Trobe's order. However, the example at Royal Park, although identical in size, plan form and detailing, is clearly attributable to a competitor, one Mr Walmsley. It can only be assumed that the original contractor, John Walker, subcontracted a portion of La Trobe's order to a third party.<sup>36</sup>

Who, then, was Walmsley? Dr Miles Lewis of the University of Melbourne, a world authority on nineteenth century prefabricated housing, described Walmsley in 1985 as 'a very mysterious figure', and little else has been revealed of him since.<sup>37</sup> At one point, he was presumed to be related to one A T Walmsley, author of a treatise on iron roofing published in 1884. Bibliographic research, however, shows that this book was in fact written by Arthur Thomas *Walmisley*, whose surname is spelt slightly differently.<sup>38</sup> A check of London directories confirms at least that Benjamin Walmsley, retail ironmonger, occupied premises at 127 London Road, Southwark by 1850 – one of a row of three residential shops that had been built only a few years earlier.<sup>39</sup> By 1851, Walmsley's business had expanded to take over the adjacent No 126 as well.<sup>40</sup> The 1851 census confirms that Benjamin Walmsley, ironmonger, lived at 126-127 London Road, and further reveals that he was then 39 years of age and was born in Middle Rotherhithe.<sup>41</sup> This places the year of his birth as around 1812, and indicates that he not only worked but was also born within the Borough of Southwark, in London's southeast.

He is surely the same Benjamin Walmsley who, according to civil registration records, was born on 5 November 1812 and christened on 28 April 1813 at the Jamaica Row Independent Church at Bermondsey, also in Southwark. Walmsley's long association with London's south-east – born in Rotherhithe, christened in Bermondsey and working in Southwark – may well suggest a prior connection with iron house manufacturer John Walker, whose father's ironworks was originally located in Rotherhithe and later moved to Bermondsey.<sup>42</sup>

The 1851 census also identified three other occupants at 126-127 London Road, who presumably comprised Walmsley's staff: 22-year-old shopman Alfred Holland, 17-year old cashier George Neutor, and 36-year-old housekeeper Cherry Glanville.<sup>43</sup> Although the last named was married in 1853 and presumably left Walmsley's employ, his ironmongery business otherwise expanded and, by 1856, finally occupied all three shopfronts at Nos 126, 127 and 128. However, Walmsley's business disappears entirely from the directory listings after 1858. His former premises in London Road (and perhaps also the business itself) had been taken over by two other ironmongery firms: Hodd & Gill at No 127, and Thomas Henry Fairhall & Company at No 128. The third shop, at No 126, became occupied by linen draper John Young.<sup>44</sup>

The subsequent whereabouts of Benjamin Walmsley are revealed by the 1861 census, which records that the former ironmonger, late of Rotherhithe and now 49 years of age, was residing at No 2 Park Villa in the Parish of East Budleigh, Country Devon. A local directory, the *Morris & Company's Commercial Directory & Gazetteer for 1870*, confirms that Benjamin Walmsley lived at Park Villa, citing its location more accurately as Little Knowle – a street on the north-western outskirts of Budleigh Salterton. This small town on England's south coast, then with population of around 2,000, was described in the gazetteer as 'a place rapidly and deservedly increasing in size and popularity'. It remains unclear, however, why a London-based ironmonger suddenly moved to a coastal village, although ill health may have been a factor. What is certain is that he was no longer employed as an ironmonger; not only was his name absent from the local directory's commercial listings, but the census listed his profession as 'proprietor of house' in 1861 and then as 'no occupation' in 1871. In the interim, Walmsley had married and had a child – his wife, Isabella, and seven-year-old son Henry

both being recorded in the 1871 census as co-occupants of No 2 Park Villa. Walmsley was still living at that address at the time of his death on 4 November 1880, one day before his 68th birthday. While nothing else is currently known of Walmsley and his professional activities as an iron house supplier, the triple shopfront that his firm occupied in London Road miraculously still stands – albeit now renumbered as Nos 218-223, in a streetscape dominated by twentieth century buildings.



**Figure 7** Benjamin Walmsley's former premises in London Road, London. Although now known as Nos 218-223, rondels at each end of the first floor level still indicate the original numbering of 126 to 128. Photograph: Simon Reeves, 2008.

While much detail of Benjamin Walmsley's life has been brought to light, it remains unclear how one of his iron houses found its way to Royal Park in Melbourne. Research to date has failed to identify the original locations of La Trobe's 36 prefabricated dwellings. When they arrived in Melbourne in 1854, ten were sent to the Police Depot at Richmond, two more to William Street for the Colonial Surgeon and the Registrar General, and an unspecified number of others for use by the Steam Navigation Board – location unknown. Those at the Richmond Police Depot, which stood on the south-western corner of Punt Road and Victoria Parade, are the most well-documented, with a fragile sheet of drawings and a typewritten specification that miraculously survive in police archives held by the Public Record Office. This rare drawing depicts a small four-roomed iron cottage that is absolutely identical to the one now standing at the edge of Royal Park.

What is still unclear, though, is whether the Walmsley House was actually relocated to its present site from Richmond. The fate of the iron houses at the police barracks is largely undocumented, although a few remained there when the barracks was sold for subdivision in 1881, as a newspaper advert at that

time specifically listed three iron houses "by Walmsley of London" amongst the items for sale.<sup>45</sup> One was evidently sold prior to the auction, as it was not mentioned when an updated advert was re-published two weeks later. Although the auction itself was later reported in the local press, the purchasers of the two remaining Walmsley houses were never identified.<sup>46</sup> It has been suggested that an iron house from the Richmond barracks found its way to a rural sheep station at Inverleigh, near Geelong, where it remains to this day – although this now semi-ruinous structure bears the nameplate of original contractor, Walker of Millwall, rather than that of Walmsley of Southwark. By odd contrast, a prefabricated iron building of rather more elongated form – yet still bearing Walmsley's distinctive nameplate – survives today in the nursery complex at the Royal Botanical Gardens. Although Dr Lewis once surmised that it might also have been relocated there from the Richmond depot, he has since proposed that it was probably originally part of the Immigration Depot that once stood nearby in what is now the Alexandra Gardens.<sup>47</sup>

Although the original location of the Walmsley House at Royal Park cannot be confirmed with any certainty, it clearly arrived there between 1855 (when surveyor Kearney prepared his detailed map of the inner suburbs, on which the house does not appear) and early 1862 (when the house is first referred to in official documents). A search of the Victorian Government Gazette for the interim period, however, has failed to locate any tender notice relating to either the construction of the house or its relocation from elsewhere. Ironically, the gazette contains references to many other government buildings built in Royal Park during that time – a police barrack (1855), buildings at the Model Farm (1858), a powder magazine (1860), camel sheds associated with the Burke & Wills expedition (1860), and a keeper's quarters (1861) and sentry platform (1862) at the powder magazine. Confusingly, the police barrack is known to have been a prefabricated iron building of standard government type – although this was located elsewhere, on the corner of Royal Parade and Park Street, and was recorded as being demolished in 1889. Adding to the confusion, a third prefabricated iron building appeared in the park in 1868 in the form of a 'temporary' guard house erected alongside the powder magazine keeper's house. Again, this was not located anywhere near the present-day Walmsley House, and, in any case, was razed in 1930.<sup>48</sup>

Unfortunately, the existence of three different prefabricated iron houses in Royal Park has led to some confusion regarding the original function of the sole survivor at the park's south-eastern edge. Writing of the building in 1923, an *Argus* journalist stated that 'when Royal Park was bushland, the Lodge was utilised as barracks for mounted troopers in charge of gold exports'.<sup>49</sup> Some years later, local historian W A Sanderson asserted that the building was originally a 'soldier's depot'.<sup>50</sup> More recently, it has been claimed that the building was a police lock-up.<sup>51</sup> While it is certainly possible that a prefabricated iron building of this type may well have served any or all of those official purposes, none of the authors cited any documentary evidence to support their respective claims, and none has come to light since. The only clue to the building's original function is provided by the aforementioned reference from 1862, which represents the earliest documentary record of the Walmsley House. This was uncovered in the minute books of the Acclimatisation Society of Victoria, a body founded in 1857 for the preservation and exhibition of exotic animals – the antecedent of the modern zoological gardens. This society had established a small menagerie near the Yarra River at Richmond, which, in early 1862, was relocated to the under-utilised government reserve at Royal Park. The society hoped to take over most of the existing buildings in the reserve, including the police barracks (which had been vacated that same year), the powder magazine and camel sheds. At the inaugural meeting of the Royal Park Trustees on 28 March 1862, it was resolved

That the small iron cottage at the NE entrance to the Royal Park may be rendered available for one of the keepers of the zoological gardens.

That the Crown Lands Department may be requested to permit the Superintendent of the Zoological Gardens to occupy the iron cottage at the SE entrance on or before June 1st next.<sup>52</sup>

Clearly, these two statements refer respectively to the former police barracks, and the building now known as the Walmsley House. As it turned out, the scheme to adapt the latter as the superintendent's residence was abandoned when it was resolved instead to erect a new purpose-built dwelling closer to the zoological gardens.

There was no further mention of the south-eastern cottage until September 1862, when the minutes recorded that 'the Lodge at the

Park had been vacated by Mr Scott, and the Superintendent had, as a temporary measure, placed the carter Francis Meaker in it'.<sup>53</sup> Unfortunately, the identity of Mr Scott – the only clue to the original purpose of erecting this prefabricated iron house at Royal Park – has not been established. The fact that he is not recorded in either rate books or directories might indicate that he was a public servant temporarily accommodated in the house. He is perhaps the same R D Scott who, as per the *Victorian Government Gazette*, was appointed by the Crown Lands & Survey Department as an "Appraiser of Crown Lands" in November 1860.<sup>54</sup> While little is known of the responsibilities of this position, and whether one was required to live in Royal Park, the common link with the Crown Lands Department (which maintained the park until 1862) makes the evidence compelling.

Fortunately, the identity of "Mr Meaker" – who succeeded Scott as tenant of the Walmsley House in September 1862 – is much clearer. Francis Meaker (1837-1910) and his wife Jane (1839-1900) had arrived in Melbourne in July 1859, the former gaining employ at the then recently-established Model Farm in the grounds of Royal Park. The farm's closure in 1862 (following a parliamentary inquiry) coincided with the establishment of the Acclimatisation Society, and Meaker simply transferred to the latter's payroll. He was first recorded in the minute books in August 1862, named as one of three men 'employed at the park'.<sup>55</sup> Another early source identifies the other two as brothers Andrew and David Wilkie who, with Meaker, were the three original members of staff at the new Zoological Gardens under its founding director, Albert Le Souef.<sup>56</sup>

In 1870, Meaker was appointed Ranger of Royal Park – a title created in August 1862 to empower an existing park employee 'to prosecute any person infringing on the rules established by the Trustees of the Park'.<sup>57</sup> This more or less honorary position, which carried no further remuneration, was originally held by the first Superintendent of the Zoological Gardens, W Smith, and subsequently by George Sprigg and Eugene Lissignol, both one-time secretaries to the Acclimatisation Society. In June 1870 the minute books recorded:

I am desired to recommend to you the appointment of Francis Meaker as Crown Land Ranger of the Park, since Lissignol has left the colony. The object of the desired appointment being merely to invest one of the

employees with the authority to uphold the rules and regulations; no salary or emolument will be attached.<sup>58</sup>

In 1872, Meaker's title was changed from Park Ranger to Crown Lands Bailiff, but little else is known of his role.<sup>59</sup> One recollection described him as 'a well-known figure in the Park during his long term of office, especially when riding his horse; and many a boy has found it prudent to keep out of his way to save the confiscation of a shanghai'.<sup>60</sup> Another source records that he befriended the park's native inhabitants, who camped and held corroborees there at that time.<sup>61</sup> Some of these were reputedly entertained in Meaker's iron cottage, which, in the words of still another early observer, 'became famed for its hospitality to tribes of black-fellows who were camped on what is now Royal Park'.<sup>62</sup>

More is known of Meaker's professional activities in connection with the Zoological Garden. One source alludes to his skill as a horseman, relating how he assisted in the breaking in of a hybrid donkey-zebra that proved a little unruly:

A celebrated horse-breaker, who boasted that he could tame anything on four legs, undertook for the love of the thing to break the gentleman in to harness. He brought enough gearing with him to break in an elephant. Mr Meaker knew as much as anyone about breaking in horses, and he was quite sure the man had undertaken to perform the impossible, but he was willing to render any necessary assistance in the venture, and was most curious to discover the outcome of it.<sup>63</sup>

After three days, both men conceded defeat, and the hybrid – whose more docile half-brother took children on donkey rides around the zoo grounds – was 'given up as a useless burden on the payroll'. The same could never be said of Meaker himself, who, in 1895, was presented with the annual Silver Medal of the Acclimatisation Society as a tribute to someone who, as Alfred Le Souef himself stated, had been 'in every way a reliable and trustworthy man' for more than thirty years.<sup>64</sup>

Meaker's modest four-roomed iron cottage evidently underwent little change. In 1871, minute books record that both cottages on the park's eastern boundary 'should be provided with raised wooden roofs, to protect the inmates against the intolerable heat generated during the Summer months'.<sup>65</sup> A subsequent annual review of works reveals that these renovations simply involved re-cladding the corrugated iron roofs with timber palings.<sup>66</sup> Both lodges were

repainted in 1872 and subject to unspecified flooring repairs in 1874.<sup>67</sup> A year later, Meaker's property was further improved by the erection of a new fence.<sup>68</sup> It would appear that no further works were undertaken for some years, as it was minuted in 1883 that 'the lodge has become so dilapidated that it was almost uninhabitable – all the floors were perfectly rotten'.<sup>69</sup> The MMBW plan for the property, prepared in the late 1890s, reveals the extent of changes made by that time. A small addition had been erected to the rear of the cottage, and there were also two outbuildings that opened off an enclosed yard.

Even when thus extended by a rear addition and outbuildings, it is difficult to envisage how Meaker's iron cottage accommodated a family that included his wife and no fewer than twelve children (of which half reached adulthood) born there between 1860 and 1885. While the official history of Melbourne Zoo states only that 'the Meaker family undertook various tasks at the zoo', this belies the extent of their involvement over many decades.<sup>70</sup> Minute books show that Mrs Jane Meaker assisted in the rearing of animals as early as 1871, when her efforts at helping to rear fifty 'strong healthy birds, principally Silver Pheasants' were praised by the Acclimatisation Society.

The rearing of these birds in confinement requires the most unremitting attention and much of our success is due to Mrs Meaker, the wife of the keeper, who looked after them most carefully until they gained a little strength. I would suggest a small gratuity to her would be very well expended as it would make her take an increased interest next season, and indeed she deserves some recognition for the care and trouble which she has taken.<sup>71</sup>

The animal-rearing efforts of Frank Meaker and his eldest son, Charles, were also recalled in a brief article about the cottage published in the *Argus* in 1923.

Both men made the rearing of young lions their hobby. The animals, which were born at the Zoo, were taken to the Lodge, where they roamed around the rooms and yards. Mr [Charles] Meaker relates the story of a young lion which had been reared by a woman member of the household, and later sold to a travelling circus. After three years the circus revisited Melbourne and the young woman startled the crowd of spectators by fondling her old pet, which had instantly



recognised her.<sup>72</sup>

**Figure 8** The Walmsley House as it appears after its recent restoration by the Melbourne City Council, showing its two most intact original elevations. Photograph: Simon Reeves, 2008

While this story has yet to be verified in any primary sources, a curiously similar account is contained within the book *Almost Human*, based on the recollections of early zoo employee Andrew Wilkie:

A fine young lioness was born at the Gardens one day and one of the keepers, an old bachelor who had quarters in the grounds, decided to try the experiment of rearing it on a bottle like a human being.

At night, she took up a position at the foot of her friend's bed and if anyone ever passed along the gravel path outside there was an ominous growl from a tireless watcher within. It would have been sudden death for anyone, friend or foe, to have attempted to enter that house during the hours of darkness, for the creature would have sprung first and listened to explanations later.<sup>73</sup>

Charles Meaker's own association with the zoo dates back to 1881, when, at the age of eighteen, he was employed to sell tickets.<sup>74</sup> Two years later, minute books record that one of Meaker's sons – probably Charles' younger brother, Edward – had been appointed to tend the zoo's new elephant, then only recently arrived from Siam.

During the 1890s, Meaker's family began to diminish with the successive marriages of his three surviving daughters and the death of his own wife in 1900. Frank remained living in the iron cottage with his three sons until 1905, when he retired and moved elsewhere, leaving his eldest son Charles to succeed him in the position of Crown Lands Bailiff. The younger Meaker married that same year, and he and his wife Alice (1876-1939) resided in the Walmsley House for another three decades. His professional status changed in early 1934 when the management of Royal Park was transferred

from the Department of Lands & Survey to the Melbourne City Council. The new position of 'District Foreman' was created to administer the park, with one Evan Smith as its first incumbent. Council minute books record that the services of Charles Meaker were briefly retained 'to enable him to collaborate with Weston regarding the details necessary for the working of the park'<sup>76</sup>. The question of Meaker leaving the old iron house was, as noted in the minutes, left in the hands of the park's curator. Charles and Alice finally vacated the property in mid-1934, thereby ending his family's remarkable seven decade tenancy in the iron cottage. The couple moved to Essendon, where Charles died a year later.

The departure of Charles Meaker and other resident staff rendered their respective dwellings surplus to council requirements. It was initially suggested that 'these cottages be offered to Council's employees in the park at a small rental in return for necessary duties to be performed after working hours'.<sup>77</sup> Of the five staff houses that remained within the park's boundaries, four were described as habitable and, of those, only three were sewered. Towards the end of 1934, the iron cottage formerly occupied by the Meakers was inspected by council's Building Surveyor, who noted that

The Foreman's Cottage [sic] at the corner of Gatehouse Street and The Avenue, Royal Park, is a very old structure, the walls and floors being out of plumb and alignment, and the question of rebuilding throughout should be considered.<sup>78</sup>

However, it was deemed that 'rebuilding throughout' would not be a satisfactory solution, and that a purpose-built residence should be provided for the new District Foreman. Plans for this new dwelling, in the currently fashionable Tudor Revival style, were completed in 1935. Although two of the old staff houses in the park were demolished that same year, the old iron cottage was miraculously retained and the new District Foreman's house simply erected alongside. The cottage, now slated for adaptation as a council depot for the City Engineer's Department, was gutted of flooring and internal walls, with one entire external wall removed to permit the storage of vehicles and equipment. Seven decades later – by which time its cultural significance had been firmly acknowledged – this humble house has been subject to refurbishment as a new amenities block of Royal Park staff. With its original metalwork and windows restored,

and a new side wall added in a sympathetic style, the house now stands at this prominent corner of Royal Park as a unique reminder not only of the complex history of the park itself, but of government occupation in early Melbourne and the administration of Lieutenant-Governor Charles La Trobe.

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