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COVER: Unknown cabinet-maker, possibly Newcastle, NSW, painted decoration attributed to Joseph Lycett, *Collector's chest (Macquarie chest)*, about 1817-18. Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, XR 69

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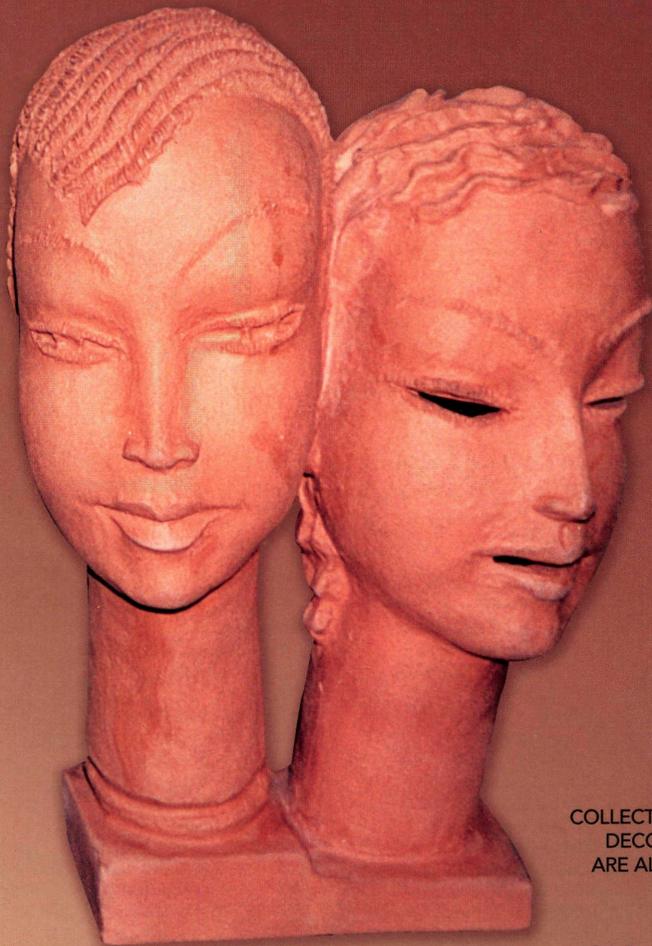
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Two early collector's chests

in the State Library of New South Wales

JOHN MCPHEE

Art historian John McPhee examines and compares the two early colonial Australian collector's cabinets, which are now both in the State Library of NSW



Dixon chest, handle, c. 1817-18

On October 2005, I had the pleasure of examining at the State Library of New South Wales the newly acquired collector's chest, to be known as the Macquarie chest, alongside the collector's chest donated to the Library by Sir William Dixon in 1937, and known as the Dixon chest. The Australian furniture historian Andrew Simpson accompanied me, and with us were Elizabeth Ellis, Mitchell Librarian and Director, Collection Management, and Richard Neville, Manager, Original Materials Branch, of the Library. For all of us it was an exciting and informative comparison. The following observations are my own and are not necessarily those of my colleagues.

My initial interest in the chests concerned the painted decoration traditionally attributed to the convict artist Joseph Lycett (c.1775-1828) who worked in the colony from 1814 to 1822. The exhibition, *Joseph Lycett: convict artist*, on which I was working with Richard Neville and Martin Terry

from the National Library of Australia, had involved us in careful observation and consideration of all of Lycett's known work, including the decoration on the chests. As a result of our work we are all confident that there need be no doubt that this painted decoration is by Lycett. Since much has already been published about the painted decoration, and future publications will detail more, this article concentrates on the cabinetry of the chests.

Traditionally these objects have been described as collector's chests, when, in fact, the description collector's cabinet may have been more accurate. The notion of a collector's cabinet arose in the ancient European tradition of the cabinet of curiosities in which collectors made rooms in which to display their collections of art, antiques and curiosities, many of which were natural history specimens. These are also, of course, considered to be the origin of the modern museum.

None of the pattern books of the great English cabinet-makers and furniture



Dixon chest, tray, c. 1817

Unknown cabinet-maker, possibly Newcastle, New South Wales, painted decoration attributed to Joseph Lycett, Collector's chest (*Dixon chest*), about 1817-18.

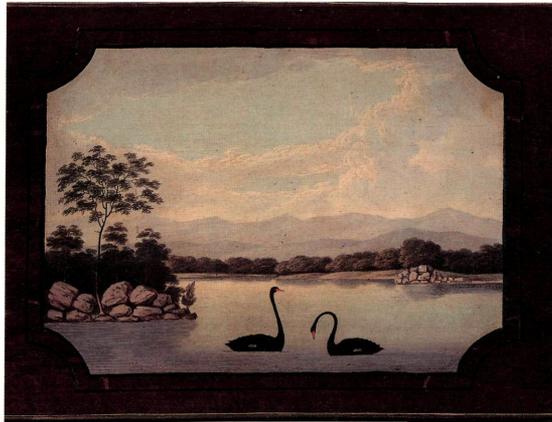
Oil paint on red cedar (*Toona ciliata*) and rose mahogany (*Dysoxylum fraserianum*) panels, red cedar and rose mahogany carcasse, satinwood [?] crossbanding, ebony (*Diospyros* sp.) and pine (unidentified) stringing, mahogany replacement feet, black painted stringing, gilt decoration, glass, brass (handles, escutcheons, other fittings, castors and capitals on feet), various natural history specimens.

Closed: 63.0 x 72.0 x 56.5 cm, open: 60.0 x 143.0 x 56.5 and 60.0 x 143.0 x 95.5 cm. Presented by Sir William Dixon, 1937, Dixon Galleries, State Library of New South Wales, DG R4

Provenance: unknown; Robert Frank, London; purchased from Frank by Sir William Dixon, 1937, and then presented to Dixon Galleries, State Library of New South Wales



Unknown cabinet-maker, possibly Newcastle, New South Wales, painted decoration attributed to Joseph Lycett, Collector's chest (Macquarie chest), about 1817-18. Oil paint on red cedar (*Toona ciliata*) panels, red cedar and rose mahogany (*Dysoxylum fraserianum*), ebony (*Diospyros* sp.) and pine or ash (*unidentified*) stringing, black painted stringing, gilt decoration, glass, brass (handles, escutcheons, other fittings, and capitals on feet), artefacts and various natural history specimens. Closed: 68.5 x 72.2 x 57.2 cm, open: 66.5 x 143.5 x 57.2 cm and 66.5 x 143.5 x 99.0 cm Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, XR 69 Provenance: unknown, probably Lachlan Macquarie, thence by descent to his son, Lachlan Macquarie, before the Drummond family, Strathallan Castle, Scotland, 1845-1910; William Roberts, Scotland, until 1989; Sotheby's, Melbourne, 17 April 1989, lot 327; private collection, Sydney, until 2004



Macquarie chest, detail showing the original over-painted stringing, c. 1817-18

display the qualities and potential of the colony's timbers, and particularly complements its use as the container for collections of natural history specimens. Originally, the Dixon chest probably looked more like the Macquarie chest with its highly contrasting timbers; when sold in England early in the 20th century, it is likely that its surface was stained and polished to create a more unified colour scheme.

Probably at the same time, the clumsy proportioned replacement feet were added. The drawer knobs, most unsuitable for a piece of travelling furniture, are certainly later additions, replacing the use of a key to open the drawers.

This 'restoration' disguises the timber and makes certain identification of its nature difficult. At the time of our inspection, no scientific examination of the timbers had been made. Conservators and furniture historians have always based their identification on their familiarity with Australian timbers. In recent years, botanists and dendrologists have reclassified red cedar (*Toona ciliata*) as not endemic to Australia's eastern coastal forests, but as growing throughout much of south-east Asia and India. Scientific examination of the timbers would be worthwhile, especially in determining the use of rose mahogany (*Dysoxylum fraserianum*), which is not

designers, Thomas Chippendale, George Hepplewhite and Thomas Sheraton, published in London in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, nor any of their contemporaries, include designs for collector's cabinets or chests. The closest to anything like these chests are dressing and shaving tables and a lady's travelling box,

which open out and make use of incorporated and foldaway trays in a similar manner. Closer comparisons can be made with furniture specifically made for travelling, and similar campaign furniture used by army and navy personnel.

The Macquarie chest makes use of timber with showy grain, an obvious attempt to



Macquarie chest, open
Mitchell Library,
State Library of
New South Wales, XR 6

dissimilar in appearance to some Asian hardwoods, in particular, teak.

While the two collector's chests are similar and probably have similar origins, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the Dixon chest is the prototype for the Macquarie chest. The slightly better quality of the cabinetwork and use of fittings of the Dixon chest - in particular the spring mechanism and locking device - points to its being the earlier. While both have countersunk brass carrying handles, those on the Dixon chest are decorated with engraved decoration rather than the undecorated, more common handles used on the Macquarie chest. It seems probable that in making the earlier chest, the cabinet-maker's first, and unrepeatable, choice was for the more ornamental handles. The slightly awkward nature of the engraved decoration suggests an Indian origin for these handles. Another possible Indian influence on the cabinet-maker can be found in the elaborate shape of the open handles of the inner tray of the Dixon chest.

The use of countersunk brass drawer handles on the Macquarie chest supports the suggestion that the use of a key to pull open the drawers, later replaced with knobs, as originally found in the Dixon chest, was a further refinement of the design.

Most significantly, as evidence of a copy being made, the cabinet-maker's stringing

on the Macquarie chest forms much larger arcs in each corner of several of the painted panels. As this would have left a smaller area for the paintings than on the Dixon chest, the mistake has been corrected by painting over the stringing. This resulted in the size and shape of the Macquarie panels more closely matching those of the Dixon chest.

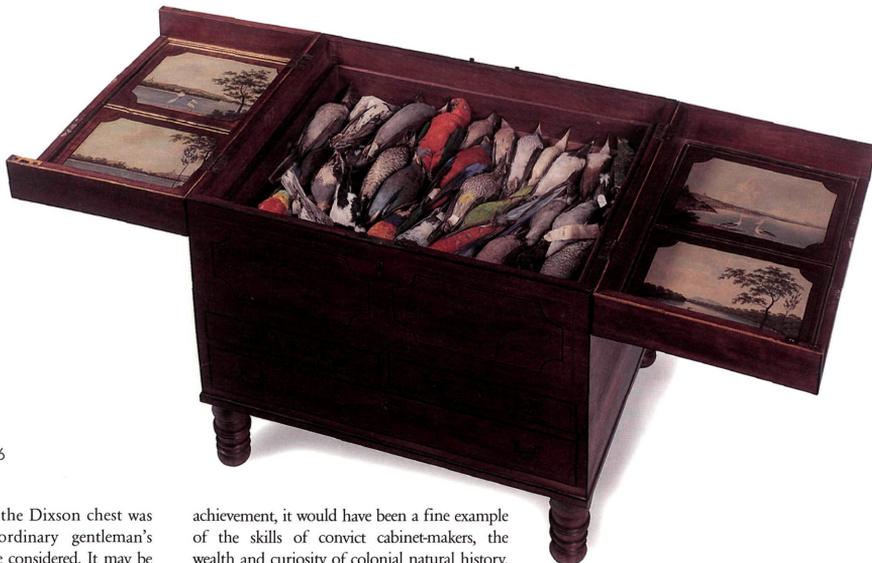
Overall, the slightly less sophisticated craftsmanship, the poorer quality of the fittings, and changes in the design and during its manufacture suggest the cabinet-maker of the Macquarie chest had to make-do in the copying of an earlier example.

The identity of the cabinet-makers responsible for the chests might never be certain. In the first years of the 19th century the colony's most skilled, and therefore most probable, cabinet-makers were Lawrence Butler (c. 1750-1820) and William Temple (c. 1778-1839). Butler, an Irish political transportee, had a flourishing business in Sydney from 1811 until his death in 1820, and in the *Sydney Gazette* on 9 December 1815 advertised dressing and shaving boxes which may have been of the kind the collector's chests resemble. However, his death in 1820 and no known association with Newcastle, tips the balance of probability in favour of Temple.

William Temple arrived as a convict in Sydney in 1814 and worked for Lawrence

Butler. Sentenced to a year's punishment at Newcastle in August 1817, his skills would have been known to Captain James Wallis, the commandant. After returning to Sydney, Temple continued as a cabinet-maker, and in 1820 established a partnership with the convict carver and gilder John Webster (c. 1798-?). In 1821, the same year that Lycett received his pardon, both received conditional pardons from Governor Macquarie for their work at Government House. The greater use of gilded decoration in the Macquarie chest - in framing painted panels, as gilded moulding, and as moulding holding glass in place - indicates the involvement of a craftsman with the specialised skills that John Webster possessed. This supports the possibility that Temple and Webster may have been responsible at least for the second chest.

While the Macquarie chest is obviously complete, with every drawer containing natural history specimens of various kinds and some artefacts, the Dixon chest has empty spaces. These may have once held objects similar to those in the Macquarie chest, but they show no obvious evidence of being further fitted with the elaborate system of trays found in the Macquarie chest. They may have been intended for another use, such as to store personal papers, documents and books.



Macquarie chest, open
Mitchell Library,
State Library of
New South Wales, XR 6

The possibility that the Dixson chest was originally a more ordinary gentleman's travelling chest has to be considered. It may be that its current appearance represents an unfinished attempt to convert it into a collector's chest, or that it served both purposes. The later creation of the Macquarie chest would represent a more fully realised example of both the colonial cabinet-maker's skill and its owner's desire to create a cabinet of colonial curiosities.

If, as has been suggested, the chest was a gift from Captain Wallis to Governor Macquarie when visiting the settlement at Newcastle to appraise himself of the commandant's

achievement, it would have been a fine example of the skills of convict cabinet-makers, the wealth and curiosity of colonial natural history, and an officer's desire to ingratiate himself with his superior.

John McPhee is an art historian and guest curator at the Historic Houses Trust for the exhibition *Joseph Lycett: convict artist* at the Museum of Sydney, Sydney from 1 April - 18 June; Newcastle Region Art Gallery 8 July - 27 August; and next year at the National Library of Australia, Canberra from 1 March - 11 June 2007. An illustrated catalogue will be available

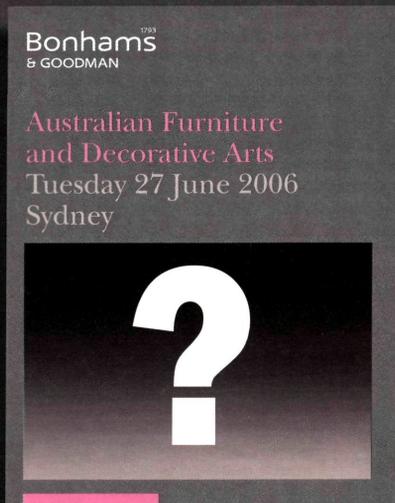


Macquarie chest, open
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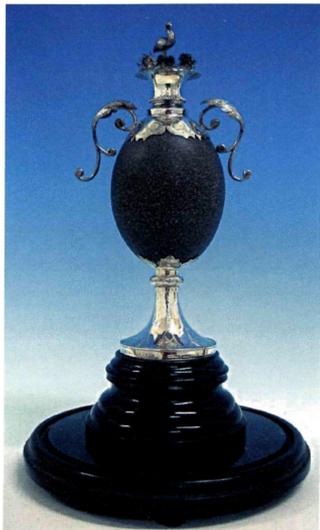
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Charles Brownlow, sporting legend and silversmith

BRIAN HUBBER

The 'Brownlow Medal' awarded to the best AFL player each year makes him a household name, but in the days when elite sportsmen needed a real job as well, Charles Brownlow had also trained as a silversmith in Geelong.



Charles Brownlow was a football legend – premiership captain and coach, founding father of the Victorian Football League, and sports administrator extraordinaire. Brownlow was a player and administrator at the Geelong Football Club, which had been formed in July 1859, a few months after Melbourne formed the first football club in Victoria.

Charles Brownlow was born in Geelong in 1861, the son of Charles Brownlow, bookbinder and his wife Eliza, née Whitaker. Young Charles made his debut in the navy blue and white hoops of the Geelong Football Club in 1880, was captain 1883-84 and retired as a player at the end of the 1891 season. He served as secretary of the Geelong Cricket and Football Club from 1887 until 1922, was Vice-President of the Victorian Football League from 1907, and President of the Victorian Football Council from 1911. When Brownlow died in Geelong in 1924, he was rightly honoured by having the trophy for the VFL's (and now AFL's) 'fairest and best' player named after him. The trophy, a medal, was first awarded in 1924 and has been awarded every year since, except during the war years 1942-45.

Most fans of the game probably know of Charles Brownlow's sporting achievements and contribution to Australian Rules football. But recently, while undertaking research on an exhibition, the Geelong Gallery has established that Charles Brownlow was accomplished in a completely different field, long before he turned his hand to sport. Charles Brownlow was a master craftsman – a man trained in the exacting discipline of the silversmith.

Although initially employed at the Yarra Street Methodist Sunday School, Brownlow was, by 1880, apprenticed to Geelong silversmith Edward Fischer (1828-1911). In the 19th century, Geelong was a centre for silversmiths, and Brownlow was apprenticed

to the best of them. Among other works, the Viennese-born Fischer was responsible for a series of ornate and beautiful Geelong racing cups.

John Hawkins quotes an 1876 newspaper report that Fischer employed eleven men and six boys in two workshops, and that at the Geelong exhibition of 1880, four of Fischer's apprentices exhibited their works: G. Jones, C. Brownlow, W. Henkel and H. Holdsworth.

Having completed his apprenticeship in 1880, Brownlow went on to establish his own jewellery and watchmaking business. He made numerous medallions for sporting and community groups, including the MUIOOF and the Geelong Volunteer Fire Brigade. Aged 25, Charles Brownlow, jeweller, married Matilda Jane Barber on 25 August 1886 at Geelong in a Wesleyan ceremony.

Brownlow's finest surviving work, now on display at the Geelong Gallery, is a silver-mounted emu egg, made in the late 1880s. The practice of mounting emu eggs was common in the second half of the 19th century, when Australians had a keen interest in using the indigenous flora and fauna. Brownlow mounted the egg in finely engraved silver with scrolled handles decorated with fern fronds. The finial at the top is moulded in the form of an emu among native grasses.

Brownlow combined his silversmithing with more general businesses, including a china warehouse and a tobacco shop. It appears, however, that he hung up his shingle in the mid-1890s, a time of severe economic depression, and made sport and in particular football his profession.

The commemoration of Charles Brownlow in the awarding of an annual medal is particularly appropriate, given Brownlow's early career as a silversmith.

Brian Hubber, formerly curator at the Geelong Gallery, is now the Director of the National Wool Museum in Geelong.

Above left: The Brownlow Medal, courtesy Sydney Swans

Left: Charles Brownlow, *Mounted emu egg* (c. 1890), silver, emu egg and ebonised wood, stamped 'BROWNLOW GEELONG'. 38.0cm x 23.8 cm. Collection Geelong Gallery, Dorothy McAllister Bequest Fund, 1995

References

- H. Gibbney & Ann G. Smith, *A Biographical Register 1788-1939*, Australian Dictionary of Biography, Canberra 1987, p. 91
J.B. Hawkins, *Nineteenth century Australian silver*, Antique Collectors Club, Woodbridge 1990, vol. 1, pp 298-302 & 309

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Captions: Bunting to celebrate the visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York, 1901; Preserved specimen of a lizard; Restored Ferrier Wool Press, 1831; Kewpie Doll, gift of the NSW Government, part of the Sydney 2000 Games Collection; Holden Prototype Car No. 1, 1946; Turtle sculpture from the Jim Davidson Collection, artist unknown; Landau, the 'Ranken Coach', early 1800s.
Photos: Dean McNicoll, Dragi Markovic, National Museum of Australia and Kewpie skirt courtesy Newspix.

3935_couchdesign.com.au

Mr Petersen and Mr Blytt

ALAN J. ROBB

Winsome Shepherd's *Gold and Silversmithing in Nineteenth & Twentieth Century New Zealand* is a valuable reference book which complements J.B. Hawkins' *Nineteenth Century Australian Silver*.² This note adds to Shepherd's information about two men involved in the silver trade in New Zealand. One is the founder of a prominent firm, Petersen. The other is an individual, Blytt, who appears under three different variants in her index.

There are many parallels between New Zealand and Australian silver, including the use of emu eggs, tree ferns and even mayoral cradles.³ Yet the works of silversmiths in each country can generally be distinguished by maker's marks, national motifs, distinctive materials and, of course, inscriptions.

Below: M. Selmer, photographer, Bergen Norway, carte de visite photograph of Benjamin Petersen (1837–1916/17), aged about 34, c. 1871. Robb collection, Christchurch

Below right: B. Petersen & Co.'s advertisement from the 1881 *Southern Provinces Almanac, Directory and Yearbook*

Shepherd's recounting of the history of Petersens' draws largely, and without acknowledgment, on a history written by Cyril Robb for a chapter of a numismatic book *They made their own Money - The Story of early Canterbury Traders and their Tokens*.⁵ The Robb family owned Petersens from 1929 until 1974. It continues to operate today as Petersens Jewellers Ltd, and is the oldest jewellery business in Christchurch.

Benjamin Martin Petersen was born in Bergen, Norway, in 1837 and served his apprenticeship as a watchmaker. At an early age he went to Adelaide, where he got a job with the silversmith J.M. Wendt, who had emigrated from Schleswig-Holstein to South Australia. The South Australian climate did not suit Petersen's health, so he moved to Christchurch, in the South Island of New Zealand.

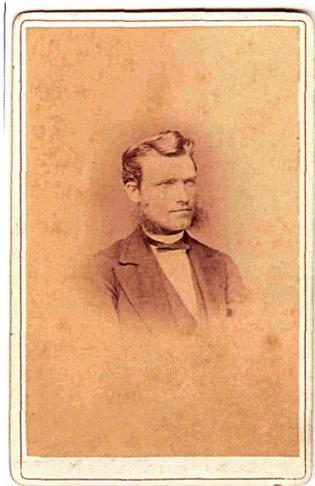
Petersen had established his business in High Street, Christchurch by December 1863. Though he would have been only 26 years old, his first advertisement proclaimed that he had '12 years' experience as a practical watch and clock maker in the first-class establishments in the principal cities of Europe.⁶

In 1864 he became a naturalised British subject. He was appointed Swedish and Norwegian Consul General for New Zealand in 1868 and was given special dispensation not to live in the capital. He held his consular position until December 1871, when he decided to relocate to London, setting up business as a merchant's agent buying for businesses in Australia and New Zealand.

He married, in Bergen, in 1872 and his only son Walter Lind Petersen was born in 1876. Petersen and his family lived in England, initially at Peckham and then at Annerley. According to correspondence in 1930 and 1931 between his son and Petersens Ltd, now in the Robb collection, Mrs Petersen died in 1915. Benjamin Petersen himself died in either 1916 or 1917 of pneumonia; both dates are given in his son's letters. The only known photograph of Benjamin Petersen, supplied by his son, is one taken in Bergen about 1871.

Petersen was directly involved in the business for only eight years (1863–1871) and was not himself a silversmith or goldsmith. Shepherd records that work produced by the company up to this time bore the marks [BP] [Lion passant], similar in style to an early mark of J.M. Wendt's. One of two examples of silverwork from this period is an emu egg cup shooting trophy dated 1871 which, as Shepherd says, shows the Australian influence as a result of Petersen's stay in Adelaide. Stamped 'BP', it was retailed by Petersen but Shepherd attributes its manufacture to William Edwards in Melbourne.⁷

With Benjamin Petersen's departure for London, ownership of the business changed. Cyril Robb records that the business was sold to Solomon Nashelski. Winsome Shepherd reports an advertisement in the *Lyttelton Times* of 1 January 1872 that suggests that Petersen retained an interest in the firm. The business style became 'B. Petersen & Co' which



1

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would not be inconsistent with this. In short order, Nashelski sold out to Herman Cohn who in 1875 left for London.

The business then came under the control of three employees who appear to have been partners in the firm. John Monson was in charge of the shop, Albert Gundersen* was in charge of the watchmaking department and Andreas Blytt was in charge of the silversmith department. All three were Norwegians. Gundersen and Blytt are known to have come originally from Bergen; possibly Monson did too. More recent research has revealed that Monson was admitted as a partner in July 1873.⁹

Shepherd's history of the firm is inaccurate in her references to Mr Blytt whose first name she gives as 'Albert' on five occasions. On another page he is 'Andreas' and yet another entry refers simply to 'A. Blytt'.

The official registers of Births, Deaths & Marriages shows that on 22 January 1874 Andreas Blytt, goldsmith aged 43, married Laura Cecilia Riise, spinster aged 30, 'at the house of Mr Blytt, Avonside', Christchurch. The baptismal records of Holy Trinity Anglican church, Avonside, show that a son, Haakon Blytt, born 29 April 1875, was baptised on 26 December 1875. His sponsors were his parents, Andreas and Laura Cecilia.

It is possible that Blytt was with Petersen in Adelaide or had spent some time working in Australia prior to coming to Christchurch. He may have been the creator of the emu-egg cup dated 1871, referred to previously. The small centrepiece illustrated here, ornamented with figures of emus, suggests that Blytt had a strong connection with William Edwards, the Melbourne silver manufacturer, and may have worked for that firm before coming to New Zealand.

Like Petersen, when Blytt left Bergen he was single young man, technically trained, free to travel. His arrival in Christchurch would initially have held good prospects for a skilled goldsmith. Blytt was probably the practical silversmith who made the work that went out under the company name.

A really profitable gold field had been discovered at Gabriel's Gully in Otago in 1861. Men came to the diggings from Australia, from California, from Ireland, from China. The population of Otago nearly trebled in a little over a year.¹⁰

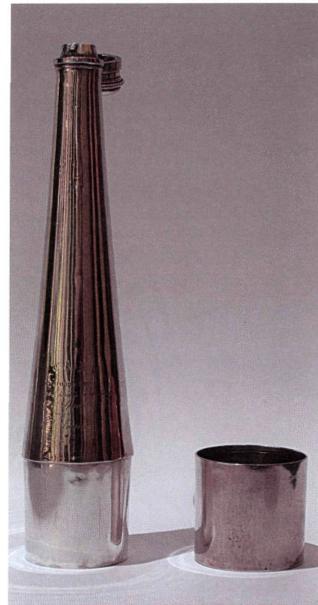
In 1865 and 1866 further gold rushes took place on the west coast of the South Island. But by the late 1860s, New Zealand was entering what became known as The Long Depression (1870-95).



Above: B. Petersen & Co., Christchurch, christening mug, sterling silver, dated 1873.

Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

Right: B. Petersen & Co., Christchurch, hunting flask and integral cup with leather case, the flask engraved 'SCAAC/ Champion Cup/ for most points in meeting/ 13th and 14th April 1874/ won by/ H.V. Anson', c. 1874. Sterling silver, h 25, diam 5 cm. Stamped on base 'B. PETERSEN & CO.' The South Canterbury Amateur Athletics Club (SCAAC) was established in Timaru in 1871. Private collection, Sydney



Below right: B. Petersen & Co., Christchurch, vase, silver, engraved with ferns and wakas c. 1880. Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

In August 1877 a torchlight procession of 1,500 Dunedin tradesmen drew attention to the slump...

Not only in Dunedin was there distress; in 1878 the Hospital and Charitable Aid Board in Canterbury passed a resolution urging the house surgeon to keep down the number of patients, for 'the present distress among the working men might lead to much illness... The competition of men for jobs brought wages down by one-quarter to one-third, while the unemployed became restive to the point of revolt.

Civil servants' salaries were cut, relief depots were organised by citizens' committees in all the main towns, and soup kitchens opened for the destitute poor. But the unemployed demanded 'work not soup.' In 1880 a petition was sent by the unemployed to the President of the United States asking for help to take them away from New Zealand.¹¹

Knowing this background suggests why, in June 1880, Andreas Blytt moved from the city of Christchurch, with a population of about 15,000, to the small town of Timaru, 100 miles south, with a population of about 3,500. A notice in the *Timaru Herald* of Friday 11 June, 1880, announced:



An Australian convict-made travelling desk from 1805

ALEX S. GEORGE

The author has located in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, London, a travelling desk with an inscription stating that it was made by a convict using Australian timbers and taken to England by the botanical artist Ferdinand Bauer in 1805. The cabinet-maker may have been either Laurence Butler or Thomas Williams.

Very few items of furniture made locally during the early decades of settlement in New South Wales have survived. It is thus exciting to report the discovery of a convict-made travelling desk in England, dating from 1805 at the latest.

In 2005, I was based at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, England, as Australian Botanical Liaison Officer (ABLO). The ABLO position has been occupied by a succession of botanists from Australian botanical institutions since 1937, apart from a 10-year break due to World War II. It is usually a 12-month appointment. The first priority for the ABLO is to answer requests sent by botanists in Australia and New Zealand for information from the very rich collections—historical specimens, rare literature, archives—held at Kew and other European institutions.

This year, one request took me to the collections held by the Economic Botany Museum at the Royal Botanic Gardens. The Museum was opened in 1847, soon after the establishment of the Gardens themselves in 1841 (Wickens, 1993) and holds specimens

and materials of economic importance, or potentially so, from all parts of the world. It contains hundreds of specimens sent from Australia, in particular during the second half of the 19th century when efforts were being made to find resources useful to the rapidly expanding colonies, still distant from the sources and markets of Europe.

While browsing the Museum's catalogue, I was intrigued by an item labelled 'travelling desk of Australian woods' and was amazed to be shown the item described here. It is catalogue number 37818 and has been housed in the Economic Botany Museum since 1888.

The desk

The desk is 51.6 cm long, 23.5 cm high and 25.5 cm wide. There is a brass lifting handle at each end. The lid is attached at the rear by a brass hinge at each end and is fastened at the front by a lock. A drawer at the base of the left-hand side of the desk is also fastened by a lock. The upper half of the desk is a lid that is 4.9 cm high at the front and 8.8 cm high at the back and opens in such a way that the top and bottom surfaces of the desk are in the same plane. One then turns the desk around to work on a sloping surface covered with green baize.

Left: The travelling desk from the front.
Photo by Andrew McRobb,
© copyright to the Board of Trustees of
the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

Below left: The desk opened showing the writing surfaces, the compartments along the top, one of the handles, and the drawer in the base.
Photo by Andrew McRobb,
© copyright to the
Board of Trustees of the
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew





Along the upper edge are five compartments. One 5.5 cm square (probably for holding an ink or sand pot) is at each end. Next to each of these is an oblong compartment 9 cm long, the left-hand one with a sloping wooden slide cover and the right with a horizontal one. A central compartment 17 cm long has a concave slide cover. These slide covers may be removed with some difficulty (being a close fit) to give access to storage spaces below. Each half of the writing surface may also be opened up to reveal a storage space beneath. In the base of the desk is the drawer mentioned above. It occupies virtually the full length of the desk, when removed being 50 cm long, 22 cm wide and 4 cm high.

The main case is constructed of *Eucalyptus* with a veneer of *Casuarina*. The likely species are *Eucalyptus resinifera* (Red Mahogany) and *Casuarina glauca* (Swamp Oak) or *Casuarina cunninghamiana* (River Oak) (Hawkins, 1983a). Inset from the margins, the top is strung with a pale wood, possibly *Callitris rhomboidea* (Port Jackson Pine). The writing surfaces are probably *Eucalyptus*, as is the base of the large compartment below the upper part, but a board covering the base inside is of softwood, possibly taken from a packing case. The large drawer also appears to be *Eucalyptus* species.

A sheet of green baize covers the underside of the desk. Apart from this the whole outer surface is French polished. The keys to both locks are extant and turn easily.

A metal plate below the lock on the front, measuring 14.3 cm by 5.5 cm, is engraved:

THIS DESK
was Manufactured by a Convict
AT SYDNEY IN NEW SOUTH WALES
INTIRELY OF THE NATIVE WOODS OF
THAT COUNTRY
and brought from thence and Presented to me
BY MY BROTHER FERDINAND BAUER
1805.

The engraved metal plate giving the initial provenance of the desk. Photo by Andrew McRobb, © copyright to the Board of Trustees of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew



The desk is in excellent condition, though with some marks from either transit or use. There are some stains (probably ink) in the square compartments on top, and traces of wax on the cloth.

Provenance

Ferdinand Bauer (1760–1826) was the Austrian botanical artist on HMS *Investigator*, commanded by Matthew Flinders, on a charting survey of the Australian coast in 1801–03. With Flinders and Bauer were the Scottish botanist Robert Brown, gardener Peter Good and landscape artist William Westall. When Flinders made his abortive attempt to return to England seeking a ship to replace the leaky *Investigator*, Bauer and Brown remained in New South Wales to continue their botanical work.

They returned to England in the patched-up *Investigator*, sailing from Sydney on 23 May 1805 and docking at Liverpool on 13 October 1805. Their effects amounted to 35 or 36 cases of natural history collections, drawings and personal luggage (Moore, 2005: 144). From accounts of their travels (e.g.; Vallance *et al.*, 2001) and the evidence of the plate on the desk, we know that, apart from some plant and seed collections sent earlier, all their effects were brought to England on this vessel. Bauer himself kept no journal of his travels to the Antipodes.

Ferdinand Bauer's elder brother was Francis or Franz (1758–1840), also a superb botanical artist who spent most of his working life (1790–1840) illustrating plants grown at the (then) Royal Gardens at Kew. The formal inscription shows that Ferdinand brought the desk back as a gift for his brother. So how did it end up in the Economic Botany Museum? The Museum records give the donor as 'Hooker Sir Joseph' with donor notes 'Smith John, Curator of Kew'.

Upon Francis Bauer's death on 11 December 1840, some of his effects were sold, among them the desk (Lack, 2003). They were auctioned in London by William Meyer in November 1841, item 186 in the catalogue being 'A Portable Desk made of wood from New South Wales', almost certainly the item here. There is no record of the buyers or prices from the auction, but presumably the desk was bought by John Smith. Smith was Curator of the Gardens at Kew from 1842 to 1864 and died there on 14 February 1888. He bequeathed the desk to Joseph Hooker, Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens from 1865 to 1885, who placed it in the Economic Botany Museum.

Who made the desk?

A major question is: who was the 'convict' who made the desk? From the quality of its construction, the person had good cabinet-



Brass-bound travelling desk in solid casuarina, with some cedar interior fittings. The brass lock is stamped 'crown/GR', suggesting military use during the reigns of George III or George IV, first third of the 19th century. Private collection, Sydney

making skills. It is pertinent to recall that, by present-day standards, the crimes for which people were imprisoned and transported were relatively minor, e.g. stealing an item of clothing, poaching a rabbit. Many had skills that proved a boon to the new colony being established in New South Wales.

One possibility is Thomas Williams. Convicted at Chester in 1796 and sentenced to seven years' transportation, he arrived in Sydney per the *Barwell* in May 1798. He was put to work as a carpenter in the Government

Lumber Yard, where all manner of wooden furniture and equipment was made. He must have completed his sentence or been given a ticket-of-leave within a few years, for he was listed as an emancipated convict, no. A4646, in the 1805-1806 *Muster* (Baxter, 1989). On 22 January 1804 he advertised in the *Sydney Gazette*.

Cabinet-Work T. Williams, Cabinet-Maker, No. 26 Chapel-Row, Respectfully acquaints Gentlemen and the Public in general, that he Manufactures for Sale all kinds of folding Desks, Tea Chests and

Caddies, Writing, Card, Pembroke, and oblong Dining Tables, Sea and Cloaths Chests, Quadrant Cases richly ornamented with the native woods, and a variety of other Articles peculiar to his profession in a handsome Style, and at moderate prices. N.B. Captains of Ships and all other Gentlemen who may favour him with their Commands supplied at the shortest Notice.

Williams specified that he made 'folding Desks' (first in his list) and that he used native woods, both relevant to the item under discussion. Williams was clearly no longer working in the Lumber Yard, however, and hence might no longer have been technically a convict. But even if the desk was made within the last few months before Ferdinand Bauer left Sydney, Williams may still have been known as 'a convict'.

Little further is known of Williams, except that he committed suicide in October 1821 (Fahy *et al.* 1985: 39). On 20 October 1821, a note in the *Sydney Gazette* reported an inquest as follows: 'The deceased was a carpenter, and considered an honest, industrious and inoffensive inhabitant, having been a householder in Sydney for the last twenty years.'

Another possibility is Laurence (or Lawrence) Butler (c. 1750-1820). Butler was convicted in 1800 for his role in the Irish Rebellion of 1798 (Fahy & Simpson, 1998) and transported to Sydney in the *Atlas 2*, arriving in October 1802 (no. A0426 in the *Muster ... 1805-1806*, Baxter, 1989). He, too, worked in the Government Lumber Yard. He received a conditional pardon in 1808 and set up a furniture-making business at 7 Pitt Street, Sydney, that eventually employed several apprentices and craftsmen. He first advertised in the *Sydney Gazette* on 2 November 1811, while a notice in the *Gazette* for 9 December 1815 offered:

for Sale chairs, tables and sofas, drawers and clothes presses, patent dining tables on pillars, on the newest construction, dressing and shaving boxes with glasses, card tables, an elegant cabinet and escritoire, bedsteads and mattresses, &c.

After Butler died in December 1820, aged about 70, his widow maintained the business until late 1823.

Other wood craftsmen who were in the Colony during the first two decades after settlement, e.g. William Haynes, Joseph Smith, John Baughan and David Brown (Fahy *et al.*, 1985), may be discounted for various reasons such as date of arrival or death, or because they were free settlers.

Travelling desk in cedar with pine stringing,
first quarter of the 19th century.
The brass handles are replacements.
H 17, W 30, D 30 cm.
Private collection, Sydney



The handles and locks would have been of English make. Such hardware was available in the colony; for instance, Butler offered imported butt hinges for sale in his advertisement of 2 November 1811. To judge from the wording, however, which implies that it was made for Francis Bauer, the plate on the front was engraved and added in England.

Similar early and travelling desks exist, but they have no provenance. Judge Ellis Bent wrote in 1810 that he was commissioning a beefwood writing desk as a present for his mother in England (Fahy *et al.*, 1985: 39).

It is exciting to discover an Australian writing desk that has such an early origin and intriguing ownership. Apart from the listing in the auction catalogue (Lack, 2003), there has been no mention of it in the extensive literature on the Bauer brothers.

Although cabinet-makers were active in Sydney from the early years of settlement, few examples of their work have survived. According to Crouch (1998), only two other items of similar provenance are known: a secretaire bookcase that belonged to Governor King, made c. 1803; and a gentleman's dressing table or toilet stand, made c. 1800. This desk adds a third.

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Above Left: The Ball Room of 'The Australia', redecorated by Emil Sodersten (note the Art Deco rising sun), *The Australia Handbook*. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Sydney



Above right: The Winter Garden, July 1931, Australia Hotel, designed by Alan E. Stafford ARAIA, painting and murals by H. Petersen, *The Australia Handbook*. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Sydney

packed social contacts lacked refinement and education. To her, the rich squattocracy lived at the Hotel in 'course but ostentatious luxury'.⁷

Not all international celebrities staying at the Australia Hotel shared her view. The majority tended to be much more diplomatic about Australian city culture and its denizens. Kurt Offenburgh, German author, playwright and journalist visiting in December 1930 found Australia as a country a refreshing, interesting place with 'everything in front of it', 'a new land working towards the future' and not trapped by 'ancient history' and traditions. His opinion was an extremely positive one. 'Already you have done much here - fancy a city like Sydney in 130 years!' At the time of this statement in an interview with the Australia Hotel's journalist and published in the Hotel's magazine, Offenburgh had spent two months at the Hotel and had seen something of elite rural life in Mudgee, visiting stud sheep and Clydesdale stations. He had also visited the steel works at Newcastle and the coal-mining town of Cessnock. These visits came from invitations made by the Australia Hotel's wealthy domestic guests who were having a holiday at the Hotel and a break from country life.

Offenburgh was the author of two published novels, a book of essays on European writers, prose and poetry anthologies, and two successfully produced plays. He had been commissioned to write a book on his travels to the Antipodes and was writing a series of articles about Australia for several German newspapers.⁸ His positive views were expressed in an interview with the Hotel journalist who made sure that they were highlighted in the next issue of *The*

Australia Handbook, which was published by the Hotel itself and provided *gratis* to paying guests, thus helping to sustain the place's cosmopolitan image while extolling the virtues of tourism in Australia.

Sydney Ure Smith (1887-1940), the erudite editor of *The Australia Handbook* in the 1920s and 1930s, was born in London and eventually became a publisher and artist of renown in Sydney. His father John Smith, formerly the manager of Melbourne's Menzies Hotel, became the manager of The Australia in 1901. Sydney grew up living with his parents in the manager's apartment in the highly sophisticated environment of the hotel, attending Sydney Grammar School briefly, and then for five years, Julian Ashton' Art School. He developed an intimate knowledge of the Australia's social and cultural life as well as its workings. While still at Sydney Grammar School he produced *Kat* (1901-02) and then *Australia Kat* (1902-03), a cyclostyled broadsheet newsletter aimed at clients of the hotel.

In his later editing of *The Australia Handbook*, he successfully incorporated high quality art work and design with technically advanced printing methods using colour.

With his cartoonist friend Harry Julius, he had found Smith and Julian in 1906, the earliest advertising agency to feature outstanding artwork and colour printing. In 1920 he established the publishing company Art in Australia Ltd. *The Australia Handbook* was one of his firm's most outstanding and sustained products as a commercial periodical. He ultimately published six different periodicals, including the famous *Art in Australia* (from 1916 to 1934) and *The Home* (1920 to 1942) which fostered 'good taste' in interior design, decoration, design, architecture and photography. As well he produced over 130 books, pamphlets and other published items. Although cosmopolitan in outlook, he did not travel overseas until 1933 when his career was well under way.⁹

His generosity of spirit was abundantly displayed in many of the pieces he wrote

especially for *The Australia Handbook* on contemporary Australian and overseas artists, writers, actors and filmmakers.

Theo Shall, the then famous Viennese actor who had starred beside Greta Garbo in the Continental film version of *Anna Christie*, arrived at the Australia Hotel from Melbourne in December 1932 on part of a theatrical tour with the popular play *Autumn Crocus*. With a graceful Continental charm and manner, he gave praise to the Australian landscape that he encountered on his motor tour from Melbourne to Sydney:

Near Canberra, I came upon a view I thought one of the most beautiful I have seen - blue sky surmounting well-shaped hills, green meadows and the blue water of a lagoon or river below, and beyond, virgin country untouched by cultivation. I loved too, the dead, gaunt trees in your Australian landscape. They remind me of the work of Honoré Daumier, the French caricaturist and illustrator, in their weird and fantastic beauty.¹⁰

His comments are in stark contrast to those of Beatrice Webb. Before coming to Australia he had known little of the country - he was totally unprepared and he acknowledged 'what has been achieved in this country in little over one hundred years'.¹¹ His opinions were enthusiastically endorsed by the Hotel management as they helped to promote tourism in which the Australia Hotel could play a central role as an elegant stopover in Sydney before or after exploring the wonders of the countryside.

In the same month another guest at the Australia Hotel was the dashing German aviator, Captain Hans Bertram, who was described as a fine representative of 'young Germany' who would help to promote the entente between England and Germany more than all the activities of politicians and diplomats. The Hotel's house journalist portrayed him as courteous, highly able and courageous. Monte Luke, the Hotel's photographer, provided an elegant portrait of the handsome young German

in a white tuxedo and black tie during his stay at the Hotel. He had flown a seaplane from Cologne to Australia on an eventful, adventurous and dangerous journey. He was accompanied by a co-pilot and two mechanics on the arduous flight. He was a hero suitable for endorsement by the Hotel as his celebrity enhanced its reputation.

During a wild storm he was set off course on the Timor Sea and was forced to land with an empty petrol tank in a sheltered bay somewhere between Wyndham and Darwin. After the storm subsided an Aborigine swam out to the plane to help. Neither could understand the other's language, but it was conveyed to the intrepid aviator 'that there was no habitation anywhere' close by. Bertram then moved the plane to the beach and promptly detached one of the floats. He endeavoured to sail in it to Wyndham in the open sea with his crew. Three days at sea saw them in dire straits. Catching a single fish just helped their survival, and they eventually returned, exhausted, to the coastline where fortunately they found a waterhole. Heat, flies, and the shortage of food then reduced the men to a very poor condition, their diet composing merely of lizards they caught and shellfish gathered on the beach.

In the meantime another lone Aborigine came upon the abandoned seaplane and discovered Bertram's inscribed silver cigarette case. On his report at a Mission some distance away, the Western Australian Airways, alerted by two-way radio, sent out planes in a fruitless search for the men. They were eventually discovered, not by the planes but by another Aborigine from the Drysdale Mission, who returned with others carrying kangaroo meat and fish for the starving men. Bertram's adventure was the stuff of legends that became embedded in the folklore of the Australia Hotel.

The Drysdale Mission immediately notified authorities at Wyndham. By this time the search for the Germans had been abandoned as all hope that they would be found alive had been given up. Eventually a police search party arrived at the Mission. After being cared for by the police and the Mission superintendent and his assistants, the fortunate young Germans were flown to Perth. While his companions travelled back to Germany, Captain Bertram proceeded on to Sydney to stay at the Australia Hotel, the Grand Hotel of the South Pacific. There he was welcomed like a conquering hero, as he was great publicity for the Hotel's reputation and a talking point for the media. His adventure in the far north was told and re-told to a succession of newspaper journalists visiting the celebrated German aviator in the Winter Garden of the Australia Hotel, while guests at other tables looked on and from time to time politely asked for his autograph. The possibility of such a sighting of the famous drew Sydneysiders to have afternoon tea at the Hotel.

Bertram had his Fokker machine fitted with a land under-carriage and toured Australia in it, lecturing in different centres where he could draw an audience. He had, indeed, a good and profitable story to tell on the lecture circuit and donated part of the proceedings to the Mission that had saved his life. The Australia journalist described him during his stay in Sydney:

This attractive young Vaterlander is extraordinarily alive, radiating a *joie de vivre* which one realises was part of the unquenchable spirit which helped him through his terrible ordeal. Outwardly the privations have left no imprint. He laughs easily and readily - his blue eyes twinkle and wit slips readily from his tongue. Yet underneath this gay, debonair mien, lies a

serious note, a profundity one does not always find in one so young - he is only twenty-seven. Throughout his lectures, simply and vividly told and enthralling in their interest, was a note of gratitude and thankfulness and humility for the Divine intervention to which he readily acknowledges his deliverance.¹²

Bertram was suitably feted, particularly by the German community in Sydney. Leo Buring, the prominent wine grower and wine merchant, gave a 'delightful luncheon' in honour of the aviator to farewell him in his Sydney wine-cellar, 'Ye Olde Crusty', which was attended by notables of the community.¹³ Other such functions were held at the Australia Hotel itself and Bertram savoured its fine cuisine and wines on several occasions.

Below left: Sarah Bernhardt (pen and ink portrait), 'Madam Sarah Bernhardt's visit to Australia', *The Illustrated Sydney News*, 23 March 1891. The great French actress, known as 'The Divine One' and the 'embodiment of the subtle arts' was the first guest of the Australia Hotel when it opened and one of the first stage 'super stars' to visit Australia. Her previous ten years of international success were described as 'a series of triumphant voyages around the world'

Below centre: The original grand entrance of the Australia Hotel showing the classic beauty of the Italian Renaissance. From an etching by David Barker, *The Australia Handbook*. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Sydney

Below: Program cover of Madame Sarah Bernhardt's performance of *La Tosca* (the play in French) at Her Majesty's Theatre, Sydney. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Sydney





Percy Grainger (photograph by Monte Luke), *The Australia Handbook*. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Sydney

Over the years, the Australia Hotel developed an abundance of facilities for its patrons. By the early 1920s, potential customers were demanding more luxury comforts. In 1921 three more floors were added to the original 1891 building as business began to boom after the Great War and demand for accommodation in Sydney increased. The Hotel had needed revitalising along the lines of an up-market New York hotel with a broad range of facilities for the modern guest. By then it contained, apart from hotel rooms, an elaborate bookshop in the vestibule, a booking office, the so-named Winter Garden for luncheons, morning and afternoon teas, a formal dining hall, a ballroom, Turkish steam baths with expert attendants and other specialised areas.¹⁴ All of these facilities costing £250,000 were developed to maintain the Hotel's competitiveness in Sydney. It was a successful attempt at modernisation and a movement away from its late Victorian origins of more basic facilities.¹⁵

The new Martin Place extension to the Hotel was completed in 1936, revitalising it yet again and adding a number of new features linked throughout to the old building, but of Art Deco design carried out on the outside in granite and freestone. Along the new frontage in Martin Place itself were shops, two new main entrances and a new bar. Vertically the building carried an even richer array of facilities resplendent throughout in the latest Art Deco design. Art Deco designs in New York and London (such as Claridge's) influenced the remodelling. By the mid 1930s, the Art Deco movement in the design of public buildings in Sydney was at its height, especially in Martin Place.

Australian-born Emil Lawrence Sodersten, the most notable exponent of the streamlined modernist architectural design in Australia, designed the new wing for the Australia Hotel management.¹⁶ A flamboyant amateur polo player and skier, Sodersten (whose name was anglicised from 'Sodersteen' in 1943) drew from the contemporary modernist Art Deco movement overseas, extensively using the popular imagery of the era: jazzy angular ornamentation, geometrical foliage and the rising sun in *bas-relief*. In the Hotel building he employed 'the full gamut' of brass-edged terrazzo floors, chrome plating, glass, piano-finish veneers, modern concealed lighting and other streamlined forms. Through this groundbreaking vocabulary he gave the building the ultimate look of sophistication of the age.¹⁷ His use of 'black glass embellished with silver' created an interior where 'everything sparkled and shone'.¹⁸ Management had demonstrated a sharp adaptability to change.

The intention continued to be not just a mere hotel for overnight guests, but an epicentre for established business, cultural and social life – a place in the centre of the city to meet, finalise business deals and entertain. It aimed to be the hub of the Southern Hemisphere for globe-trotters as well as well-off country and interstate visitors.¹⁹ Six floors in the extension provided additional first class accommodation overlooking Martin Place. A new Wintergarden, banquet hall and buffet and three private dining rooms were included. The whole building had by this time five hundred rooms and suites, occupying eight floors of the Hotel.

There were the stainless steel lift cabins, a stairway reminiscent of the one found in the famous Art Deco Chrysler Building in New York, an elliptical stairwell lined in etched black glass, a streamlined bevery and tables in the new Wintergarden clustered around black glass columns beneath a bas relief by the prominent and distinguished sculptor Rayner Hoff²⁰ who often worked with the architect Sodersten.

The refurbishment required new furniture too and the contract was given to Frank De Groot, a regular patron of the hotel. De Groot considered himself the 'furniture architect', and outsourced work he could not complete in his own furniture workshop at Rushcutters Bay. He supplied 90 wardrobes and the furniture for the Winter Garden, Banquet Hall and private dining rooms.²¹

The Second World War years saw a decline at the Hotel in terms of its traditional genteel elegance of old money and the heightening of a racy, raffish and jazzy atmosphere. American servicemen of the officer class took over several floors of the building. Now that the harbour city was substantially a male R and R leave garrison, the Wintergarden became generally known among the most sedate Sydneysiders as the 'passion pit'.

During the whole period of the war, Tilly Devine, the famous Sydney 'Queen of the Underworld', centred her more exclusive operations at the Hotel. She provided a team of her best-dressed and most attractive prostitutes, complete with expensive handbags, flamboyant hair styles decorated with an orchid, swinging floral dresses above the knee, nylon stockings and high heels. They were available to servicemen for a price, especially to the free-spending and sometimes lonely American officers. She had a table permanently booked in the Wintergarden beneath the Rayner Hoff *bas-relief* in order to control her business operations and from where she could supervise her employees specially chosen from the various men's clubs (that is, brothels) that she ran so successfully in the Surry Hills district.

Occasionally known as La Divine Tilly, the 'tough peroxide blonde' in her mid-fifties presided at her table wearing showy expensive clothes, furs and other finery, and the 'most glittering collection of jewellery in Australia'.²² She was concerned that her girls were extremely well mannered and well groomed while working the Hotel rooms and she grew wealthy over this and numerous other ventures. She collected money at the table and gave change to her working girls using a large, expensive leather purse.

After the austerity of the War, the Long Bar – which had a secret door behind it from the interior of the hotel for the benefit of residential after-hours drinkers – and the Wintergarden with its Art Deco interior decoration – black onyx and a ceiling of silver stars – were the best public places in 1950s Sydney for convivial meetings of the sophisticated in the inner city. Famous radio stars like the compere Jack Davey had permanent tables booked each day and evening of the week in the Wintergarden. Journalists, established writers, artists and radio and theatre actors dined there with great frequency to discuss contemporary issues and the latest theatre gossip of import. 'See you at the Australia!' was a catchcry of the Sydney sophisticate.²³

Prince's, one of Sydney's most famous nightclubs, was established opposite the Australia Hotel in Martin Place and Romano's²⁴ was found in a similar position underground and next to the Prince Edward Theatre. In the vicinity of the Hotel, then, were all the respectable night clubs of Sydney that were not closely associated with the criminal underworld – the Australia Hotel was 'top of the town' in a variety of ways. In the Art Deco Hollywood settings of both Romano's and Prince's, grand descending staircases led down to the small elegant tables with soft individual lighting waited on by waiters in evening dress – beyond there was the highly polished dance floor and the bandstand. The



most beautiful, elegant and famous were given the best table to show them off in a prominent manner. Such display was expected by both the customer and the management. Evening dress in high style was expected. The best picture theatres of the post-war period – the Prince Edward, the Mayfair and the Embassy – were close by, and provided the best of Hollywood feature picture entertainment.

But the Wintergarden was the very epicentre of the whole of this sophisticated leisure-time city system:

The new Wintergarden [sic], which leads off the old room [the original Winter Garden in the original part of the building] now turned into an assembly lounge, is a beautiful room, spacious, lofty, with splendid natural light. Simple in design, it impresses with its liberal window space, curtained in wine-coloured velour with silver enrichments; its lovely walls panelled in natural Swedish birch; its stately pillars of black marble with insert strips of chromium, and its joyous murals typifying Australia's love of the sea and surf, designed by Mr Emile Sodersteen and engraved by Rayner Hoff, one of our finest sculptors. More than ever will the Winter Garden, famous as a rendezvous for luncheons, teas, cocktails and suppers, be a popular centre for social gatherings.²⁵

The Long Bar was of similar decoration in black and silver – the favoured colours of the Art Deco mode of interior decorating. Glass panelled walls had engravings depicting various 'phases of sporting life'. Here again, is a feeling of cosy intimacy, a gay meeting-ground for many a friendly toast.²⁶

When compared with the architectural anathema of Manhattan Island in New York, the

Australia Hotel and the nearby sophisticated nightclubs and picture theatres were a small oasis of invented night time elegance, but nevertheless a pale imitation. The difference between Sydney of the Australia Hotel and Prince's nightclub and Manhattan was the 'difference between night and day'. Both cities behaved much the same way during hours of business, but when 'the moon is over Manhattan' things were very different. Sydney had little nightlife when compared to that found in New York or indeed the cities of the European continent.

The capacity of the 'New Yorker to enjoy himself when away from the cares of the office' was 'amazing' compared to dinner at one of the 'pubs' in Sydney like the Australia Hotel, a picture show and then a supper dance at Romano's. Of course, New York was a much more densely populated city and the magnet for so-called 'out-of-towners' from all over the United States. It had a much greater pressure to provide nightlife as well as a greater capacity. Cocktails 'till curfew' could be had at One Fifth Avenue and Eighth Street, the world famous Cotton Club on 'Broadway and 48th Street' where the jazz greats played and sang, at Longchamps on Madison Avenue from midnight to sunrise 'after the celebrities of society, radio, stage and screen have their rendezvous ...'. The Club Gaucho was a 'picturesque haunt where food, both Spanish and homelike', was 'inexpensive and good', and as well one could dance to a 'tango and rhumba band' until the early hours. The list seemed endless. Benny Goodman, 'the King of Swing', was to be found at the Pennsylvania; there was also the 'sleek and sophisticated Stork Club where one could get close-ups of celebrities at any hour, and the Paradise has the 'best

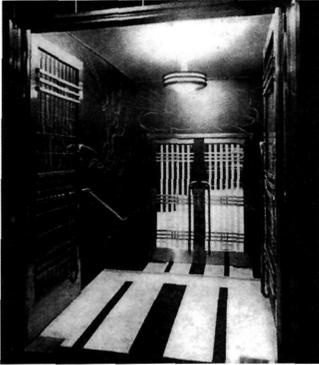
Above left: German aviator Captain Hans Bertram (photograph by Monte Luke), *The Australia Handbook*. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Sydney

Above centre: Anna Pavlova (photograph by Monte Luke), *The Famous Russian Danseuse*, *The Australia Handbook*. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Sydney

Above: Dame Nellie Melba, (photograph by Harold Cazneaux, 1922) *The Australia Handbook*. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Sydney

girl-shows, plus other tonics for the jaded'. The Kit Kat Club and Leon and Eddie's were two nightspots for the 'fast and furious', but Jimmy Kelly's was 'the noisiest and the naughtiest'. And right opposite Madison Square Garden was Jack Dempsey's huge restaurant for honest American food and a large dance orchestra after 10pm that was 'second to none'. More sophisticated food could be found at the Marguery on Park Avenue or Tony's on West 52nd Street, or at the Caviar close by in the same street.²⁷

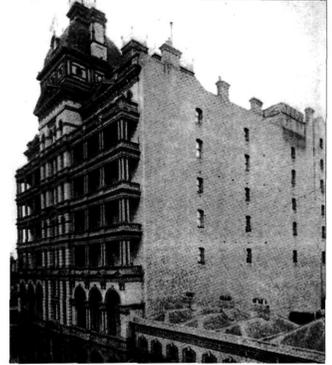
Despite the incompleteness of this survey of New York night life provided by the expatriate Australian journalist in early 1937, the staid and comparatively empty city of Sydney at night had no answer, except for the Australia Hotel, Romano's and Prince's, where the rich and famous behaved with the decorum of the Australian elite in formal evening dress, while enjoying some sort of nightlife. They could, however, dance until after midnight, provided proper behaviour was preserved.²⁸ Night culture in the two cities was decidedly different, but the Australia Hotel did imitate some aspects of grand hotels in New York, especially in its range of facilities for clients, including late suppers and ballroom dancing.



Above left: Art Deco internal entrance to public bar, designed by Emil Sodersten, *The Australia Handbook*. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Sydney

Above centre: Art Deco staircase in the Martin Place vestibule, designed by architect Emil Lawrence Sodersten (Sodersteen) (1899-1961), *The Australia Handbook*. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Sydney

Above right: The Australia Hotel, Castlereagh Street, Sydney, soon after its opening in 1891. Mitchell Library, State Library, of NSW, Sydney



In a short story set in the Australia Hotel, a fictitious character in evening dress put it another way: 'It's so nice to find a real cosmopolitan in this hick town.'²⁹ Muriel Chadwick, the Australian expatriate society journalist and fashion artist in New York, clearly agreed and added a rejoinder to enterprise in Sydney:

A city the size of New York must naturally provide a good living for a large number of night-club vendors, while the enormous number of out-of-towners giving Broadway the one-over ... who eagerly adopt 'We Won't Go Home Till Morning' as their theme song. Yet Sydney, I am sure, could support quite a few spots patterned after those of New York, and be all the happier for them.³⁰

Nevertheless she felt an 'exile for the loss of the sunny softness of Sydney', but compensated in the rich nightlife of Manhattan from 'dusk to daybreak' in the great variety of nightspots.³¹ Muriel Chadwick had formerly been a journalist in Sydney and knew the city well, including its night-time entertainment. Her views on Sydney nightlife are supported by Sydney-based journalists like Carl Rühn³² who claimed that in the 1950s the 'beau mode' of the city

circulated ceaselessly between the Australia Hotel, Romano's and Prince's to be seen and photographed for the society pages.³³

In the post-war years, the Australia Hotel continued its tradition to play host to artists of the screen and stage or concert platform. Some were at the pinnacle of their careers, some were just in their initial years of becoming prominent and others were beginning to be in their twilight years. All had some fascination for the Australian public and the popular media, and they included Lawrence Olivier, Vivien Leigh, William Boyd, George Formby, Jack Benny, Johnny Ray, Nat King Cole, Joe E. Brown, Jean Simmons and Marlene Dietrich. Ray, Dietrich, Formby, Joe E. Brown and William Boyd (Hopalong Cassidy) were certainly in the twilight zone of their public careers when they arrived in Sydney.

The Australia was frequently the target of Sydney University's students' Commemoration Day activities and pranks in their heyday. Commemoration Day was 'D-Day' for the Australia and it 'was locked up like Fort Knox. You needed a passport for entry ...' After the Second World War, the distinguished English conductor, Sir Thomas Beecham, stayed there some time after he had founded the London Philharmonic Orchestra in 1946, touring with them internationally between 1950 and 1957.³⁴ The story goes that Sydney University students intended to kidnap him at the Australia as a prank and shave off his famous goatee beard.

Another Commemoration Day prank involved a university student booking into the Australia overnight and calling for medical attention as she claimed that she had the bubonic plague. The hotel was quarantined and all guests were medically checked.³⁵ Is it any wonder that the Australia's management and staff felt edgy on that one day more than any others throughout the year?

The Australia Hotel and its large staff of doormen, lift drivers, receptionists, waiters, chefs, cooks, housemaids and so on of 500 permanent employees (in 1949) as well as numerous casuals,³⁶ shared the lives of the wealthy,

talented, beautiful and famous, who went through its doors as clients. The memories of famous guests accumulated, became legendary and lingered long after their departures, and were passed on continuously. The *haut monde* always filled the dining rooms, bedrooms and ballrooms of the great establishment. Steamer trunks taken from luxury liners docked at Circular Quay burst with morning dresses, smoking jackets, tea gowns and sundry ballroom and supper finery. Later not so much could be brought by airline, but the fashionable managed with slightly less expensive attire in modern lightweight luggage (in comparison with heavy trunks for sea voyages).

The experiences of the rich and famous were recorded, reconstructed and celebrated as the more fascinating parts of the working lives of the housemaids, chefs and assistant cooks, reception staff, waiters, house detectives and doctors. Vivien Leigh was remembered for her sweetness and politeness, and her partner, Lawrence Olivier, for his rudeness and explosive temper. The manager, Lex Rentoul, claimed that he was 'the rudest man' he 'ever had the misfortune to encounter.'³⁷

This collective of memories of the glorious past occasionally found its way into published form in the popular literature. For example, the last prominent and well-regarded manager of the Hotel, Lex Rentoul, who supported the notion that excellent service came at a price with good salaries for a large well-trained staff, described an incident in the visit of the famed American entertainer, Danny Kaye:

As he tells it, the parents of a small girl who had cerebral palsy had brought her to Sydney from Wagga Wagga to see Kaye in performance, and were staying at the Australia. When he learnt this, and that the comedian was a great favourite of the little girl whose parents he knew quite well from previous stays at the hotel, Rentoul [the Manager] decided to make a direct approach to Kaye, and telephoned his suite. To his delighted surprise, Kaye didn't

Right: The New Banquet Hall, Australia Hotel, designed by Emil Sodersten, *The Australia Handbook*. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Sydney



Far right: The Beverly, Australia Hotel, Art Deco design by Emil Sodersten, *The Australia Handbook*. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Sydney



demur for a moment, and instructed Rentoul to bring the girl up to his suite. Rentoul did so, carrying her up from the dining room where he had left her and her parents – and for about an hour, said Rentoul, gave the excited child a ‘glimpse of heaven, doing all kinds of wonderful imitations, singing and dancing. Then he gave her an autographed photograph of himself.’³⁸

There were many such stories of the legendary figures that had stayed at the Australia Hotel. Another was told by staff who were there in the 1930s:

Said to be a Russian countess, Madame Destine, as she was to be identified, rode on horses, played Beethoven on the grand piano in the hotel ballroom, wore her hair in a severe Eton crop, and could be observed striding out in King’s Cross with a walking stick and a blue cattle dog. In one story printed about her she was described as the widow of an Argentinean cattle king and had subsequently become a drover in Central Australia where she had been sent for health reasons as the result of complications setting in after she had been injured in a horse riding accident in Sydney.³⁹

The Decline

From the late 1960s the Australia began a slow slide toward the inevitability of closure, due to modern competition with new luxury hotels being established in Sydney. It could not compete. Passenger aeroplanes replaced luxury liners in celebrity travel. Car travel was replacing train travel from the countryside. Its once sophisticated Art Deco style, which had dated by the late 1960s, had become a liability and a burden compared to Sydney’s new first-class hotels in the international style – the Menzies, Chevron and Wentworth. Modern motels burgeoned in the inner suburbs for ‘out-of-towners’.

The Australia Hotel developed a reputation of being faded and run down, and no big scale renovation or revitalisation like that of 1936 was anywhere in sight. Profits had dramatically slumped in the 1960s due to the inroads of intense competition. The building’s premier city site in the very centre of the town became earmarked by big investment for the development of office space. The city’s skyline was about to change with the Hotel’s closure on 30 June 1971. The writing on the wall was made flesh with the grand old hotel’s final destruction.

The auction sale to dispose of china, silverware, cutlery and the huge number of fittings, furnishings and other pieces of equipment was the largest in the country’s history up to that time. Even the bathroom taps and the ashtrays were sold to the highest bidder, but at the other end of the scale were the chandeliers that graced the public rooms and the Bechstein baby grand piano from the Emerald Room.⁴⁰ The Emerald Room itself in a sense was reinstalled in a restaurant in Oxford Street by an enterprising restaurateur who recycled the Australia’s dinnerware, silver cutlery and voluminous curtains purchased at the auction sale.⁴¹ The interior of the Hotel was gutted and scattered across Australia into the ownership of hundreds of collectors as well as owners of small hotels and furnished lodging houses.

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Notes

- 1 Paul Wenz died at Forbes in 1939. Many of his short stories and novels were written in French about Australia as he knew it. A few of his works were written or translated into English. His works interestingly depict Australian cultural life in the first half of the 20th century from an ‘outsider’, or ‘New Chum’s’ viewpoint. See Paul Wenz, *Diaries of a New Chum & other Lost Stories*, (preface by Frank Moorhouse), Imprint (A&R), Sydney, 1990.
- 2 Eric Russell, *Victorian and Edwardian Sydney from old photographs*, John Ferguson, Sydney, 1976, p.167; 90 boxes of documents on the Australia Hotel are housed in the Mitchell Library, Sydney, in the Manuscripts Collection. They are uncatalogued, but a preliminary trawl through them reveals the determination of the hotel management was to develop the Hotel as ‘the Grand Hotel of the South Pacific’ along the lines of prominent European metropolitan hotels for the elite.
- 3 Carl Rühlen, *Pub Splendid. The Hotel Australia 1891-1971*, Murray Child & Co., Collaroy NSW, 1995, p.10.
- 4 Kenneth Slessor & Virgil Reilly, *Darlinghurst Nights*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1981 (first published in 1933), p.35.
- 5 *The Australia Hotel Registers, 1891-1969*, Manuscript Collection, Mitchell Library.
- 6 Images derived from *The Australia Handbook*, 1925-1935 editions, Mitchell Library.
- 7 Kate Harman (ed.), *Australia Brought to Book. Responses to Australia by Visiting Writers 1836-1939*, Boobook Publications, Balgowlah NSW, p.145-150.
- 8 ‘Mr Kurt Offenburgh’, *The Australia Handbook*, December 1930, p.17.
- 9 Nancy D.H. Underhill, ‘Smith, Sydney George Ure (1887-1949)’, *ADB* vol. 11, p.662f, *Making Australian Art 1916-1949*. Sydney Ure Smith patron and publisher, Oxford UP, Melbourne 1991, pp24-38
- 10 *The Australia Handbook*, December 1932, p.21.
- 11 ‘Mr Theo Small’, *ibid*.
- 12 ‘Captain Hans Bertram’, *ibid*, p.13-14.
- 13 *ibid*.
- 14 *The Australia Handbook*, August 1925, pp.6, 15, 24-25, 34.
- 15 ‘Vale. Mr William Tilley, formerly Chairman and Managing Director of the Australia Hotel’, *op.cit.*, December 1928, p.3.
- 16 Born 30 August 1899 at Balmain, Emil Sodersteen FRAIA, 1931 (Fellow of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects), a leading Sydney architect,



Above left: Australia Hotel plated milk jug and hot water jug stamped 'The Australia Hotel'. Collection of the Rowe Street Society

Above: Australia Hotel match box holder, in nickel silver, stamped with 'The Australia' on a map of Australia in a circle. Possibly North American, 1930s. Collection of the Rowe Street Society

Left: Australia Hotel cup and saucer with printed 'The Australia' logo. Both are Staffordshire, the cup by Maddock, the saucer by Grindley Hotel Ware, 1960s. Collection of the Rowe Street Society

**Memory Lane -
 Recollecting Rowe Street**
 A free exhibition at the Sydney
 Customs House exhibition lounge
 31 Alfred Street, Sydney
 January - June 2006

worked on the new Martin Place extension of the Australia Hotel in association with the building firm of Robertson & Marks. Sodersteen designed the City Mutual Life Assurance Building in 'skyscraper' style at the intersection of Bligh & Hunter Sts, Sydney, completed in 1936 as well as much of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, opened in 1941 (winning the competition for the design in 1926 at the age of 27). He designed the 9-storey *Birtley Towers* in Elizabeth Bay in 1934, an apartment block with an in-house restaurant, an inner courtyard and parking areas.

17 Mark Ferson & Mary Nilsson (eds), *Art Deco in Australia. Sunrise over the Pacific*, Craftsman House, Sydney, 2001, pp.89, 179, 183. This source consistently spells the architect as 'Sodersten' as does the *ADB*, Vol.16, p.279f; but *The Australia Handbook* published by the Australia Hotel in the 1930s spells it consistently as 'Sodersteen'. He and his brothers changed their surname by deed poll to 'Sodersten' on 19 November 1943. He was Emil Sodersteen when the extensions to the Australia Hotel were completed.

18 Peter Reynolds & Poppy Biazos Becerra, 'Sodersten, Emil Lawrence (1899-1961)', *ADB* vol. 16, p.279f.

19 *The Australia Handbook* of the 1930s in each issue identifies in articles, photographs and their captions and snippets a large number of luminaries from overseas who stayed at the Hotel including Percy Grainger, Leff Parishoff the famous Russian pianist, Baron Kjell Fleetford the Swedish pianist, Joseph Szigenti the Hungarian violinist, Efrim Zimbalist the Russian violinist, Yehudi Menuhin, Dame Sybil Thordike and Sir Lewis Casson, Elli Beinhorn the German aviatrix and many others.

20 *Ibid.*, p.183.

21 Andrew Moore, *Francis De Groot Irish Fascist Australian Legend*, Federation Press, Sydney, 2005, p.164.

22 'La Divine Tilly - a blond dynamo purrs social respectability', *People*, 6 May 1953; 'Study in scarlet: An uncrowded Queen of Slumland drips with diamonds and charity', *People*, 15 March 1953.

23 Meg Stewart, 'Dinner at the Australia', *The Bulletin*, 17 December 2002, p.108-110.

24 Lucy Hughes Turnbull, *Sydney: Biography of a City*, Random House Australia, Sydney 1999, p.298.

25 *The Australia Handbook*, December 1936, p.5.

26 *Ibid.*

27 Muriel Chadwick, 'Night Life of Manhattan', *Fashion and Society*, 1 February 1937, p.10-11, 56-57.

28 'Memoirs of a Midnighter', *ibid.*, 1 February 1939, p.23.

29 *Fashion and Society*, 1 June 1940, p.9 (caption).

30 Muriel Chadwick, *op. cit.*, p.11.

31 *Ibid.*, p.57.

32 Carl Rühén, *op. cit.*

33 *Ibid.*, p.47.

34 'Beecham, Sir Thomas (1879-1961)', *The Concise Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol.1, Oxford UP, 1992, p.193; reminiscences, Kevin Fahy, 23 November, 2005.

35 Reminiscences, Kevin Fahy, 23 November, 2005.

36 Rühén, *op. cit.*, p.36.

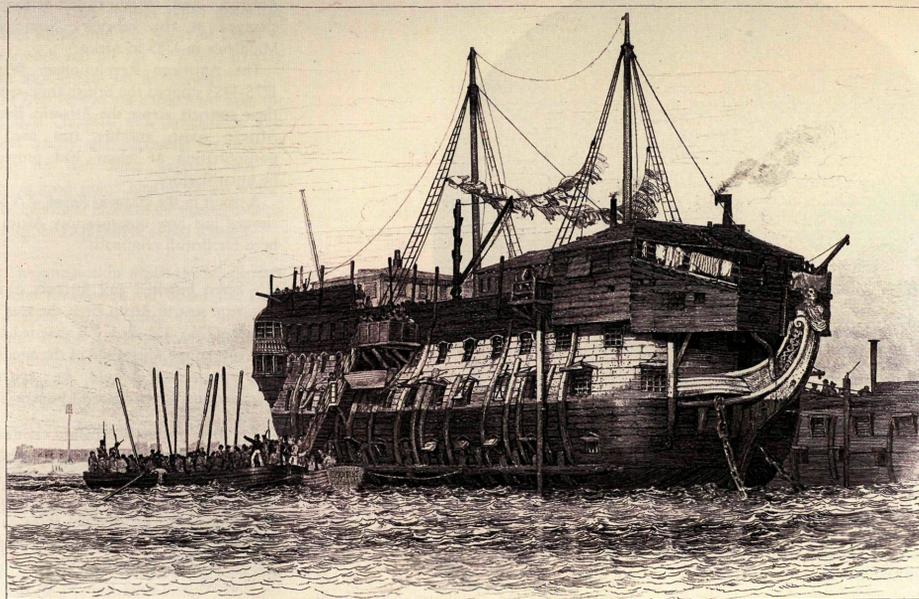
37 *Ibid.*, p.76.

38 *Ibid.*, p.78.

39 *Ibid.*, p.86.

40 Rühén, *op. cit.*, p.180.

41 Reminiscences, Kevin Fahy, 23 November, 2005.



PRISON-SHIP, IN PORTSMOUTH HARBOUR.
CONVICTS going on board.

Drawn & Etched by Edw Wm Cooke 1828.

Edward William Cooke (1811-1880), *Prison-ship. In Portsmouth Harbour. Convicts going on board.* Drawn & etched by Edw Wm Cooke 1828. Engraving, published in Cooke's Shipping and Craft series, 1829, 183 x 270 mm. Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney

'Ann Wright 1786' – a love token?

LES CARLISLE

Les Carlisle suggests that a copper disc bearing the name of 'Ann Wright' may be a convict love token relating to a young woman convicted of stealing at the Old Bailey in 1784.

The War of Independence deferred her transportation to the North American colonies and she was placed aboard the First Fleet transport *Lady Penrhyn* bound for New South Wales.

A year before the First Fleet sailed for Botany Bay in 1787, a hand-engraved keepsake was prepared. It depicts a woman in period costume with a posy in her hand, and simply records a name, Ann Wright, and a year, 1786. This copper disk appears to have been made slightly smaller than a halfpenny; a love token?

With so little information as to the reason for its preparation and a seemingly common name, Ann Wright, the task seemed daunting to find the story behind this humble piece.

Firstly, it is important to understand why love tokens were made. They recorded in a lasting form major events in a recipient's life – a birth, marriage, death or parting, for example, for war. Sailor's farewells were common in the 18th century and produced in many media not just tokens.¹ In the case of convicts, with transportation they faced a long voyage across the seas, where there was little hope of returning to a loved one. These latter pieces have been referred to as 'the leaden hearts the convicts left behind.'²

Birth celebration love tokens usually have 'born' and full date while marriage memories do not always use the word 'marriage', just symbols such as couples holding hands, a heart with arrows, or two names and date. Ann Wright's token is without any of these markings nor is it engraved 'died' with a date for a death memory.

Having now dismissed the traditional major reasons for making this particular type of token, which is not all that uncommon, other ideas needed to be followed.

On the chance that this Ann Wright may have been a felon, the records of London's famous Old Bailey Criminal Court, now available on the Internet as well as in the Mitchell Library in Sydney, were examined. Only one Ann Wright appeared in the timeframe. Did she have any link to the Ann/ Wright/1786 named on the 26 mm copper disc, hatch dated?

This Ann Wright's first brush with the law noted was when she appeared before a Middlesex jury and Mr Rose on two counts of stealing, allegedly committed on 2 January 1784 with a Henry Keigan. Charges heard on 25 January resulted in 'whippings' for Keigan and 'not guilty' for Ann.

A further arrest on charges of stealing on 11 May 1784 brought her before the court again. This time, on 26 May she was



convicted and sentenced to transportation to North America for seven years.³

Her trial record lists the goods she had stolen, including ten copper medals, one silver medal and one halfpenny, the property of John Hill, whose wife gave evidence:

The prisoner was my servant, about three months she laid with me, on account of my husband being in trouble, he was arrested for a debt that he was bail for. I called her up early in the morning as I wanted to go out, she got up immediately to iron some things, I thought she was up doing her business, a little boy of mine cried and made a noise for his breeches, I was angry with him, and told him to go to Nanny; I then found that the maid was gone, and every box, and every drawer, and wearing apparel, my petticoats, my gown, my shift, and every individual thing but my garters, I believe the keys might be on the table, as I never hardly put them in my pocket; in two days I found the things, the prisoner was going by Bishop's Court, in the Old-Bayley [sic] with all my clothes on her back, my hat and every thing she had on was mine, I took her into custody, and found duplicates in her pocket of a great many things she had pledged, and the pocket-piece and medals were found in her pocket, she said the devil was very busy with her, she was in liquor.

Statements by probable pawnbrokers, William Bothman and John Taylor as evidenced by the 'duplicates' Ann Wright was carrying, listed various clothing 'brought to our shop on the 18th May', while George Meecham swore:

I was with Taylor and took the prisoner, these things were found upon her, I found some medals on her, and a pair of white stockings in her pocket, and a remarkable half-penny with a name engraved upon it, and I found all the duplicates.

In her defence Ann claimed:

'The prosecutrix gave me the things to keep for her, for she was afraid of having them taken away from her, these things I had on my back she lent me, and I was to pay for them as soon as I could.'
Guilty. Transported for seven years.
Tried by the London Jury before Mr Recorder.

So this Ann Wright had in her possession, the property of John Hill, what sounds to be an engraved halfpenny, perhaps similar to the one being researched.

By coincidence, in July of 1784 another trial was held. This time Elizabeth Bicknell otherwise Hill with others was indicted with having possession of counterfeit money 'called half-penny', also blanks not imaged as coin of the realm. She was fined one shilling and sentenced to Newgate for twelve months.⁴

After being convicted on 23 February 1784 and supposedly on her way to America, Ann Wright's destination was changed at the February Sessions of Middlesex in 1785 to Africa.⁵

The American Revolutionary War of 1775-1783 stopped the British from sending their convicts across the Atlantic. But the African coast, another area used for transportation of felons, had proved to be unsatisfactory.

A report in the *Historical Records of N.S.W.*⁶ showed just how unsatisfactory Africa had been for British criminals:

Seven hundred and forty-six convicts were sent to Africa from the year 1775 to 1776... 334 died, 271 deserted to no one knows where, and of the remainder no account could be given...an alarming expenditure of human life.

For Ann, neither destination eventuated.

Other alternatives needed to be addressed. Building new gaols would not solve the immediate problem. The use of decommissioned or captured ships as gaol 'hulks' in ports and rivers around England was supposed to provide a stop-gap solution to the ever-increasing number of criminals in custody. In the event, a line of prison hulks was anchored in Portsmouth Harbour for over seventy years. HMS *York*, illustrated here, was a 74-gun, third-rate ship of the line built in 1807, converted to a prison hulk in 1819, and kept in use until 1854. She would have held about 500 prisoners.

After years of discussion, thoughts turned to Botany Bay, the discovery of Captain James Cook, with Joseph Banks taking an active part in consultations and negotiations leading to the settlement of a Colony there. Banks argued 'that its soil and climate were such as would soon enable a settlement to become self-supporting.'⁷

Although settlement was decided in August 1786⁸ many convicts, detained in gaols and hulks like Ann Wright, had already served part of their various sentences before the decision to send some of them to Botany Bay. Thomas Tilley, for instance, had been sentenced in 1785, sent to the hulks in 1786, and transported on the First Fleet transport *Alexander*; a token commemorating this is now in the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.⁹

The convict Ann Wright had been in Newgate, the main London prison. Had she served all or part of her sentence there with other felons like Mrs Hall for example? In January 1787, many of the female convicts in Newgate under sentence of transportation were sent to the 333-ton *Lady Penrhyn*, built on the Thames in 1786.

Ann was aged 33 when she was transferred from Newgate in London to

Woolwich on 6 January 1787 and put on board the *Lady Penrhyn*. One of the First Fleet ships, *Lady Penrhyn* sailed down the Thames round into the Straits of Dover to Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight, arriving at the Motherbank on 10 February.¹⁰

The *Lady Penrhyn* was a ship hired from the East India Company with directions to turn around quickly after depositing her cargo at Botany Bay and defray shipping costs by collecting goods from China on the way home.¹¹

The indifferent health of the women convicts boarding the *Lady Penrhyn* caused concern:

The situation in which the Magistrates sent the women on board the *Lady Penrhyn*, stamps them with infamy – tho' almost naked, and very filthy that nothing but clothing them could have prevented them from perishing, and which could not be done in time to prevent a fever etc.¹²

Heavy weather delayed the assembling of the full Fleet at Motherbank, Isle of Wight until 16 March 1787 and it was a further two months before the Fleet was ready to put to sea.¹³

There was fever on board *Lady Penrhyn* but less virulent than that on the *Alexander*, another First Fleet convict transport.¹⁴ That fever did however claim one woman on *Lady Penrhyn*. That woman was Ann Wright.

Ann had already been on board for almost three months before the captain's log reported:

Wednesday 4th April 1787

Winds variable.

Departed this life Ann Wright, convict. Committed the body to the deep with the usual Ceremony.¹⁵

The First Fleet sailed from Portsmouth on 13 May 1787—without Ann Wright.

Having traced the later part of the life of an 'Ann Wright' is there any proof that she is the one whose name is engraved on this token? Was the 'Ann Wright' of the token native to London? According to the International Genealogical Index (IGI) there were eighteen Ann Wrights born in London between 1752 and 1756, the period relating to this Ann Wright's possible birth date. No other Ann Wright is recorded in the index of the Old Bailey Session Papers for the relevant trial period.

Newgate Prison ran as a business.¹⁶ For the right price, prisoners could receive visitors and the preparation and exchange of 'leaden hearts' would have presented no problems. In Newgate Prison during 1786, the date on the love token, Ann Wright's connection and previous experiences with the Hill family and their engraved half-



Above and opposite page:
Ann/ Wright/1786 token,
copper 26 mm diameter.
Private collection

penny size blanks could lead us to believe the research has produced a possible story behind this humble piece. Did she leave the token in London with someone important to her or did one of her fellow prisoners take possession of it after her death? No provenance has accompanied this piece of history to its appearance in Australia.

Les Carlisle is a numismatist and author of the standard work, *Australian Commemorative Medals and Medalets from 1788*, B & C Press, Sydney, 1983.

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- Arthur Phillip, *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay etc.* John Stockdale, London, 1789

Abbreviations

ML Mitchell Library, Sydney
OBSP Old Bailey Session Papers

Notes

- 1 Michele Field & Timothy Millett (eds.) *Convict Love Tokens, the leaden hearts the convicts left behind*, Wakefield Press, Kent SA, 1998, p. 13-14
- 2 *ibid.*
- 3 ML Trial 337/8 and 558 OBSP FM4 7152 10 Dec 1783-7 July 1784
- 4 ML Trial 766 OBSP 7 July 1784
- 5 ML Privy Council Registers, PRO Reel 619, PC 2 131
- 6 HRNSW Vol.1.Part 2 p.6.7
- 7 HRNSW Vol. 1. Part 1 p. xiv
- 8 Bateson 1983, p. 34
- 9 Field & Millett, *op. cit.* p. 56
- 10 Bateson, 1983, p. 98
- 11 HRNSW Vol.1. part 1, p.87
- 12 HRNSW Vol. 1. part 2, p. 59
- 13 Bateson 1983 p. 98
- 14 Bateson 1983 p. 98
- 15 PRO 5777 Adm. 51/4376 pt. 9
- 16 Field & Millett, 1998, p. 10

Joseph Lycett's *Durham*, 1811

JOHN MCPHEE

The painter Joseph Lycett arrived in Sydney as a convict in 1814. His previous output was unknown, but a discovery this year in the USA reveals an example of his earlier English work.

Every collector or curator's dream is to discover a missing work. European newspapers breathlessly report stories of the discovery of missing Rembrandts or over-painted Titians. In Australia we have to be content with less spectacular discoveries, but ones that nevertheless sometimes mean a lot to our understanding of the history and development of Australian art. A recent discovery, made while working on an exhibition of the work of Joseph Lycett, the convict painter, for the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, is one such find.

Until this discovery, only the barest of information was known about the life and work of Joseph Lycett before his arrest, imprisonment and transportation for forgery. No examples of his painting before his time in Australia were known to exist. In fact, historians and curators wondered about his background and training, and whether he was a painter at all.

Though Lycett was probably born about 1775, our knowledge of his early life is vague and

includes nothing of his training as an artist. The earliest confirmed account of his activity is in the Shropshire Calendar of Criminal Prisoners for January 1811, which reports that Joseph Lycett, aged 36, had been arrested in the market-town of Ludlow and charged with forging Bank of England £5 notes. Tried and found guilty in August 1811, Lycett was sentenced "To be transported to parts beyond the seas for the term of fourteen years..." From the time of his trial until July 1812 when he was sent to the prison hulks at Portsmouth, Lycett was held in Shrewsbury Gaol.

During this time, Lycett's partner Mary Lycett was permitted to take Joseph his dinner every day and allowed as many visits as she wished. Probably as a result of this practice a daughter, Emma Selina, was born. The record of her baptism in April 1812 records her father's occupation as a painter. This is the earliest known reference to Lycett's profession.

After his time in Australia, he returned to England. Writing about Lycett more than a decade later, when he was once again facing a charge of forgery, the *Shrewsbury Chronicle* gave some information about Lycett's ability as an artist and occupation while awaiting his original trial in 1810 and 1811:

...his abilities excited the sympathy of many persons in Shrewsbury and its vicinity. His sketches were admirable; and the rapidity with which he painted on canvass

astonished every person. Mr Hunt, of Boreatton, and many benevolent gentlemen, gave him orders for painting while he was a prisoner in our county gaol: he executed them. When he went to Botany-bay, he probably had a considerable sum of money.

Until now, no evidence confirmed or refuted Lycett's artistic endeavour during this time in gaol.

The convict records made at the time of Lycett's arrival in Sydney in February 1814 describe his occupation as 'Portrait and Min. painter'. This is the first description of Lycett's particular ability as an artist, although his conviction for forging of banknotes confirms he had skills as an engraver.

In the 18th and early 19th century, the description 'portrait and miniature painter' did not necessarily mean a painter of small-scale personal portrait miniatures. The term also embraced painters who executed in a variety of media portraits smaller in scale than, and made small-scale copies of, formal life-size portraits. If Lycett had been trained and practised his art in the Staffordshire potteries, as has been suggested, the description 'miniature' may even have referred to his ability to paint miniature landscapes and still-lives as popularly used to decorate tableware. But until this recent discovery, no examples of Lycett's work in any media before his arrival in Australia were known.



Joseph Lycett, *Durham*, 1811.
Oil on wood (unidentified) panel,
18.0 x 23.0 cm,
inscribed in ink on reverse:
Durham / J. Lycett Pinx / 1811.
Private collection, USA

In researching biographical information about Lycett, about two years ago I joined the website www.genealogy.com, hoping that I might find descendants or someone working on a family tree which would help with information about the artist's background. Apart from the negative replies I received from members of various Lycett families around the world researching their family history, I made no headway.

Then in January 2006, just as final proof reading and page layout was being completed for the catalogue of the coming exhibition, I received an email from a collector in the eastern United States inquiring about a painting in his possession which was signed Joseph Lycett and dated 1811. In an attempt to find out something about the painter of his work he had found my query by googling the artist's name, and written with digital images of his painting and the inscription. Unfortunately the painting has no provenance other than that it was purchased in the eastern United States in recent years.

Even looking at the poor quality images, it was obvious that this small painting was the work of Joseph Lycett and was almost certainly an example of the kind of painting that had earned him notice while held in Shrewsbury Gaol in 1811. The ink inscription on the reverse of the panel, 'Durham / J. Lycett Pinx / 1811', showed

similarities with the few surviving examples of Lycett's writing.

The small painting showed a view of Durham featuring the cathedral and castle on the banks of the River Wear. The wood panel on which he painted is 18.0 x 23.0 cm, and is almost certainly English oak. Its bevelled edges suggest that it was probably intended for a small painting or as a panel in a piece of furniture. The restricted palette of green, brown and white, and the mostly thin application, suggested a limited supply of paint. The carefully painted architectural detail possessed a proficiency similar to that shown in Lycett's Australian subjects.

There is no evidence to suggest that Lycett ever visited Durham, which was some distance from any of his known places of residence or activity in England before or after his transportation. The painting was probably worked up from a print showing all the features of the historic Yorkshire city, a popular destination for late 18th and early 19th English tourism. However, so far the source has not been identified. Of course, Lycett may have worked from his memory of such a print, which may explain why the river is shown flowing in the wrong direction, although this might also have been the result of an incorrect interpretation of the printed source.

After a series of excited emails to the owner, and some difficulties bringing the work into

Australia because it was painted on a wooden panel which had to be examined and fumigated before being allowed into the country, (and an assurance from the owner that it was not a bomb!), the painting arrived and met all my expectations. With small changes to my catalogue essay about Lycett's life, this extraordinary discovery was able to be included. The owner's generosity means that the painting will be seen in the exhibition and a small addition will be made to our knowledge of one of colonial Australia's least known artists.

John McPhee is an art historian who enriched the Queen Victoria Museum in Launceston, the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, and the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne. He is now a freelance curator.

The exhibition *Joseph Lycett: convict artist* can be seen at Museum of Sydney, Sydney 1 April - 18 June 2006
Newcastle Region Art Gallery, Newcastle 8 July - 27 August 2006
National Library of Australia, Canberra 1 March - 11 June 2007
An illustrated catalogue will be available

NEWS and EXHIBITIONS

Thomas Woolner's photographs

Thomas Woolner (1825-1892) was the only sculptor in the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. This marginal position, and his somewhat erratic career, meant that his work has neither been studied much for its own sake, nor in other contexts. Renowned particularly for his portrait busts in the 1850s and 1860s, Woolner's work falls between the tail-end of Neoclassicism and the beginning of the 'New Sculpture'.

Woolner arrived in Melbourne in 1852, spent six months looking for gold, and returned to his craft, making portrait medallions of leading citizens in Melbourne and Sydney. He sailed for England in 1854.

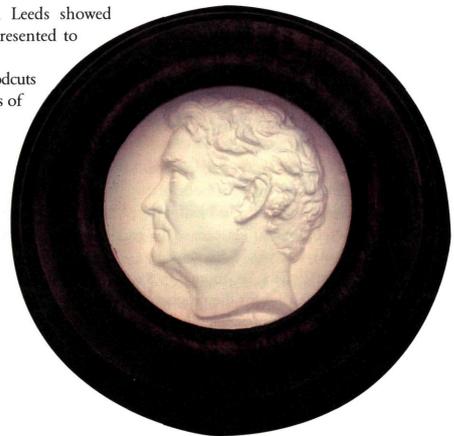
Thomas Woolner's sculpture in Britain has been largely forgotten, but new research shows that Woolner deserves to be remembered in the field of photography. Research by American art historian Joanne Lukitsh revealed Woolner's interest in

photography, and highlights how Victorian sculptors used the medium for self-promotion. By placing commissioned photographs against sculptures and other types of reproductions, her exhibition at the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds showed how Woolner's work was presented to the Victorian public.

Though etchings and woodcuts were still the dominant means of

Below: Plaster cast of Woolner's portrait of W.C. Wentworth

Below left: Woolner's *Love*



reproducing art works in the printed press, Woolner's preference for photography as early as the 1850s was an innovation. This exhibition concentrated on two of his most famous sculptures - his ideal figure of *Love*, and his bust of *Tennyson*. His association with the London Stereographic Company as well as some of the most fashionable London photographers, demonstrates his awareness of - and desire to be identified with - the latest trends and developments in the medium.

A block off the old ship?

The British TV program *Antiques Roadshow*, which screens on late night cable television and noon afternoons on Channel 9, is based on a few simple ideas that guarantee success. The main one is that everyone wants something for nothing.

The recent series shot in Sydney at the 1850s University of Sydney Quadrangle and in Melbourne at the 1888 Exhibition Building turned up some interesting things. Many people seemed to go away happy with what the experts, both British and Australian, had told them.

One man who won't be happy was the Sydney man who brought along a piece of oak that he claimed was from the keel of James Cook's discovery ship, HMB *Endeavour*. In the past, several such pieces have surfaced in the USA and Australia, one once in the possession of a Sydney QC.

Endeavour, 368 tons, formerly the *Earl of Pembroke*, had been built in Whitby in 1764, three years and nine months before the Navy bought her in 1768 for £2,800. The bearded man with this solid chunk of oak had had the timber carbon-dated at the University of Sydney, which had produced a date of AD 1400 with a standard deviation that would be acceptable for old oak cut down to build a ship in the mid-18th century.

The BBC expert wearing the flamboyant striped orange-and-white jacket was duly sceptical, but the collector produced a letter dated 1828, confirming the identification. The fragment had come from Cook's ship left rotting in Newport, Rhode Island. When she was eventually broken up in or before 1828, some pieces were souvenired.

The owner said his late father had paid 'a substantial sum of money' when he bought it in Boston from 'Sam Lowe', who had had it in his family for over 100 years. He offered his opinion that nowadays it would be worth a quarter of a million dollars 'or more'. This would have been quite a find for the program, except that all the information, including the valuation, came from the owner. There are several valid reasons why, with the presenter, we too should be sceptical.

Firstly, 'Sam Lowe' sounds suspiciously like 'Junie' Lowe, an amiable, wily and

charming old Boston nautical antiques dealer who ran a shop called Samuel Lowe Antiques, so the provenance may not be 100 years in the family as claimed. But it is quite possible that it was souvenired from a rotting ship associated with Cook in Newport.

Secondly and far more seriously, Dr Kathy Abbas proved some years ago that *Endeavour* was, without sentiment, sold out of the Royal Navy and then promptly re-hired as a transport ship, the *Lord Sandwich*. In the summer of 1778, during the Revolutionary War, the British scuttled her and twelve other transports in Newport harbour to obstruct a French naval incursion.

Old stories are often confused, and this is one. By coincidence, another of Cook's ships, HMS *Resolution*, did become a coal carrier named *La Liberté*, and did end up rotting away in Newport. Australian researchers Mike Connell and Des Liddy demonstrated this in 1997. Pieces of it could well have been souvenired and this could be one of them. But *Endeavour* it is not.

Since Abbas showed that these thirteen wrecks, among many in Narragansett Bay, are Revolutionary War ships and that one may be *Endeavour*, maritime archaeologists from the US and the Australian National Maritime Museum have dived on them. Unfortunately, not only have they been unable yet to confirm the identification of one of the wrecks as *Endeavour*, but illegal divers have been looting pieces of the wrecks. These fragments, without genuine provenance, are just lumps of metal or wood.

Australia on the Map, 1606-2006

Dutch mariner Willem Janszoon was the first mariner known to chart the Australian coastline, when he sailed to the north of Cape York in 1606. Among the low-key events to commemorate the voyage of the *Duyfken* ('Little Dove') and celebrate 400 years of mapping Australia, the National Library is displaying large copies of rare maps to highlight the discovery and charting of the Australian coastline in its Map Reading Room.

From the early speculations of Ptolemy, Macrobius and Renaissance mapmakers about Terra Australis, through the Dutch mapping of New Holland, to Matthew Flinders' Australia, these maps tell the story of how the new continent was revealed to the rest of the world. A changing selection of items from the National Library's Map Collection will be displayed in the Visitor Centre throughout 2006. The Map Room is open 9 am - 5 pm Monday to Friday.



Jimmy Possum chairs,
courtesy Simpson's Antiques

Obituary: Susan Mary Rapley

31 March 1947 - 10 December 2005,
Launceston, Tasmania

Sue Rapley was a great dealer and collector of colonial furniture, and later of houses of great colonial interest, *Roseneath* and *Plasey*, both near Ross, Tasmania.

I first met Sue in the 1970s when she ran the Brass Shop Antiques in Launceston. To my knowledge, Sue was the person who discovered the 'Jimmy Possum' chair.

I had never seen such chairs before this and at times would be amazed to see ten or more 'Possums' in the back of the shop, ready to be sent to a well-known dealer in Melbourne. It was truly an exciting vision.

The late prominent Sydney antique dealer George Auchinachie told me that Jimmy Possum chairs were being reproduced - he had seen a shop full in Melbourne! I could never be sure if George wasn't having a smile at my expense, or if he believed his own story.

My wife Trisha and I left Tasmania in 1978 and lost contact with Sue, but we always remembered this really inspiring woman, who was a true original with regard to Australiana.

Rod Crockford

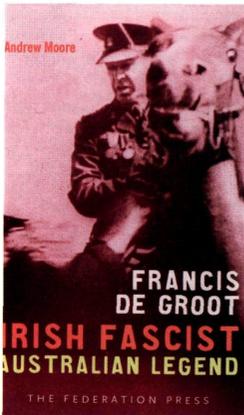
Trisha and Rod Crockford were founding members of the *Australiana Society*, and now live in South Australia.

Pate's Pottery

Canterbury Library at 14 Amy Street, Campsie NSW is holding an exhibition and talk on Pate's Pottery for the Heritage Festival on 3 April. This small family-owned pottery in Lakemba Street, Belmore began just after the war in 1946, producing a range of slip-cast wares.

On 3 April from 12-2, Ron Pate and John Davenport will give a talk on the pottery, 'Industrial kitsch? Pate's Pottery in the 1950s'. Bookings and information 02 9789 9380.

Book reviews



Andrew Morris,

Francis De Groot Irish Fascist Australian legend,

Federation Press, Sydney 2005, hard cover, 14 b&w illustrations, 222 pages, \$39.95

This book grew out of two things, an invitation to contribute an entry on De Groot (1888-1969) to the supplementary volume of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, and a talk on De Groot's furniture by Michael Bogle, published in *Australiana* in 2000. So while De Groot is best known for beating Premier Jack Lang to the ribbon to open Sydney Harbour Bridge on 19 March 1932, Morris covers in some detail his career, especially before that event, as a furniture maker and antique dealer.

De Groot arrived in Australia in 1910, returning to Ireland in 1914 to buy antiques. There he enlisted to fight in World War I in a cavalry regiment, the 15th Hussars. After the war, he married Bessie in Dublin, returning to Sydney in 1920 and opening a quality furniture manufactory in 1921.

De Groot's factory in Rushcutters Bay produced some outstanding works, including a set of chairs for Governor-General Sir Isaac and Lady Isaacs, a secretaire for Harry Ervin, a dining suite for Dame Eadith Walker's *Yaralla*, and furniture for the Australia Hotel. Morris envisages the Irish Catholic De Groot as being seen as 'that nice Mr De Groot' by the matrons of the Sydney Establishment.

The majority of the book rightly deals with De Groot's involvement with the New Guard and the significance of his upstaging Lang. At the time, the electorate was volatile, polarised between the Communists and the Fascists, with many positions in between. Bloodshed and even civil war were possible, and Morris treads a carefully neutral path between the political extremes.

He has uncovered much new material. Not least of this is De Groot's sword, which the National Museum foolishly publicised before it had secured it, and lost out to the Bridgeclimb founder, Paul Cave (the buyer of the late Caroline Simpson's *Clyde Bank* in The Rocks). Morris argues a convincing case that De Groot's attempted ribbon slashing was a flamboyant act, but did little to relieve the political tension. That was achieved when the Governor, Sir Philip Game, withdrew Jack Lang's commission as Premier.

Christopher Cunneen (ed.),

Australian Dictionary of Biography, Supplement 1580-1980. MUP, Carlton 2005.

Hardcover, 520 pages, \$74.95

The first 16 volumes of the *ADB* are immensely useful references, but have some notable omissions. Since the first volume appeared in 1966, new research has suggested new entries, and neglected fields such as the history of women, indigenous Australians and culture have meant that another 500 people are covered here. Some obvious omissions, such as James Matra, have been redressed.

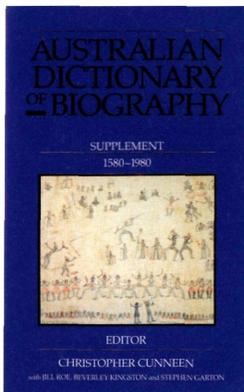
Notable entries are for Pemulwy, Aboriginal freedom fighter; Billy Blue, ferryman; Mullah Abdullah, camel driver and loyal soldier of the Sultan; Ellen Kelly, mother of Ned; Gooseberry, Aboriginal identity; David Blackburn, master of the First Fleet tender *Sirius*; Diamantina Lady Bowen, Governor's wife; Alexander Green, hangman; and Jean-Michel Huon de Kermadec, French naval officer after whom the Huon River and Huon pine are named.

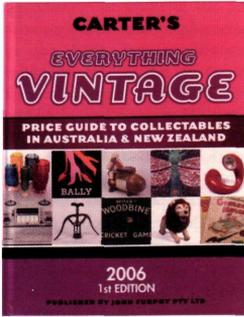
Commerce has been well served with recognition going to people who are household names today: James Boag, Launceston brewer; Alfred Allen, Melbourne confectioner; John Blundstone, Hobart bootmaker; Edwin Street, ice-cream maker; Henry Buck, men's outfitter; Eric Ansell, Melbourne condom maker; Teresa Cahill, café owner (with a special mention of her caramel sauce that came in waxed paper containers); Granny Smith, orchardist; and Charles Packham, pear breeder. Zacharias Simos is not as well known but the Paragon café he founded at Katoomba is.

Artists and craftspeople include Florence Broadhurst the fabric designer; Lewis Steffanoni, illuminator and embroiderer; Joseph Backler, painter; Augusto Lorenzini, artist; Alexander Dick, silversmith; Julius Hogarth, silversmith; Mickey of Ulladulla, artist; and John Radecki, stained glass artist. Some of these entries were provided by *Australiana* Society members.

You can have fun finding all sorts of surprising stories. Closer to home (literally), Rosa Anna Summerfield — feminist and labour leader — is an addition to my growing personal list of notable people (four so far) who lived in my own street. When she and her new husband John Cadogan emigrated to the colony of 'New Australia' in Paraguay, the Hon. Audley Coote, a former Tasmanian MP who became the consul for Panama (*ADB* vol 3 p. 455), moved in.

A name index of 100 pages lists the major and minor names appearing in all seventeen volumes of the *ADB*. There are still some surprising omissions; Charles Brownlow of football fame is one.

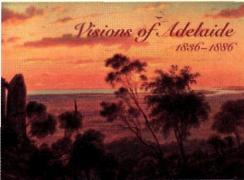




Carter's Everything Vintage Price Guide to Collectables in Australia & New Zealand, John Furphy Pty Ltd, Baulkham Hills 2006, hard cover, thousands of colour illustrations, 416 pages, \$85

The price guide takes up where the Antiques Guide leaves off, the guide to 'collectables, retro, 20th century design and kitsch' from the 1950s onwards. It follows the traditional format of many photographs with short text captions, with a guide to retail asking price. There are traditional art and craft forms such as glass, ceramics, costume and furniture, and newer materials – radios, cameras, record covers and comics.

There are some weird ones too – football bottle tops, beer cans, branded hand towels, wooden salad bowls, commemorative glasses and sporting memorabilia, where the charitable thing to say is that values have not stabilised yet. A list of 300 dealers is a helpful guide when you are travelling.



Tracey Lock-Weir, Visions of Adelaide 1836-1886, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 2005. Softcover, 144 pages, 58 colour illustrations, \$39.95

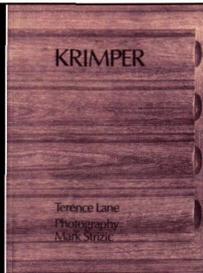
With the hills close behind the narrow plain, Adelaide physically reminds me of Lord Byron's words 'The mountains look on Marathon, and Marathon looks on the sea'. South Australia's first colonists must have liked the Greek analogy, referring to their port as 'the Piraeus of the Metropolis'.

The earliest views here are of the placid sea and beaches, devoid of indigenous inhabitants. As the settlement is established, friendly natives appear near the roads or towns. Many of these early views with their idyllic scenes were designed specifically to promote immigration. These gave way to views of new, impressive buildings rising from a flat, raw, scrubby landscape, and towns with bustling commerce. It's left to explorers departing, horticultural shows, sporting events, fires or Skipper's cartoon of emigrants arriving at 'Port Misery' to introduce some action. The watercolours, prints and oils here present a view of Adelaide which reflects its planned, convict-free status.

SCHULIM KRIMPER

CABINET-MAKER

by Terence Lane
with Mark Strizic



Terence Lane traces the life of Schulim Krimper (1893-1971), who occupies a unique position for demanding and receiving for his craft, the respect that had previously only been accorded to artists.

Mark Strizic's photographs were taken in the 1950s and 1960s when Krimper was at his peak. The National Gallery of Victoria honoured Krimper with two exhibitions, in 1959 and 1975.

This book has been unavailable since publication in 1987, and we have been fortunate to secure the remaining stocks.

Size 290 x 200 mm, 100 pages, approximately 120 mono photographs.

Hardback \$75, Soft cover \$45 including delivery

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Carving a place in Australian history: Mabel Daveney Lemaire, 1895–1985

JENNY SPRINGETT

Historical research is such a curious process. Sometimes a story appears from a sideline that, although not directly related to the original line of enquiry,

is rich and complete enough to take on a life of its own and worth the unexpected detour down a slightly different path.

So it was that the life work of Mabel Daveney Lemaire came to my attention while researching early women woodcarvers in Australia. Her carvings are both outside the timeframe and style of my original research

project; however, when I first saw them I recognised them as a unique collection of Australian art in wood, now dispersed through various members of her immediate family, museums and other Australian institutions.

Born in 1895 in Sydney, Mabel was one of six children raised by a strong, independent, pioneer-spirited single mother, Katherine Daveney. Mabel learned the fundamentals of woodcarving at school early in the 20th century, a time when it was acceptable for girls to be taught the techniques of woodcarving among other traditional handicrafts. However, it was not until 1938 that she picked up her chisels once again to produce her first carved three-dimensional artwork, *Vista of the Blue Mountains*, aiming to enter it in a competition and art exhibition in Sydney to mark 150 years of European settlement.

Woodcarving was a popular craft among young Australian women during the first decades of the 20th century, particularly for the creation of designs carved into robust furniture and other home decorator items. By the 1930s this was beginning to wane, due partly to the shifting role of women in Australian



Above: Mabel Daveney Lemaire (1895–1985), *Cobb & Co Coach and First Train to Parramatta, 1855*, painted beech

Left: Mabel Daveney Lemaire (1895–1985), *The Endeavour and Achievements, 1770*, painted beech



Above left: Mabel Daveney Lemaire (1895–1985), *Fort Denison*, painted beech

Above right: Mabel Daveney Lemaire (1895–1985), *Joan*, painted beech

Below: Mabel Daveney Lemaire (1895–1985), *Wentworth House, Vaucluse*, [Vaucluse House], painted beech



society and to evolving and changing styles in interior decoration.

Around the same time, some of these early woodcarving women began experimenting and using their woodcarving skills to create new forms of artistic expression with the desire to celebrate an emerging Australian identity by incorporating local themes, motifs and designs in their work. Mabel Daveney Lemaire, although an obscure artist at this time, is an excellent example of this trend.

Mabel took the themes of the largest proportion of her work from significant

milestones in Australian history, major historical sites, landscapes or rural scenes and heritage buildings. She did most of her research at the Mitchell Library in Sydney, where her scrapbook of photographs, stories and preliminary sketches was subsequently purchased to add to their vast collection.

Some of the most striking of her carved pictures include *Cobb & Co coach and first train to Parramatta, 1855*; *The Endeavour and achievements, 1770*; *Fort Denison*; and *Wentworth House, Vaucluse*. Mabel was equally talented at carving portraits of her family, for example *Joan*, her daughter as an infant.

All of her ‘living pictures’ (as she described them) were carved from beechwood, a reasonably easy-carving timber obtained from a mill at Casino, NSW. After she finished the carving, she painted them in oils to enhance their three-dimensional qualities and bring the scenes to life. Finally, they were mounted and

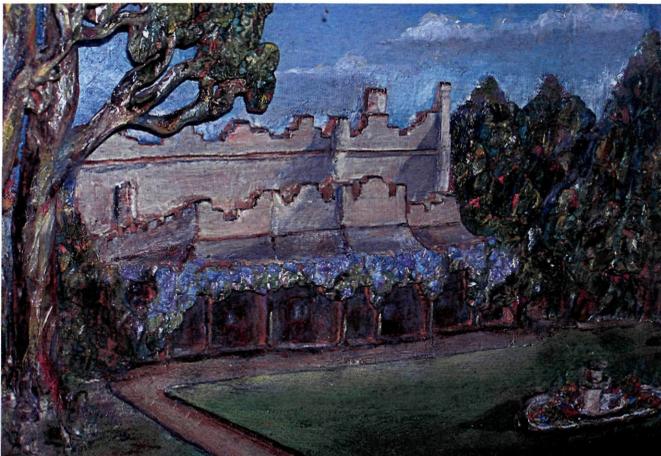
box-framed behind glass both to protect them and complete the display.

From a relatively simple beginning to her woodcarving career, Mabel Daveney Lemaire went on to produce a large collection of works, spending between two and three months painstakingly completing each one, working well into the later years of her life. Over the years, she donated a number of the pieces to various local museums and galleries and in 1945 sent one as a gift to General Macarthur, the Commander in Chief of Allied Forces in the Pacific. A chair with the coat of arms of Australia, one of a few furniture pieces she carved in the earlier part of her long career, was donated to NSW Parliament House.

In 1979 at the age of 84, Mabel self-published a book entitled *History of Australia in Woodcarvings*, depicting around 70 of her 150 distinctive works with explanations and information on the background to the story of each particular piece. While the book is a well-bound and well-documented history of both her carvings and the Australian scenes and time periods she captures with such warmth and simplicity, the black and white photographs of the works contained in the book do not adequately replicate the distinctive qualities of the originals.

Mabel Daveney Lemaire’s carving career was never about financial gain. Her lifelong work and the legacy of ‘living pictures’ she left behind was a pastime she pursued with passion. It was ultimately a labour of love – a love of her chosen craft, of her country and what its history meant to her. It is time for her work to be more widely recognised.

Jenny Springett is a freelance artist and writer currently researching early Australian women woodcarvers.





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Fleurieu Art Foundation, 1988, Illust. P30.

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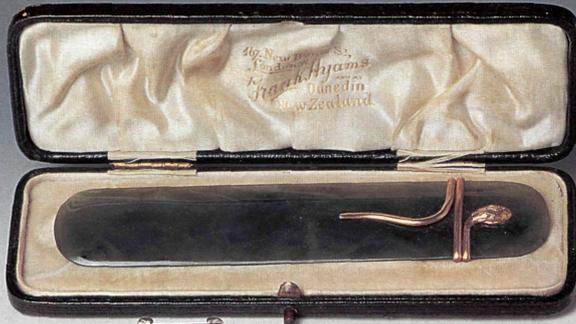
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