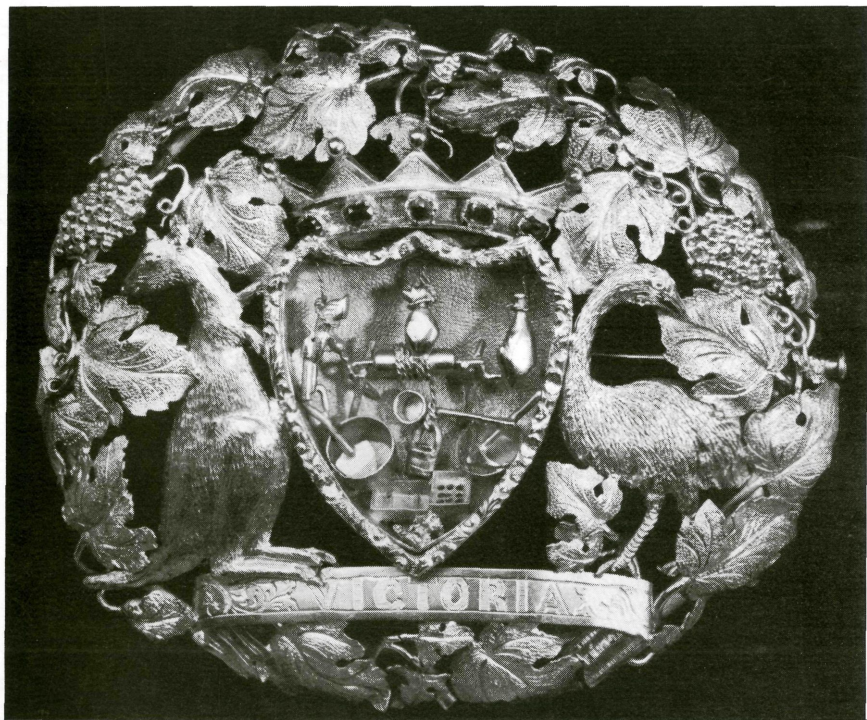


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# AUSTRALIANA

MAY 1987

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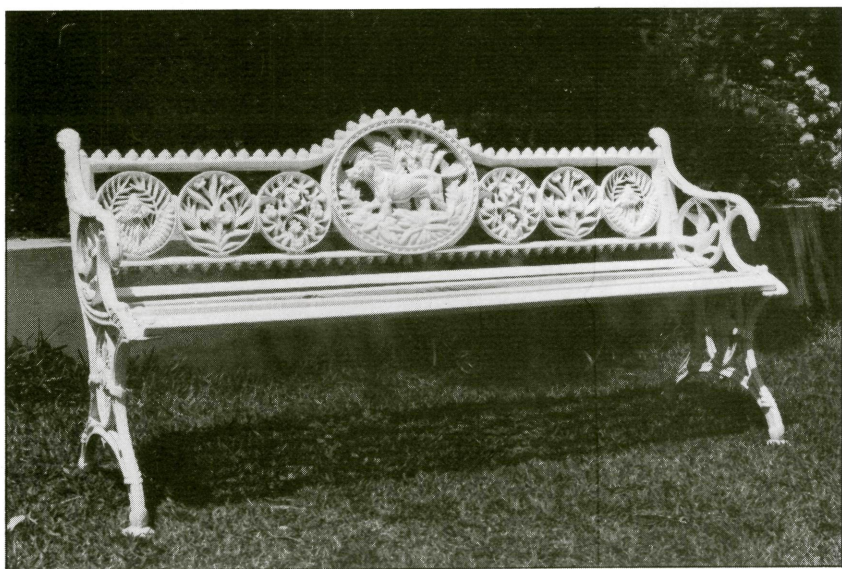
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# An Introduction to Buying Australian Antique Furniture

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David Bedford

## Thank heavens for plastic finishes!

Heresy! you say, fancy a quality journal like this printing such rubbish! But consider the wonders of modern finishes. Easy to apply, hard wearing and long lasting, are the oft repeated claims for such substances. For our purposes, however, the biggest advantage of all is how a modern finish (including some new "orange" shellac french polishes) warns the clued-up buyer to beware of modern fakes and alterations. It is quite fascinating how the renovators and modern fakers of furniture (as distinct from true restorers who care for the age and patina of a piece) seem to have a blind spot about finishes. They go to great efforts to fake furniture to disguise it as a valuable antique, and then apply a modern finish which gives the game away!

This is not to say that every piece of antique furniture with a new or modern finish is a fake — far from it. It may just have been unsympathetically "renovated". What is clear is that one of the best ways (if not *the* best) to be sure that a piece of furniture is an antique and not a fake, is to find it in original condition with its original finish. And, of course, to protect your "investment" you must leave it that way or, at the most, have it *sympathetically* cleaned, to be able to convince any possible future buyer of its authenticity. Minor surface cleaning is fine, as long as the patina and tell-tale signs of age are *not* removed.

When I started collecting Australian furniture (not so many years ago, unfortunately for me) I did not realize how many types of fakes and problem pieces of furniture there are. I soon learned — the hard way! I found a "lovely" four-poster bed in an antique shop. I had some reservations, but I asked an "expert" friend of ours to look at it, and he said it was definitely a "real" one, so I bought it. Some years and many doubts later I found out what a bunny I was! The dealer had said he thought it was "turn of the century", and our friend said "1880s", but it was really a 1980 vintage country "fake"! It was one of those fragrant Asian cedar "fakes", made as reproductions but retailed to the suckers by unprincipled dealers as though they were antique! Beware! They are still made and the same dealer still operates not too many miles from the Sydney GPO. Don't fool yourselves — we all make mistakes. If you hide from your mistakes you will never learn; admit the mistakes and you can learn from them and go on to greater glory (insolvency?).

There are plenty of fakes and "wrong" pieces around so it is important to check very carefully

everything you intend to purchase. Even if the seller honestly believes the piece to be genuine s/he may not really know.

Over the years furniture has been altered or changed for many reasons, not only to fake it up. In the past, many, if not most, people have used furniture in the way it was most useful to them, without any thought to its possible future value as an antique. That is, furniture has often been treated in the same manner as houses often are — by being extended or altered to suit the needs, moods and aesthetics of the current owners. So one regularly finds such things as chests of drawers used as tool boxes or mounted on shepherd castors to make them easy to move for cleaning etc. and tables, chiffoniers or sideboards which have been cut down to a "better" height. It is also common to find that "fussy" detailing has been removed or painted over.

Most of these alterations are much more obvious than the fakes, and so are not as much of a danger to the collector. But it is worth remembering that the reason why an item was altered or butchered does not change the fact that it is much less desirable, valuable and collectable than a complete item in its original state and condition. Such items can, however, still be useful, and are sometimes interesting as indicators of changing social attitudes and values.

So when looking for antiques, my advice is to check anything you intend to buy very carefully, using the following checklist —

## CHECK

1. Timbers used
2. Finish
3. Completeness
4. Relationship of parts
5. Signs of age
6. Quality of design and workmanship
7. Claims as to age/style/provenance
8. Relevance to your collection
9. Price and value for money

## 1. Timbers

Whilst not all Australian furniture is made of Australian cedar (*Toona australis*) the vast majority is, and its presence is a good indicator that the piece is Australian. However Asian and New Guinea cedar are very similar in appearance, and cigar-box cedar, which was often used in English pieces, has also been mistaken for *Toona australis*. All of these

ring-ins may be distinguished because they are significantly more fragrant, and differently scented to *Toona australis*. (Smokers are at a considerable disadvantage here). They are also usually more open-pored and softer than Australian cedar.

Some of the best and most desirable Australian furniture is made of *Toona australis* veneered with other woods, including imported veneers such as mahogany. It is here that special care must be taken as many English pieces were veneered cigar-box cedar. Whilst veneers such as Musk (*Olearia argophylla*) are also more common than the recent promotion would lead you to believe, and are fairly readily recognisable, they have sometimes been mistaken for burr-walnut. You should be especially beware of *Casuarina* (She-Oak) veneered tea caddies and small boxes, as there are many English examples of *Casuarina* (which was imported into England from very early times) veneered onto deal (common English or European pine) and *Cedrela* (cigar-box cedar). Such pieces do have "Australian interest" but are definitely not of Australian origin.

Of course many (probably most) pieces of Australian furniture were made using solid — not veneered — cedar or other timbers. Considerable expertise is needed to recognise some of these other timbers, though Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*) and Huon Pine (*Lagarostrobos franklinii* syn. *Dacrydium franklinii*) are common and easy to recognise.

The secondary timbers in a piece can also be a good indication of its origin. For example a solid *Casuarina* writing box with internal fittings and drawer made in English Oak, would be very likely to be English in origin. However an item predominantly in Australian timbers but with a small amount of a foreign timber such as deal as a structural timber is probably all right, as a considerable amount of deal did come out as packing case timber and was re-used in some Australian furniture. Secondary timbers not often available in Australia would be a much more doubtful proposition; timbers such as English or European Oak, and Teak fall into this category.

## 2. Finish

The best proof of age and authenticity is a consistent, untouched original finish. The next best thing is a consistent original finish that has been sympathetically cleaned. Suspect anything else! In practice pieces with an old though not original finish, once thoroughly checked-out as per this list, may be OK. New or newish hand french polish, if sympathetically done can also be acceptable. But modern synthetic lacquer or plastic finishes (eg Estapol) are a no no; they are either the sign of the faker or just plain unsympathetic and extremely hard to remove without ruining the piece.

It is critical to realise just how important it is that the original finish be retained. For the beginner that dirty old original finish may not be at all appealing, but is the best chance they have to be sure they are

not buying a dud. So much re-finished furniture is faked, incomplete, damaged or made-up etc. that someone without considerable expertise will have trouble ensuring they are getting something worth buying. Experienced furniture collectors almost invariably develop an appreciation of original finish for its own sake. If more buyers realised these facts, and sought furniture in original condition, then dealers would have more incentive to sell such furniture. The dealers would save "renovation" costs, buyers could be more sure of their purchases, and we would save some more of our heritage.

## 3. Completeness

One of the most common problems with furniture is incompleteness. Chiffoniers and sideboards lacking their backs are very common and wardrobes and bookcases lacking their cornices are also common, as are chests of drawers and other pieces of furniture lacking their original feet. One also frequently finds that columns, supports and detailing such as carvings and castors are missing. It is therefore important to (a) know what the usual form for a particular type of furniture is, and (b) look carefully for marks, unexplained screw holes, shading of the finish or colour, tell-tale circles indicating the former presence of knobs or feet, etc.

At a recent auction I and some companions saw an interesting sideboard with quite ornate carving to the back. The pedestals, in contrast, were very plain, and inconsistent with the rest of the sideboard because of this. We were all agreed that there was something wrong with the piece, but not sure exactly what. We had noticed two small holes in all four corners of each pedestal door, but it was not until we stood well back that we noticed that the finish was darker in a vertical strip down each side of both doors. It then became clear that there had once been two columns on each door, which would have balanced the detailing with the ornate backboard.

## 4. Relationship of parts

Many pieces of furniture which have lost bits and pieces in the past have had new pieces made to fit or have been fitted with old parts of different pieces of furniture. If such refurbishing were carried out well it would be very difficult to tell the differences. However, in practice, it is usually very sloppy, so that the new or new/old piece is not quite the right size (e.g. a chiffonier back slightly narrower than the chiffonier to which it is fitted) or is of a slightly different colour or finish to the main part of the piece. A chiffonier seen at a recent Hunter Valley auction had a beautiful original finish and patina, except for the back which was satin Estapol!

In a different class yet again are the complete "marriages" and totally made-up pieces. A marriage is when two parts of a piece of furniture have had different origins. Marriages are common in two part bookcases, tables (top / column and base) and similar pieces which can be easily divided. The things to look out for are consistency of style,



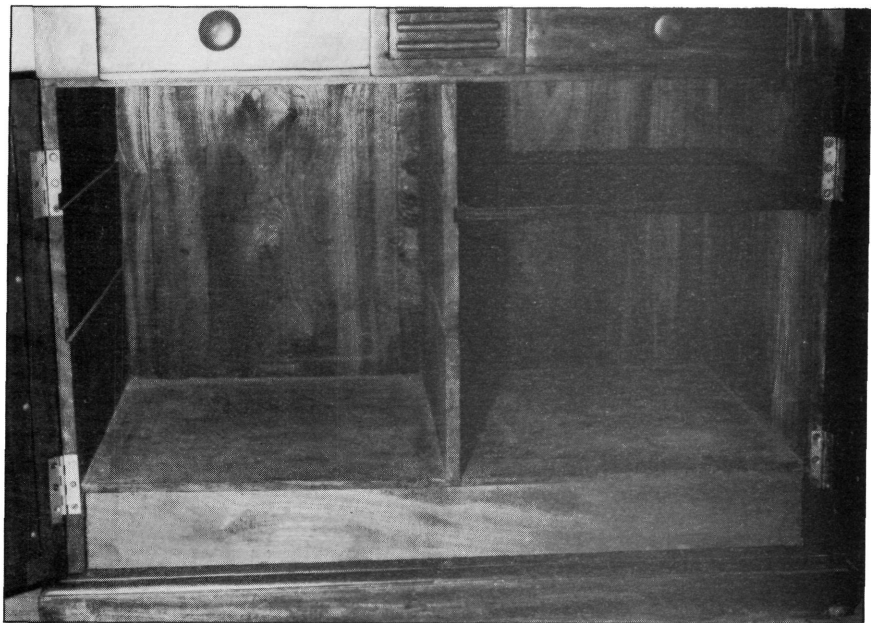
*Chiffonnier – note the arched doors and the rectangular inset panels to the back, sometimes a sign of a marriage.*

detail, finish and colour. Totally made-up furniture can be deliberate fakes or put together a long time ago without any intention of faking. They are always a mixture of parts of separate items of furniture, and sometimes newly made parts also, to simulate an old desirable piece. If intended as fakes they are usually completely re-finished, and sometimes heavily stained, to disguise differences in colour etc. between the various parts. Examples of such fakes I have seen are:

(1) a chiffonier which, upon investigation, had been made-up from (a) the back and top of a chiffonier, (b) two beautiful fielded doors from a bookcase or similar quality piece, and (c) a new base and fill-in side pieces (with the grain running the wrong

way!) to fit the gaps. Tell-tale signs included the new finish, fill-in pieces, sliding catch at the top of the door which had nothing to latch into (except the bottom of the drawer!), and screw holes under the edge of the top, indicating the top had once been screwed to a wider base.

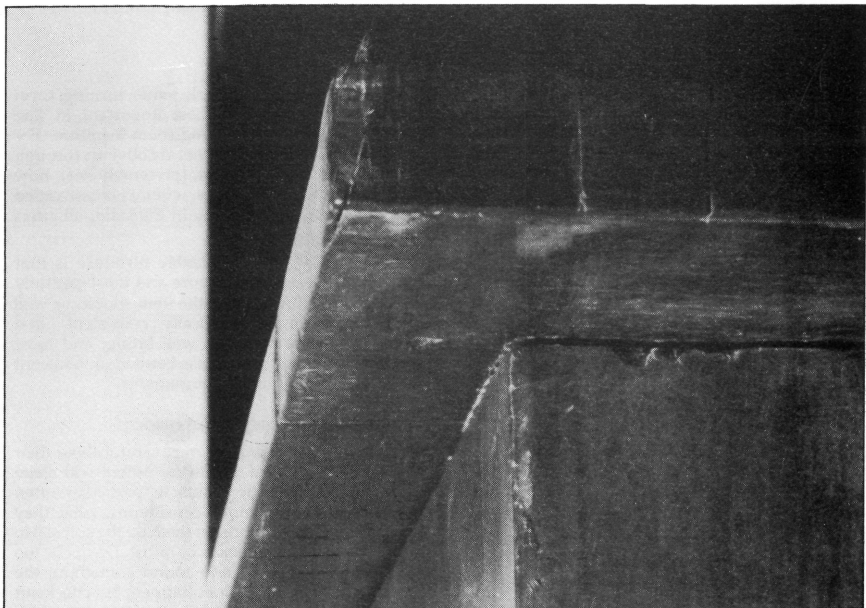
(2) a bookcase I had seen some years ago with its original finish; it was an open fronted, narrow library bookcase with a slide-out book rest, but now appears in the form of a closed in bookcase with glazed upper doors and panelled lower doors (in Pacific Maple no less!) heavily stained all over and finished in that lovely plastic finish which I so admire.



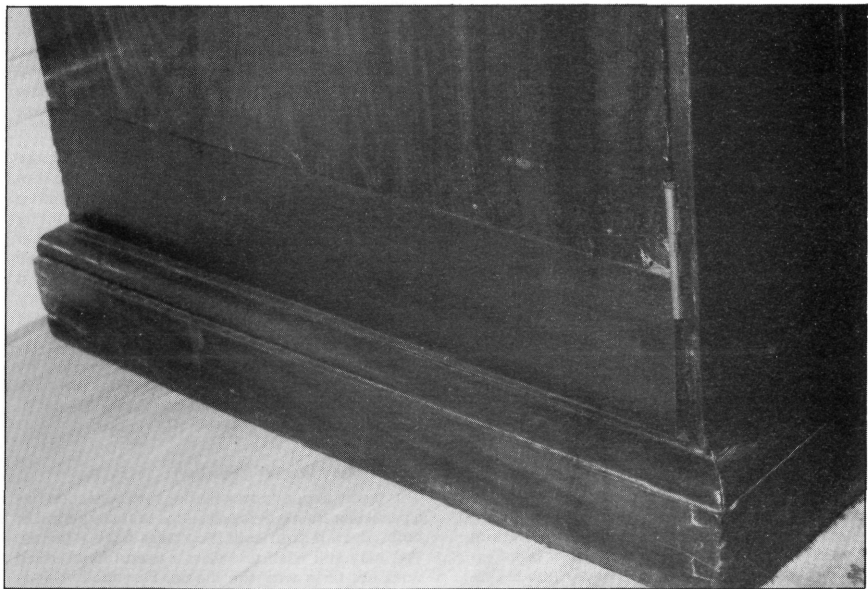
*Inside – (a) note end-grain of fill-in side-piece, with hinge screwed into end-grain, a sure sign of alteration by a faker, (b) new piece of cedar fitted in, the same height as the fill-in side-pieces, indicating the carcass has been raised in height to fit the doors and back.*



*Detail – sliding catch in the door has nothing to latch to except the bottom of the drawer.*



*Under the edge of the top – note the filled screw holes where the top was once screwed to a wider base.*



*Side – (a) side-piece of cedar with grain running at right angles to the original timber, (b) moulding is of pine stained to match the cedar, a very unlikely feature of a piece such as this purports to be, (c) exposed dovetail, unusual in a quality piece, (d) edge of door shows tenons, indicating it may once have been a recessed door.*



## 5. Signs of age

The age of the finish and patina and their consistency are important features of a piece of furniture. All old furniture shows signs of age and use: edges are rounded, there are chips, dents, burns, old repairs etc. to show that the piece has been used, and sometimes abused. Within reason these signs are a good thing, as they show the piece is old. Such signs should not be removed unless absolutely necessary. If you want furniture that looks like new then you should buy new furniture. Special areas to check are the feet and flat tops of tables etc. to see if they show the normal inevitable wear and tear. Familiarity with such aspects can help you to decide if a piece is "wrong" or not. For example, a table I was examining at an auction was disparaged by a dealer, who claimed that the feet had been replaced. However, I had examined the feet carefully, and noted that they had considerable patina, old, probably original, finish, and original early castors. These features were consistent with the table's age, so I was able to ignore the comments as they seemed to be nothing but sour grapes.

## 6. Quality of design and workmanship

The importance of both these aspects is influenced by what sort of furniture one is collecting. Most Australian furniture can be classified as belonging to one of two categories, each of which can be further subdivided:

- City (cabinetmaker)    - "fine"  
                                     - "everyday"
- Country - carpenter    - "good"  
                                     - "everyday"
- unskilled    - "rustic"

Thus city furniture ranges from pieces that rival the best products of English cabinetmakers to very plain knocked-together pieces, and country furniture ranges from pieces of good drawing room style furniture to crosscut logs for chairs. Obviously if your preference is for rustic furniture you will not be expecting to find the same quality of workmanship (jointing, veneering etc.) and stylistic purity that you would in drawing room furniture. In fact you may well look for particularly individual or Australian style and construction.

## Quality of design

The stylistic purity and special design features of furniture have a great influence on the desirability and value of the piece. As the relative importance and value of particular styles may be somewhat arguable, it is difficult to give firm guidelines as to which is best. The first step though is to familiarise yourself with the literature on the styles of whichever period most interests you. If you are interested in a range of periods, two good starting points are *A Pictorial Dictionary of British 19th Century Furniture Design* published by the Antique Collectors Club in England, 1980, and *Nineteenth Century Australian Furniture*, by Kevin Fahy, and Christina and Andrew Simpson, David Ell Press, Syd-

ney, 1985, both of which contain numerous illustrations.

## Quality of workmanship

The quality of structural work, joints, turning, carving, veneering etc. are most important in fine cabinetwork such as drawing room furniture. For instance, whether tenon joints are obvious through the morticed piece of wood, (preferably not), how thick or thin are the veneers, whether crossbanded and edge veneered, or only in the solid, all affect the value of furniture.

In general the most valuable furniture is that which is both stylistically pure and most skillfully made. By this I mean that the item should be well proportioned and stylistically consistent, that joints should be neat and well fitting, and most likely with at least some cross-banded or veneered surfaces as the minimal requirements.

## 7. Claims as to age/style/provenance

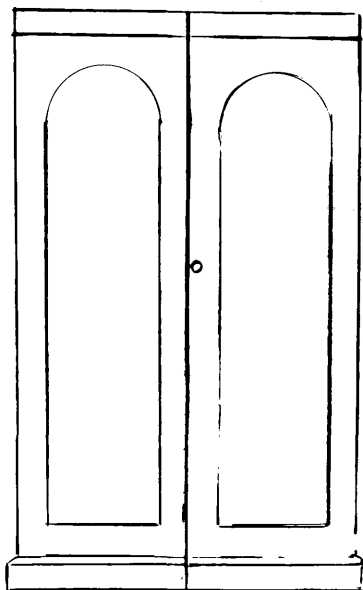
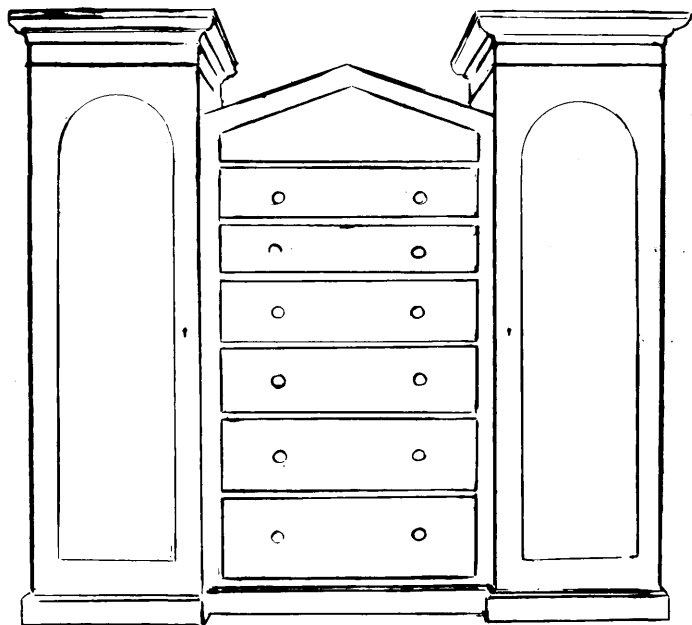
While reputable dealers are very careful about their claims for a piece of furniture, others will claim almost anything. The fakers in particular often make extravagant claims, considering what they are offering, though some of them do the soft sell to let the suckers talk themselves into it. Do not be too eager to believe you have found something the experts have missed; it does happen, but check out the claims! One particularly worrying tendency is the attribution of furniture to particular makers on stylistic features alone. Such claims are extremely difficult to substantiate, and as such do not enhance the value of a piece, and may even induce doubts about it! Some excellent furniture is completely unlabelled, and some very horrid furniture is labelled, so do not be over anxious to purchase for a label or attribution alone.

As early Australian furniture has become more scarce and more valuable, there has also been a tendency for sellers / dealers to claim an earlier rather than a later date. In general, furniture is dated by the *latest* feature it has, so do not believe that because, for example, a piece has a Regency scroll feature that it is necessarily Regency in date. If it were a mirror-backed sideboard with a Regency scroll, it would be mid to late Victorian, because of the mirror back.

Claimed provenance should be supported by written statement or documentation from previous owners. If these are not available a statutory declaration should be sought from the vendor.

## 8. Relevance to your collection

This partly depends on whether your collection has a particular theme or is eclectic as to style, period or both. Even if your collection does have a theme, you may still wish to collect a useful item which does not fit in with the theme. Essentially this is something you as the collector must decide, but, especially when starting out collecting, the development of a theme, and being consistent with that



*An example of a piece altered to fit changed circumstances – smaller living quarters.*

*Above: An original 1840s cedar wing wardrobe.*

*Left: A wardrobe made from the two wings of the same wardrobe (seen recently in Sydney).*

theme, is definitely something you should ponder. Following a theme in a collection allows you to set goals, and to end up with a collection that somehow adds up to more than the sum of its parts. Random collecting may just leave you with a lot of incompatible items.

You should balance what you want with what you can afford. However do not be unduly influenced by what dealers tell you is available. It is my experience that an amazing range of furniture turns up eventually, so you should not necessarily accept second best just because you are told that there is nothing else. You may, though, have to wait a while and pay a hefty price for what you want.

## 9. Price and value for money

It is very difficult to know what is value for money. In general the more common and pedestrian pieces such as plain Victorian chests of drawers should be fairly cheap — there are plenty of them around and they do not increase in value very quickly. More desirable and less common pieces, e.g. bookcases in the former category, sofa tables in the latter, are more expensive and harder to assess as to value for money. Something can also be rare, but ugly and undesirable and therefore of little value. You need to get a feel for the market, and to see as much furniture of the relevant sort as possible, to be able to

form such judgments.

This can be very difficult to achieve, but contacts formed through the society can help, as can seeing other people's collections. In this considerable tact, responsibility and care are required; no one likes to have their collection bad-mouthed, laughed at or shouted all over town. Nor do most people like to be too closely probed as to sources and costs. People who are ever ready to exclaim at an auction or similar situation "so and so owns that", are usually not invited a second time! If someone shows you their collection respect their privacy and confidentiality.

One of the best ways to see a range of furniture is to find a good dealer (they do exist) who sells the type of furniture you like. A dealer will usually have a flow-through of stock to allow you to get a feel for the market, but once again dealers won't tell you details and prices if they think you will run and tell their opposition, so tact and responsibility are required.

In conclusion, once you have checked-out the piece of furniture according to this list one further judgement is required, you must ask yourself "Do I like this item?". If your answer is yes, go ahead and purchase it, and then enjoy it. If your answer is no, I suggest you leave it for someone who will enjoy it.



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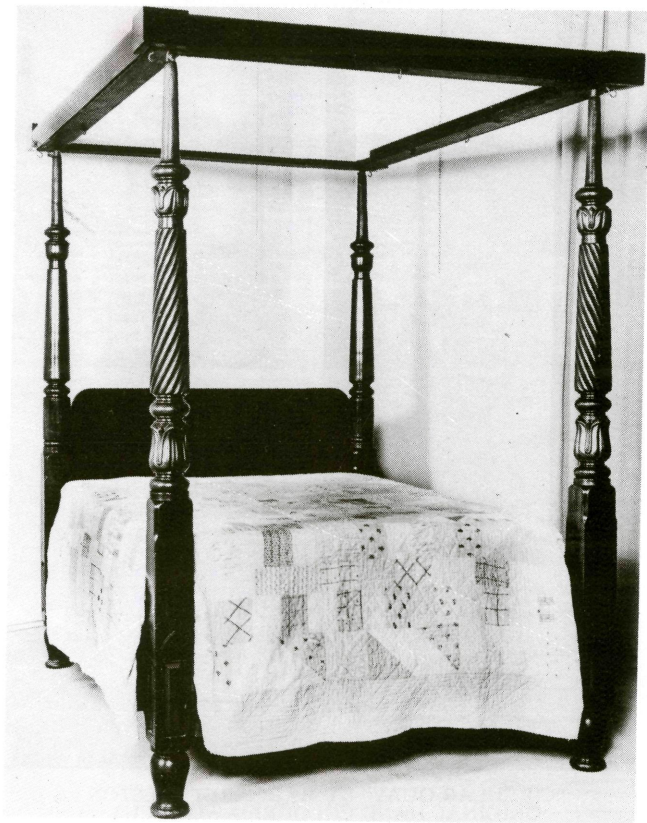
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# The Bridge Street Explosion of 1866

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*A. Wayne Johnson*

Since the early 1860s, photographers have been quick to get to the sites of fires and other newsworthy disasters to record the events. Among these events have been the fire at St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney and the attempted assassination of Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh.

A lesser known but certainly more dynamic occurrence was the explosion of a 100lb sample of nitroglycerine in a store in Bridge Street, Sydney, in 1866, now the site of the Singapore Airlines offices. The Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences holds in its collection of some 9000 historic photographs, a glass plate negative taken within days of the explosion. When viewed along with the newspaper accounts of the day, this event, which occupied the press for the next three weeks, provides a highly entertaining story of 'pass the parcel'. That it should happen without loss of life is most surprising.

## The Explosion

On the night of Sunday 4th March, 1866 at about six o'clock, Sydney was rocked by a massive explosion likened to the roar of artillery fire. A dense column of dust and rubbish was thrown more than 100 feet into the air above nos. 17-19 Bridge Street. Windows within a radius of 300-400 yards were reported to have been shattered by the blast, and it was said that some windows in the Mint building in Macquarie Street had been broken. Of the premises at 17-19 Bridge Street owned by the firm of Molison and Black, not a stone was left upon another.

John Black, manager of the Sugar Company situated opposite Molison & Black's, was standing at the door of his office opening onto Bridge Street at the time of the explosion. A faint flash was the only warning he had of what was about to happen. Black said later that he grabbed hold of the door,



*The site of the explosion in Bridge Street, 1866 possibly taken the following day. Note the broken window panes and debris littering the street. Photographer unknown. Photo courtesy of the Trustees of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences.*



*Detail of the demolished stores at 17-19 Bridge Street where now stands the Singapore Airlines Office. Photographer unknown. Photo courtesy of the Trustees of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences.*

saving him from being thrown due to the force of the explosion. It was later found that a large iron grate from the cellar of the demolished store had been thrown into the façade of the Sugar Company's offices. Another eyewitness, Charles Church, was walking along the footpath at Pitt Street. After hearing the explosion he saw a mass of wood thrown into the air and so started to run across the street. A falling slate struck Church, knocking him to the ground. Luckily, he was not severely injured.

Not so lucky was John Blake, whose grocery shop was on the opposite side of the road to the explosion. Blake reported that at 6.30pm he was sitting behind the counter of his shop, close to the window. Sixteen showcases full of confectionery fell down, as well as the window being shattered. Blake was thrown to the ground unconscious. When he regained consciousness he found his arms had been cut by falling glass.

The roadway was strewn with lead guttering and beams of wood from the demolished storehouse. Considerable damage was done to a new store on the east side of Molison and Black's, the wall divid-

ing the two premises having been blown out in the explosion leaving the roof poised precariously overlooking the gaping hole where once had stood the Molison and Black store.

The building had been used to store all manner of goods, including furniture belonging to one Captain Anderson. A fragment of chair was reportedly recovered from Church Hill, not far from the corner of York and Grosvenor Streets. Part of the cellar of No. 19 had been leased to a Mr Rawack, who in turn had given permission to Renaud Winckler to store vinegar on the premises.

#### **The Cause**

At first it was thought that the explosion may have been due to gunpowder igniting. On interviewing the occupants of the stores destroyed, it was found that there was only a small sample of the substance kept on the premises, certainly not enough to account for the damage that had been done. It was then revealed that a new substitute to blasting powder had been stored on the premises; that substance was nitroglycerine, a sample of 100lb having newly arrived on the ship 'Ramsay'.

The nitroglycerine had been sent from Hamburg to Renaud Winckler, who had entered into an agreement with the firm of W. Wolfen and Co. to act as agents for the distribution of the product in Australia. Rawack had given Winckler permission to store vinegar in the cellar at No. 19 Bridge Street, leased by him from Molison and Black, and it was to there that Winckler had taken the sample. Winckler's brother, Theodore, employed by Alred Nobel and Co. in Hamburg had suggested the sale of the product in Australia, particularly as it was thought it may be useful on the goldfields.

By Monday morning, only twelve hours after the explosion, the story was out that the mysterious new substance, nitroglycerine, was the probable cause. The next morning (Tuesday, 6th March) the following letter appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

"Sir – The explosion of yesterday, so mysterious in its origin, so disastrous in its results, has caused very great anxiety in the minds of the people of Sydney. Being, as I believe it is beyond the pale of an ordinary coroner's inquiry, I feel that I am expressing the wishes of the inhabitants of Sydney in venting to suggest to you that a strict inquiry into the cause should be instantly commenced by the Government, to be prosecuted by professional or scientific gentlemen of the highest standing the city can produce.

Yours truly

John Bird"

The city buzzed with 'Nitroglyceriomania'. The newspapers were full of stories recounting the events of the night of Sunday, 4th March. Insurance agencies were in a quandary as to where they stood, since explosions without fire damage did not enter into their policies. The *Sydney Morning Herald* on 7th March reprinted a story that had originally been printed in a German newspaper the previous year describing how a young man was 'blown to pieces' whilst packing 2lb of nitroglycerine. On the same page it was reported that one George Walker, engaged in the clean-up operations in Bridge Street, was 'seized with a fit... It was rumoured that the man had been touching or tasting some Nitro-Glycerine which caused him to faint away'. Such reports no doubt had a lot to do with the decision to establish a Board of Inquiry.

### The Inquiry

The Board of Inquiry consisted of the Hon. Alexander Campbell, Professor John Smith (Professor of Chemistry at Sydney University) and Captain Jonathon McLerie (Inspector-General of Police). On inspecting the site, Renaud Winckler pointed out the area where he had left the case of nitroglycerine. This was then cleared of debris to reveal a hole estimated at five to six feet deep in the earth and eight feet in diameter. This, it was believed, left no doubt as to the cause of the explosion.

As to why the nitroglycerine exploded no clues could be found. The cellar was cool and well venti-

lated, the box positioned so that it would not fall. The lock on the door had been secure when Winckler had last been there a few days before. There was no sign of a corpse (or parts thereof for that matter) in the ruins, and so human involvement was ruled out. The committee then sought to recreate the history of the sample.

The 'deadly game of pass the parcel' began on 9th September 1865 when Theodore Winckler first wrote to his brother Renaud with his offer of a 100lb sample of 'Nobel's Patent Blasting Oil'.

'It is a splendid invention', Theodore wrote, 'with the next mail I send you under address of W. Wolfen and Co., 100lbs Nitro-Glycerine.' On 30th September, the sample was sent to London to be shipped by steamer to Australia. The London handling agents wrote to Renaud Winckler on 12th October that owing to the nature of the goods they would not go by mail steamer, and therefore were being shipped by the 'Ramsay' which was to leave for Sydney on 17th October.

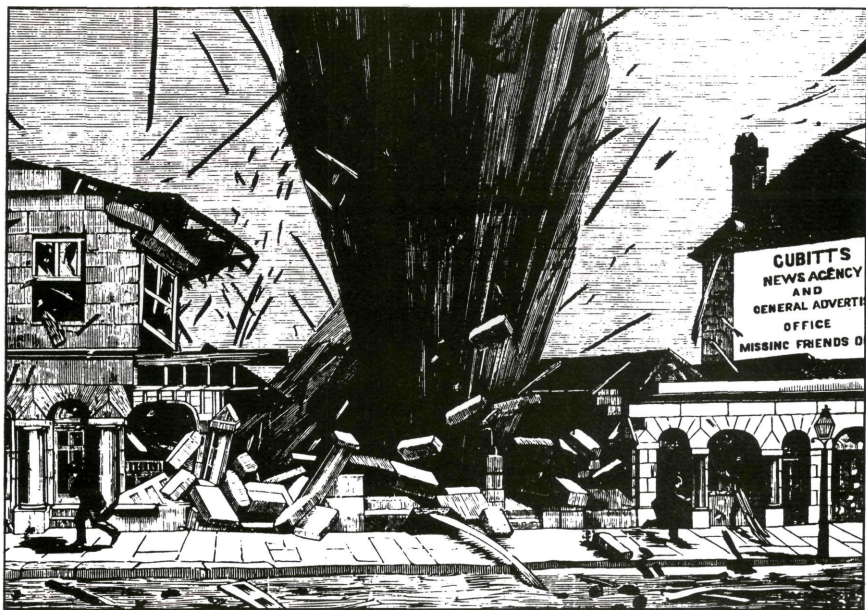
The sample was reportedly stored in the hold immediately below the cabin, one case containing the oil and another the apparatus for detonation. Both were unmarked other than the numbers M336 and M363 respectively. Nowhere on the cases was there any indication of the explosive nature of the contents.

After what appears to have been an uneventful voyage, the 'Ramsay' off-loaded its cargo in Sydney on 19th February, 1866. At the inquiry Samuel Harpur, a 'tidewater' in the Customs, stated that whilst supervising the unloading of the ship, the smaller of the two cases (which was later shown to contain the detonation apparatus) was hauled up from the hold and seen to have no entry on the cargo list. Harpur had the case stopped and it was laid on the deck, overhanging the main hatchway leading to the cargo hold. In the course of unloading, a wine-barrel was hoisted up from below, striking the case which then fell to the bottom of the hold. Luckily for those present, this case was not the one containing the nitroglycerine.

The cases were eventually unloaded and passed to the Queen's Warehouse at Circular Quay, since there was no indication of the nature of the goods contained. Normally goods of an explosive nature were removed to the colony's powder magazine on Goat Island. John Halloran, on duty at the warehouse, received the two cases, and at the inquiry stated that 'they were not opened nor examined, but they might have been tossed about through receiving and delivering'. Another of the Winckler brothers, Augustus, later recalled that he and Renaud, having gone to the warehouse to collect the cases, noticed that one of the cases had been placed on its end, and suggested to Capt. McLerie that it may have been tampered with.

On 28th February the cases were removed by the two Wincklers, they having satisfied the Customs agents that this was a sample for experimentation





Artist's recreation of the explosion in Bridge Street. (Illustrated Sydney News 16th March 1866, page 9.)

and not for sale. On leaving, the Collector of Customs asked Renaud about the danger of the oil exploding. Winckler assured him that there was no danger and promptly showed the letters from Theodore in Hamburg to corroborate this assertion. The cases were then taken to the cellar at 19 Bridge Street to await Renaud's experimentation planned for the following Saturday, 2nd March. The two brothers opened the cases and examined the contents, Renaud leaving Augustus to nail the lids back on. The last time anyone was in the cellar was on the Friday when the brothers went to fetch a sample of the vinegar also stored in there. Due to other business, the experiments were postponed.

### The Conclusions

At the Inquiry Renaud defended his action in storing the nitroglycerine in the cellar in the following manner:

"I had not the slightest idea that there was any danger in placing the oil in the cellar after it had been one hundred days on board ship and a fortnight in the Queen's Warehouse."

The Board published its conclusions in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 21st March.

"Having thus examined and dismissed the various external causes of the explosion, we are compelled to the conclusion that the cause lay within the oil itself—in other words, that it exploded spontaneously. This we allow is an unsatisfactory conclusion, and to many it may appear inadmissible.

How, it may be asked, could the oil stand the rough handling, and the vicissitudes of temperature that must have attended its progress from Hamburg to Sydney, and then, three days after being quietly deposited in a cool cellar, without any new condition supervening, spontaneously explode?"

It was decided that in the future no samples of nitroglycerine greater than 10lb should be stored in the city or suburbs, nor within 200 yards of an inhabited building. Instead it should be kept in the powder magazine and be subject to the same laws governing the storage of gunpowder.

Unfortunately no record survives of the reception the next shipment of nitroglycerine received. The Customs officials at the Queen's Warehouse no doubt had learnt to approach the substance with extreme caution.

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*Sydney Morning Herald* 5th-16th, 21st March, 1866.

*Illustrated Sydney News* 16th March 1866, p.4.

*Report of the Board of Inquiry into the Explosion in Bridge Street* 20th March, 1866.

Tyrrell Collection, Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences.

*I am indebted to Mr Alan Davies of the State Library for allowing me to tap into his seemingly boundless knowledge of historic photographs and for his help in tracking down the date of the explosion.*



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## Lawson's



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# Robert Jones and the Cross Marsh Show

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*R.A. Phillips*

Although Tasmanian silverwork of before 1850 is best known by the *finé* group of salvers from the Barclay workshop, and the cup given to George Augustus Robinson in 1835<sup>1</sup>, the bulk of what remains is a testimony to the richness of the sheep walks and farm lands of the island.

The two medals shown here are minor examples of local silverwork from a prosperous period. The obverse of each carries the legend "Cross Marsh / Agricultural / Association" with one dated 1836 and the other 1838. On the reverse of the former is engraved "Presented / to / Mr Jones / for the best / Sack of Wheat" while on the other is inscribed "Presented / to / Mr R. Jones / for the best / Heifer".

Cross Marsh lies about 48 kilometres northwest of Hobart, and was an area of fine land between Kempton and Melton Mowbray. Although the name is long out of use, it was well known in Van Diemen's Land in 1840-41 when David Burn<sup>2</sup> wrote "... we stop to contemplate that much-admired and garden-like spot - the Cross Marsh". It was, he went on "... an admirable site for a thriving market town ... Here also there is a very comfortable inn, with cattle-yards, sheep-pens, and every accommodation for the sale of stock, which, owing to its central advantages, are frequently driven here".

The advantages of Cross Marsh as a market place had been noted some years before, as a meeting of interested parties in 1826 had resolved<sup>3</sup> among other things:

- "1. - That the Establishment of a Fair or Market, to be holden Quarterly, or Half yearly, at a convenient Distance from Hobart Town, would be highly beneficial to the Community at large.
2. - That the Cross Marsh, from its central position, being nearly equi-distant from Hobart Town and Ross Bridge, is the place most eligible for holding such Fair or Market."

The following year the first market was held in a paddock named "Picton", which was only used in 1827. Lack of water and other amenities forced the market to move to the outskirts of Kempton, next to the Royal Oak Inn<sup>4</sup>.

In about 1833, annual prize show meetings or exhibitions began<sup>5</sup>. As the decade progressed so did the prosperity of the area, for the landholders who were expanding into the Port Phillip area of Victoria sought breeding and working stock. The foundation of South Australia in 1836 opened another market for livestock and foodstuffs.

The well established farmers of Van Diemen's Land took full opportunity of the markets opening

to them. The Cross Marsh Agricultural Society was the second such formed in Tasmania, the one at Ross having been set up in 1826. Once the annual prize show was established "First prizes were presented at the Show ... usually silver cups, embossed with oak leaves, acorns and roses, many of them are still in existence today and are prized possessions of families around the district".<sup>6</sup>

Of the Cross Marsh cups known to the writer, the 1837 prize for the best Fat Ox was reported to have been in Scotland in 1952.<sup>7</sup> The 1838 Champion Stallion prize was won by W.J.T. Clarke's appropriately named Young Champion which in the same year won the premium for the best horse at the Richmond Show. Both of these cups remain with descendants of Clarke.<sup>8</sup> The 1838 cup for the Best Bull went to Robert Jones, and can be seen at the Narryna Folk Museum at Battery Point. The prize cups for the Best Three Mutton Ewes in 1838 and 1839 are illustrated in the centenary history of Green Ponds Municipality.<sup>9</sup> These last three cups are of standard campana form and are English made, and it seems fair to assume that the bulk of such prize cups of this period would have been similar, imported quite likely by Barclay as a staple line. The cost advantages of the massive English silver industry and the local shortage of metal would have ruled against the local maker.

The demand for prize cups would appear to have been surprisingly large, the call for medals much less. The 1840 Cross Marsh show alone produced <sup>10</sup>

## *"Prizes - First Class*

*His Excellency Sir John Franklin's Cup - For three finest woolled Hogget Ewes.*

*Mr Thompson's Cup - For best Cart Filly.*

*The Society's Cups - Three finest woolled Rams; three finest woolled ewes; three best mutton Rams; three best mutton Ewes; five best fat Wethers; best Bull 2 years old and upwards; best cow; best fat Ox; best Cart Stallion 2 years old; best Cart Stallion 3 years old and upwards; best Cart Mare; Stallion calculated to produce best roadsters and carriage horses.*

## *Second Class*

*The Society's Medals - Best fat steer, under 4 years old; best Heifer, not exceeding 3 years old; best Boar and Sow; best sack of wheat."*

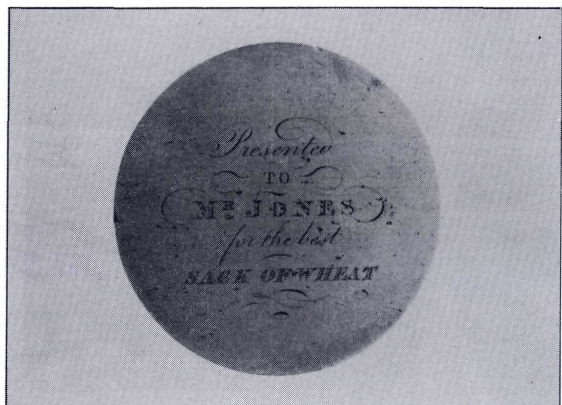
Thus we see that this one show produced 14 cups and 4 medals, and this in the period of hand-made (not die struck) medals, and before the proliferation of electroplated trophy cups.



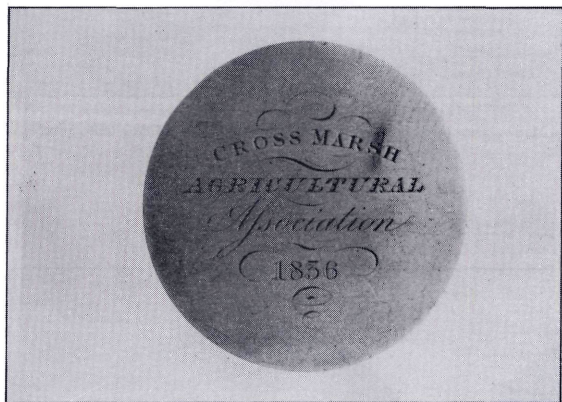
A. Two medals presented to R. Jones by the Cross Marsh Agricultural Association, that on the left in 1838, the other 1836. Silver, unmarked, diam. 60mm.



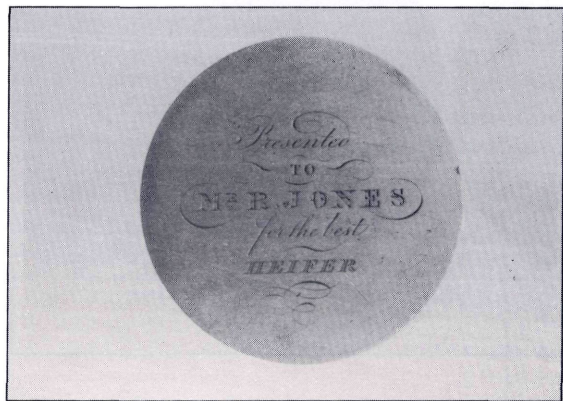
B. Two medals presented to R. Jones by the Cross Marsh Agricultural Association. That on the left for the best sack of wheat, 1836, the other for the best heifer, 1838. Silver, unmarked, diam. 60mm.



C. Silver medal presented by the Cross Marsh Agricultural Association in 1836 for the best sack of wheat. Unmarked, diam. 60mm.



D. Obverse of silver medal presented to Mr Jones for the best sack of wheat. Unmarked, diam. 60mm.



E. Silver medal presented by the Cross Marsh Agricultural Association in 1838 for the best heifer. Unmarked, diam. 60mm.

Robert Jones, winner of the two medals shown, and of the 1838 cup at Narryna, lived on his property "Pleasant Place" along the Jordan River in the area then known as Four Square Gallows. The area is now less dramatically known as Lower Marshes, and his two storeyed house stood there until about a year ago. The solid stone barn remains though, with its hand hewn blocks and slit windows. Jones is noted in Tasmanian history as one of three stockmen who were attacked near the Relief River by hostile aborigines in 1819.<sup>11</sup> Almost by chance the three survived, though all were wounded, and Jones was the recipient of three spears. Perhaps that has a bearing on why, when Colonel Arthur organised his misbegotten "Black Line" in 1830, Pleasant Place was one of the rallying places. The slits in the barn were not just for the benefit of the natives however. Cross Marsh saw the comings and goings of a number of escapees and bushrangers, one of the most notable being Matthew Brady, who skirmished with the militia near there in 1826.<sup>12</sup>

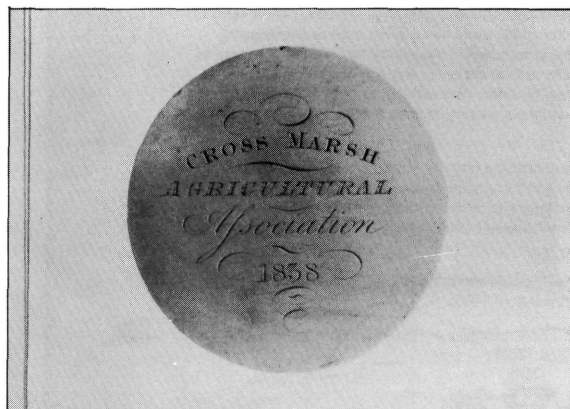
The two medals are unmarked, so their attribution is uncertain. Each has three small holes in the rim, so they may have been mounted at some stage. Around the time of their presentation both Joseph Forrester and Charles Jones were in the employ of David Barclay. Since the medals are simple silver discs 60mm in diameter the only skill in their execution was that shown by the engraver, who had a confident and flourishing hand. Charles Jones is known, apart from his cups and boxes<sup>13</sup> as having been "Medalist to His Excellency Sir W.T. Denison, the Horticultural and other Societies ...", and medals by him are held by the Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart.

The Cross Marsh Show moved to Melton Mowbray in the 1850s, and then thirty or so years later

reverted to Kempton. The original paddock at Picton is still there, fenced off and rather overgrown amongst the farmland. The stone barn Robert Jones built is still used on Pleasant Place, in sight of the family graves in the churchyard on the hillside above. The medals and the silver cup remain to remind us of a turbulent and successful period in the history of Tasmania, and of the efforts of a good farmer.

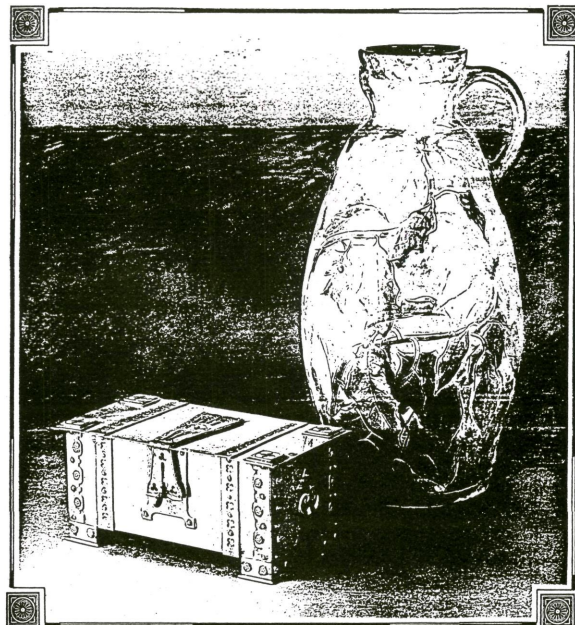
#### Footnotes

1. See *Australian Silver 1800-1900* edited by J.B. Hawkins, National Trust of Aust. (NSW) 1973, and "David Barclay..." by Peter Mercer, *The Australian Antique Collector*, No.23, Jan - June 1982.
2. *A Picture of Van Diemen's Land* by David Burn, facsimile from *The Colonial Magazine* 1840-41, Cat & Fiddle Press, Hobart 1973.
3. *The Hobart Town Gazette*, Nov. 18, 1826.
4. *History of Bothwell* MS courtesy of Gwen Webb.
5. *The Colonial Times*, 1 Dec. 1840: "Cross Marsh ... Eighth Exhibition".
6. *History of Bothwell* as above.
7. Archives Office of Tasmania 29/11/1985.
8. 'Big' Clarke by Michael Clarke, Queensberry Hill Press, 1980.
9. *A History of Green Ponds* a centenary booklet for the municipality by T.R. Macleod, 1962.
10. *The Colonial Times*, 1 Dec. 1840.
11. Retold from contemporary reports in *The Tasmanians* by Robert Travers, Cassell Aust. 1968 and by K.R. von Stieglitz in his *History of Bothwell*.
12. Burn, *ibid*.
13. Article "Charles Jones, convict silversmith of Van Diemen's Land" by B.Y. O'Driscoll, *Art Bulletin of Tasmania*, 1986.



F. Obverse of silver medal presented to Mr R. Jones for the best heifer. Unmarked, diam. 60mm.





Jamie Lincon 1904-1981 Australia  
Casket 1934, Perth  
brass, copper and enamel  
Flora Landells 1888-1981 Australia  
Jardiniere c1933, Perth  
glazed earthenware  
both from Collection of The Art Gallery  
of Western Australia

## WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CRAFTS 1890-1990 a survey

Search for Information

A major project to research the history of Western Australian crafts, design and decorative arts is being undertaken by Robert Bell, Curator of Craft at The Art Gallery of Western Australia. He is interested in finding objects known to be made in Western Australia, or using Western Australian materials and motifs. The main period of interest is from 1890 to the 1950s and objects of interest would include well-known crafts such as needlework, ceramics and china painting, furniture and woodwork, metalwork and jewellery, as well as lesser known trade, 'folk' and handcrafts such as basketry, leatherwork, pokerwork, hair and shellwork, woolwork, millinery, tailoring, dressmaking, toys, modelmaking, stonemasonry, calligraphy, signmaking and signwriting, stained glass, coachbuilding and boatbuilding.

Mr Bell is interested in locating and documenting (for the Art Gallery archive, possible exhibition loan or possible acquisition) good examples of such objects, and to talk to people who may own such pieces or who have information about their makers and histories. Early photographs of craftspeople, art and craft displays and Western Australian interiors are also sought.

It is planned that a major Art Gallery exhibition and publication, "Western Australian Crafts 1890-1990" will be drawn from this research in 1990.

Mr Bell can be contacted weekdays at The Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth Cultural Centre, Perth, 6000, (telephone (09) 328 7233).





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# Who was H.R. Nicholls?

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Ian Rumsey

Society members would no doubt be familiar with the terms the "New Right", "dry economic theories" or "conservative ideals", that have been bombarded at us all through the media over the last year or so. It seems the epitome of these economic theories come together in the famous or infamous H.R. Nicholls Society. The question a lot of people must have asked themselves is, who was Nicholls, and what did he do to make the conservative movement name a small elite society after him?

Henry Richard Nicholls was born in London in 1830, the third son of a merchant, also named Henry, who had a strong socialist commitment. Henry senior amongst his many other interests wrote for radical papers and eventually edited and then owned one such paper, the *Weekly Examiner*. (The term "radical" in 19th Century politics generally referred to the reform or liberal movement). Following in his father's footsteps H.R. Nicholls joined the Chartist movement in 1848 and often contributed to newspapers with a liberal view. (Chartists were a reform group with the aim of eliminating inequalities in the British electoral system.)

In 1853 Nicholls migrated to Melbourne and became a journalist, editing the *Diggers Advocate*, an anti government paper. During the old licence troubles Nicholls sent a wagon to Castlemaine draped with the tricolor of the French Revolution and a driver dressed in red — a very provocative gesture, designed to incite the diggers. The *Advocate's* highbrow ideals of international worker — cooperation were out of tune with the majority of the diggers on the gold fields with their local complaints and so the inevitable happened when the paper closed down in mid 1854. Henry and his newly arrived brother Charles enrolled at the Eureka Stockade, but left in protest at the lack of discipline amongst the diggers. After the fall of the Stockade their signatures appear on a petition to the Governor for a pardon for the rebels and a plea for fair treatment of the population of Ballarat. The failure of the *Advocate* did nothing to dampen the journalistic spirit in Nicholls, for after working for the *Ballarat Times*, he moved to the opposition tabloid, the *Ballarat Star*, working his way up to editor and eventually owner by 1875. Through the *Star* he advocated co-operation and government intervention in righting social wrongs while remaining an ardent supporter of capitalism. He was an early advocate of company responsibility for mining accidents and took up the cause of universal public school education with great passion. His emphasis here was on the practical rather than the classical and he seemed to have had some influence on its implementation in Victoria. While living on the

gold fields Nicholls was true to his liberal upbringing and embroiled himself in local issues that gained him the respect of the community, although his views on worker co-operation were never very popular.

In 1883, after being defeated by Peter Lalor for the seat of Grant, Nicholls moved to Tasmania, taking up the post of editor of the Hobart *Mercury*. Here he became a prosperous pillar of the Tasmanian middle class over the years. He owned a large house in Battery Point and was President of the Hobart Club, and it is possible his more secure status affected his liberal views. He became a staunch critic of governments and unions for what he saw as their preoccupation with their self interests at the expense of the community.

By 1910 his editorials show why he is the figurehead of the so called New Right movement to-day. From the *Mercury* of July 14th 1910: "One thing seems essential before we can hope for industrial peace, and that is workers must have proved to them that they are not outside the law" and "the evil will not be cured by taxing the industrious to allow those others to live in idleness". November 1910, on compulsory unionism: "It is bad enough that men should be compelled to join, whether they wish to or not, but if we add to this they must sacrifice their political beliefs at the same time, we have a state of affairs which exceeds anything that has been attempted before."

It was not until a year later in 1911 that H.R. Nicholls gained his still remembered prominence in an article for the *Mercury* dated April 7th, suggesting Mr Justice Higgins of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court was not impartial and was appointed because of his political views. Nicholls was charged with contempt of court. The proceedings in the case were held in Melbourne on June 7th 1911 and were covered eagerly by the press and public alike. Nicholls was now thrust on the national political scene as an individual standing up for his beliefs against bureaucracy. The case against him was weak and never looked likely to succeed and it was dismissed quickly. His attacks on powerful unions, government intervention and political parties all conspiring to usurp the individual's natural rights made Nicholls the people's hero of the day. Henry Richard Nicholls was 81 when all this fame broke over him, but he would only have a short time in the limelight, for one year later he died in his Battery Point home.

It was only in his old age that he advocated the views that appeal to the New Right. They were not the views he held for most of his life and it is because of this conversion that Nicholls still

retains some of the controversy of yesteryear. His disciples regard him as a great guiding light of conservative thinking, having developed a philosophy of championing the rights of individuals and the principles of a small government sector operating in a deregulated free enterprise system, where goals are obtained by mutual agreement of individuals, a system where organisations should not use their strength for their own self interests. Conversely those with more socialist leanings see him as a hypocrite and traitor to the majority of his political life's work. His detractors point to his absence at the Eureka Stockade, which raises some embarrassing questions. As far as his newspaper career goes he was a lightweight journalist, with a dubiously successful career in Victoria before he

went to Tasmania. In Tasmania his success as a crusading editor came at the expense of his journalistic abilities. Nicholls' critics can also hold him up to ridicule for the very fact that he has become resurrected nowadays by the New Right, who ignore his earlier career and appear to be hard pushed to find a more inspiring spiritual leader than Nicholls.

Whether one wants to get involved in the political debate or not, one thing can be said about Henry Richard Nicholls and that is he is an engima in Australian history, which seems to be repeating itself.

*Reference*  
*Australian Dictionary of Biography*

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# From Here and There

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*compiled by Ian Rumsey*

**Q:** How is it that the Royal Australian Navy is only 76 years old when the Commonwealth was founded 86 years ago?

**A:** Every Australian Colony did have a naval auxiliary unit to supplement the British naval forces in Australian waters carrying out the subordinate duties of customs and water police as well as coastal defence. One of the first of these vessels was the gunboat H.M.N.S.W.S. *Spitfire* built in the 1860s. Victoria followed with H.M.V.S. *Victoria* and later the famous iron clad H.M.V.S. *Cerberus*. While the colonies supplied these auxiliary boats, the Royal Navy based what was known as the Imperial Squadron in Sydney Harbour. The Flag Officer of the Australia Station had as his headquarters Admiralty House, Kirribilli (now the Governor-General's Sydney residence). It took Federation in 1901 to unite the armed forces under British direction, but the navy was slower to be Australianised, because of the high cost of building a deep water navy, training its sailors and supplying them over a large and young country. Our infant navy was originally called the Commonwealth Naval Forces and they were basically a trimmed version of the Imperial Squadron on loan to the Commonwealth Government.

The R.A.N. came into being on July 10th 1911, when George V approved the use of the title "Royal". It took another two years for the ships that would make up the R.A.N. to arrive from the British shipyards. On October 4th 1913 Sydney Harbour witnessed for the first time Australia's new navy passing in review, led by its flag ship the battle cruiser, H.M.A.S. *Australia*.

## **Canberra:**

The Australian Labor Party celebrated its 95th birthday and is commissioning a history of the

labour movement for its centenary in 1991. The labour movement can trace its political beginnings to three separate events of 1891. In the NSW state elections, trade union candidates were elected to parliament for the first time; members of the Queensland union movement called for a political party to reflect the wishes of the workers and in Ballarat at a meeting of the Australian Labour Federation, its members agreed to form a political party. It must be remembered that although there were political parties last century they were made up of individuals banded together with only a general common ideal. For example there were conservatives, liberals, protectionists, free traders, federalists and anti-federalists. Parties did not always have comprehensive policies and so relied on compromise among individuals to form and remain in government. This often broke down and it was not uncommon for state and early federal governments to serve very short terms before an internal split caused a vote of no confidence and hence a new government.

## **Melbourne:**

The Victorian National Trust has classified a tree in Melbourne's Botanical Gardens as part of a plan to make Victorians aware of the historic significance of that state's trees. The tree in question is not just the average run of the mill tree, but "The Separation Tree" as it has come to be known, because it was used to give shade to a delegation of Melbourne's citizens on November 15th 1850 and from under which the proclamation of the foundation of the sovereign colony of Victoria was announced.

## **Hunter Valley:**

A public appeal is being launched to raise money for the restoration of "Dalwood House" at Branxton. The appeal will supplement govern-

ment grants to ensure the restoration will be completed by 1988. Dalwood House was built by George Wyndham, who was one of the earliest and most important pioneers of the Newcastle — Hunter District of NSW. Dalwood was the base of the first herd of pure bred Hereford cattle in NSW as well as being one of the colony's most important wineries. Alas the years have been unkind and the house can only be described as a wreck. The Dalwood name is still used by Penfolds as a brand name for one of their clarets, and George Wyndham's name is perpetuated through the Wyndham Estate Winery, which donated the house to the National Estate.

#### **Hobart:**

On June 18th 1984, Australia's oldest and probably least known live theatre caught fire and was partially destroyed. After more than two and a half years Hobart's Theatre Royal, like the phoenix has emerged from its ashes renewed. The now restored theatre was built 150 years ago, in the classical style, but unlike most other historic theatres did not outgrow its usefulness over the years.

#### **Adelaide:**

The 83 year old Australian inventor Lancelot Leonard Hill died last year. In case readers have not guessed L.L. Hill invented the Hills Hoist. No doubt clothes lines around the country were at half mast as a mark of respect. The hoist was developed in the days after World War II, to stop the Hills' washing tangling in their garden shrubs, in a true mother of necessity fashion.

#### **Canberra:**

The Prime Minister had a request declined from number 10 Downing Street for the transfer of the Australian Constitution to our new Parliament House. The document, proclaiming our nationhood will however be lent for the bicentenary. Britain regards the constitution as an act of the British Parliament and thus is the property of Her Majesty's government and so will not be given away. A replica was offered and will probably be accepted in its place. Our constitution is believed to be the first federal constitution in the world achieved without threat of war or fear of a foreign neighbour as incentive. It was only last year that Australia severed legal links with the UK with the Australia Act which ended the powers of the British parliament over the states of Australia.

#### **Sydney:**

The Australia Day Dinner held by the Society was without a doubt the most popular to date, attracting 84 people some of whom travelled from interstate. It has already been said, but once again many thanks to Ian Pratley for his superb lecture, not to mention the cedar wine table he donated for an auction on the night, and the samples of native timbers he supplied to all tables — all at his own great expense and effort. Others that deserve a vote of thanks are, Mr D Simond and his fifteen guests, the Ryans who travelled from South Australia, Robert Hutchinson, Mike Darlow, Graham

and Anne Cocks and especially Josef Lebovic for their donations to the grand raffle. Josef's donation of a pair of Australian ink sketches was valued at \$200. The Sheraton-Wentworth Hotel once again proved the ideal location and their food and fine wines were excellent value for the \$35 per head charged.

An attempt will shortly be made to start a sub branch of the society in Tasmania with its own committee. It is hoped all Tasmanian society members will co-operate Victoria and South Australia showed great potential and it is hoped future activities there are being planned. Australia wide the society is growing and it looks like, by mid year, we should have 350 members. What's more the journal now pays its own way through subscriptions and advertising revenue. Thanks and gratitude to those members who share their advertising dollars with us. It is through the trade, the society looks for help in passing out membership forms and encouraging their clientele to join our organisation. Membership forms can be obtained by phoning or writing to the secretary.

Please help us if you can.

#### **Thursday Island:**

South Australian member Richard Phillips celebrated Australia Day in the appropriate manner, and in no less an establishment than the Thursday Island Hilton. Richard reckons it has to be the most northerly public house in the Commonwealth or its territories. (Thursday Island is located between Cape York and New Guinea).

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*In last November's issue of the journal "From Here and There" stated that stylistically the pre-Federation coat of arms could not be dated accurately. Well there is one exception. Around the time of the Inter Colonial Exhibitions 1879-1890s, the emu was confused with the cassowary, a close relative inhabiting northern Queensland, New Guinea and Malaya. The cassowary is very similar to the emu, except for a top knot on its head and can often be seen adorning coats of arms on embroidery, transfer printed pottery, furniture and jewellery sold at these exhibitions.*

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# Society News

## Reminder

Please note our next general meeting will be on Thursday, June 4th, when our guest speaker will be Norris Ioannou who will favour us with a lecture on "The evolution of Australian ceramics with particular emphasis on South Australia".

## Society Excursion 14 June

The Committee of the Society have arranged on Sunday the 14th June at 2 pm for a visit to "LYNDHURST", the Georgian house currently being restored in Glebe.

Peter Watts, Director of The Historic Houses Trust, will give a lecture on the history of the house and its restoration.

Members are then invited to inspect the residence of John Morris in Balmain and partake of afternoon tea – cost \$5.00 per head. For further details see brochure enclosed.

## Election of Committee Members for 1987 – 1988 Nomination of Candidates

The nomination shall be made in writing and shall include the written consent of the candidate nominated.

The Candidate shall be proposed and seconded by two members of the Society who shall sign the nomination accordingly.

The nomination must be delivered to the Secretary prior to the 30th June 1987 at PO Box 288, Lindfield 2070, to be valid.

## Notice

The Annual General Meeting of the Society will be held on the 6th August 1987 at 7.30 pm, at the premises of James R. Lawson Pty Ltd, 212 Cumberland St, The Rocks, Sydney.

## Society Auction – August Meeting

Members have notified the Secretary that the following items will be submitted to auction at our August meeting:-

1. Harvey School Jug
2. Glass – 1888 Centenary Plate and Australia Dish
3. Castle Harris Pottery
4. Waratah Pattern Doulton & Worcester
5. Australian Sterling Silver Toast Rack
6. Bradmania

Members are advised that only items of Australian interest will be accepted for auction. 10% commission will be charged with a minimum commission per lot of \$2.50.

Members are invited to contact the Secretary, Graham Cocks 560 6022 (B.H.) or Ian Rumsey 888 3618 (A.H.) to list items prior to the auction or for enquiries pertaining to the auction.

## Interstate Co-ordinators

The following members are willing to promote the interests of the Society by arranging a meeting or visit if other members living in the vicinity would care to contact them:

**Melbourne** Mrs Juliana Hooper (03) 51 3260  
**Canberra** Mr Tony Preston (062) 47 0413  
**Albury-Wodonga** Mr Geoff Ford (060) 24 5494

## New Members 1987 NSW

John & Susan Luke  
Norma Iyer  
Heather McPherson  
Tony & Sue Miller  
Aust. National  
Maritime Museum  
Barbara & David Jones  
Robin Hutcherson  
Louise Mitchell  
Eva Czernis-Ryl  
Kevin & Donna McCann  
Gordon & Lynne Clark  
Lloyd & Pat Oakman  
Keith Hartman  
Frank André  
Denis Jahnsen  
Angela Lassig  
Frances West  
John & Kathleen Colless  
Stella & Dale Gardner  
Jody Wilkinson  
Gail Black  
Edith & Fred  
& Elise O'Neil  
Timothy Webster

David Mort  
Sarah Payne  
Jacynth Woolven  
Penelope Lang  
Dorothy Durie  
Judith Waterer  
Beverley Johnson  
Margaret Shaw  
Phyllis Wright  
Susan Quirk  
Caroline Wilkinson  
**Queensland**  
Paul Thannhauser  
State Library of  
Queensland  
**South Australia**  
Reginald Longden  
**Tasmania**  
Peter Sexton  
State Library of  
Tasmania  
**Victoria**  
Chris Deutscher  
Caroline Miley  
David Freeman  
**Hong Kong**  
Timothy Cha



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# Australiana News

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## Australian Heritage Award 1987

The Australian Heritage Award for 1987 to publicly recognize outstanding achievement in preserving and promoting Australia's heritage was announced in Melbourne 10th April. The award recognizes work in eight categories from which a final winner is announced. The award is presented by the Australian Council of National Trusts sponsored by the leading property consultants Jones Lang Wootton. In the category 'Publications' the winner was "Nineteenth Century Australian Furniture" together with "Ceramics in South Australia 1836-1986". The authors of the former are Kevin Fahy, President of the Australiana Society with Christina and Andrew Simpson who are specialist dealers in Australian 19th century furniture and decorative arts. Andrew is also a committee member of the Australiana Society. The author of the latter is Noris Ioannou who will be the Australiana Society's next guest lecturer on Thursday June 4. The Australiana Society is delighted that two such outstanding publications have attracted such recognition and attention to Australian decorative arts, the cause it has long championed. We would like to congratulate the recipients and look forward to further publications in these hitherto largely uncharted waters.

## NSW State Bicentennial Exhibition

### **The Artist and the Patron: Aspects of Colonial Art in New South Wales**

One of the many activities planned by the Art Gallery of New South Wales for 1988 will be a major exhibition celebrating the state's early artistic heritage. This exhibition, which is being mounted in association with the New South Wales Bicentennial Authority, will take place between 4 March and 1 May 1988.

*The Artist and the Patron* will be the first survey of its kind ever undertaken of art in New South Wales during the colonial period and should have wide, popular appeal. It is further proposed to complement this exhibition with a display of works acquired by the Art Gallery of New South Wales between 1874 and 1901.

Briefly, the exhibition will focus on the relationship between art and patronage in New South Wales between 1800 and 1880 and will be divided into four main sections, viz:

The Officials and Their World

Private Patronage

Information: Illustration: Publication

Art for Exhibition and the Popular Market

Among the artists represented will be such well-known names as Augustus Earle, John Lewin, Conrad Martens, John Skinner Prout, S.T. Gill, F.C. Terry and Eugène von Guérard, together with the works of early engravers, explorers and

amateur watercolourists. Every work selected for the exhibition will have a firm New South Wales provenance and/or attribution and taken as a whole, they will improve significantly our knowledge of the local art world and its support system during the colonial period.

Apart from paintings, the exhibition will also include sketchbooks, sculpture, decorative arts, relics associated with early families, photographs and other ephemera. These will be displayed in separate tableaux throughout the exhibition and will illuminate the four main themes outlined above.

One of the highlights of the show will be a group of works which were originally exhibited at early Sydney art exhibitions such as those mounted in 1847, 1849 and 1857 by the Society for the Promotion of the Fine Arts in Australia. Another section will focus on Eugène von Guérard's important oil, *Sydney Heads*, and the many contemporary versions painted of this work. It is also planned to include a number of sketchbooks and watercolours by female members of those families who commissioned or acquired the paintings shown elsewhere in the exhibition.

Many of the works will come from the Gallery's own collection and from other public institutions throughout Australia but a significant number will also be borrowed from private families, collectors and organisations. It is hoped that the latter source will provide many surprises for the visitor including works which have never been shown publicly before as well as other, "long-lost" or forgotten examples.

The organisers of *The Artist and the Patron* have already advertised widely in the metropolitan, country and interstate press seeking information about individual works and documents relating to colonial artists and their patrons. This research is still on-going and it is hoped that further evidence will continue to come to light throughout the lead-up to the Bicentenary. Please telephone Patricia McDonald or Richard Neville on (02) 225 1700 or write to above at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Art Gallery Road, Domain, Sydney 2000 if you can assist with the project in any way. All replies will, of course, be treated with strict confidentiality.

## Wreck of the *Sirius*

Divers have recently located the wreck sites of *HMS SIRIUS*, flagship of the First Fleet, on Norfolk Island.

Under the command of John Hunter, *SIRIUS* was despatched to Norfolk Island to bring back food for the colony at Sydney. But trying to shelter from a storm, *SIRIUS* was caught by a wind shift



and drifted onto a reef on 19 March 1790. Passengers, livestock and most of the cargo was landed safely. The ship was driven further inshore onto another reef, where it broke up finally on New Year's Day, 1792.

The archaeologists under Graeme Henderson located both the stranding site, where cannon and anchors have been found, and the wreck site, marked by over 50 ballast blocks. Careful survey of the area revealed navigation equipment such as dividers and a sextant; a steelyard and the tapered bronze legs of a piece of furniture or equipment.

One of its anchors was raised in 1905 and erected in Macquarie Place, Sydney through the efforts of Sir Francis Suttor. Another was raised by local divers on the island a few years ago.

A fourth expedition to the site, sponsored by the Australian Bicentennial Authority, is planned. Some of the artefacts will be shown in the ABA's touring exhibition in 1988.

### **Margaret Preston .. exhibition, book and poster at the ANG**

Margaret Preston is one of Australia's best loved and most respected artists. Her bright, decorative paintings and prints of distinctively Australian subjects have delighted the public since they were first exhibited in the early 1920s.

A new exhibition, *The Prints of Margaret Preston*, opens at the Australian National Gallery on 8 August and runs until 18 October, 1987. Included in this exhibition are many previous unknown or rarely seen works, such as, *Still Life and Flowers*, c.1916-19, and *Rock Lily*, 1953.

A complete catalogue of Margaret Preston prints by the curator of the exhibition, Roger Butler, will also be released at the same time. The book, "The Prints of Margaret Preston", attempts to address some of the many unanswered questions about artist's life and work. Of the 300 pages that make up the book, 224 contain colour illustrations of every known Preston print.

Few Australians would not know the colourful flower paintings and prints for which Preston is best known. Yet these were produced, for the most part, in the decade 1920 to 1930 – a very short period considering she exhibited from 1893 to 1958.

*The Prints of Margaret Preston* includes works which were completed before her return to Sydney in 1919 to the late 1950s. These testify to a far wider range of themes and interests, and to previously unrecognised facets of the artist's extraordinary industry and imagination. Three such examples are *Still Life and Flowers*, 1916-19, *Beach Scene, Balmoral*, 1929, and *Rock Lily*, 1953.

*Still Life and Flowers* is the only discovered woodblock print that she did while in England. *Beach Scene, Balmoral* is the result of her collaboration with Dorothy Ure Smith, the eight year old daughter of the publisher of "Art in Australia", Sydney Ure Smith.

Rock lilies grew profusely on the Preston's property at Berowra, New South Wales, and by 1953 had already featured in three of the artists' prints. The *Rock Lily*, 1953, in this exhibition was Preston's final statement on the theme. It was included in her last one-person exhibition held in 1953 when she was 78 years old.

There are 105 works in *The Prints of Margaret Preston* exhibition and they cover the years 1916 to 1957.

To coincide with the exhibition, the Gallery Shop will release seven new Preston posters.

### **Pictorial History of the New South Wales Railways**

State Rail is producing a Pictorial History of rail in New South Wales for the Bicentenary. The work is to be distinctive, celebrating the social and cultural aspects of rail in this state over the past one hundred years.

The work will focus on such issues as the workshops, the Depression, unions, architecture, the Railway Institute, night operations, the refreshment rooms, the farewell to steam, gatekeepers etc. The emphasis is on social and cultural aspects, celebrating the role of people in the railways.

The aim is to produce an interesting, diverse and attractive perspective of the history of rail through the medium of photography. Many "coffee table" books abound with illustrations of steam engines and trains. It is hoped that this book will present real insight into the contribution railways have made to the development of society in this state.

Your assistance is sought in providing photographs that may be appropriate for inclusion in this work. Please remember that the emphasis is upon people, and how the railways affected their lives.

We are sure that many private and historical society collections have unique photographs worthy of inclusion in this book. At this stage, photocopies would suffice, however any original materials forwarded would be returned intact. Appropriate acknowledgement would be given to the source of photographs, and cost associated would be met by State Rail. Please send any material to the Bicentennial Co-ordinator, State Rail Authority of New South Wales, Corporate Relations, GPO Box 29, Sydney NSW 2001.



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in Victoria  
as a proof  
of their esteem.