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Cover: Gnung-A-Gnung-A, the first Australian to visit North America 1793-94.

THE AUSTRALIANA SOCIETY

PO BOX 322, ROSEVILLE 2069



SOCIETY PROGRAMME

MEETINGS

1990

THURSDAY,
7 JUNE

GUEST SPEAKER
KEN MUGGLESTON

*Classic Sydney Architecture in Georgian and
Victorian Times*

THURSDAY,
2 AUGUST

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
and
TAPED RECORDING OF IAN
PRATLEY'S AUSTRALIA DAY 1987
DINNER ADDRESS

Australian Colonial Furniture

THURSDAY,
4 OCTOBER

GUEST SPEAKER
JIM MARTIN

The Enjoyment of Australian Furniture

THURSDAY,
6 DECEMBER

CHRISTMAS FUNCTION

Society meetings are held at
7.30pm at the Glover Cottage Hall, 124 Kent Street, Sydney.
Convenient street parking.



Public Collecting and Private Collecting

Address on the Occasion of the Tenth Australia Day Dinner of
The Australiana Society, 26 January, 1990

John Wade

Senior Curator, Australian National Maritime Museum

For years I have been sitting through my sons' speech days, listening to retired Liberal politicians ramble on. Now I am going to get my revenge, and make you suffer.

For those of you who don't know me, let me introduce myself. Most importantly, I am a foundation member of the Society and the foundation editor of its journal, *Australiana*.

For ten years, the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences employed me as a curator. Since 1986, I have been part of the team developing the new Australian National Maritime Museum.

You used to be able to see me regularly at Society meetings. Contrary to rumour, I have not been "up the river" for the past three years. I have been studying part-time, and this week – at last – completed the dissertation which was part of the course.

So I have been out of circulation, and some would say out of touch, for some time. But your committee, having exhausted all other possibilities, did make the mistake of asking me to speak, so I shall pretend that my lack of knowledge gives me the opportunity of speaking from a detached and impartial viewpoint.

Australia Day addresses are always a good occasion for nostalgia trips. Twelve years ago when this Society was founded, the inaugural meeting was held in David Cloonan's antique shop at Rushcutters Bay.

We had one of those expert panels to flush out some portable

Australiana. One of the highlights was when a collector produced a nondescript, lead-glazed or salt-glazed pot – the sort of thing which would be called "generic" if it appeared on the shelves in today's supermarkets – Franklins's "No Frills". It appeared unmarked, so no-one was prepared to attribute it to a factory such as Lithgow. It was passed around the audience. A child sitting near the front proudly pointed out that it was marked; it bore the faint, incised inscription "M-a-r-k" underneath. That threw the unfortunate experts, of whom I was one, into confusion.

Another highlight was a talk on private collecting by Kevin Fahy, using one of his favourite lines, that "shrouds don't have any pockets".

Kevin is a great fund of knowledge – for instance, he'll confirm, I hope, that the first exhibition of Australiana was mounted in that bastion of heritage preservation, Hunter's Hill Town Hall, in 1962. One of our active members, Miriam Hamilton, was one of the four women who organised it.

But that was before my time. So I'll talk about some of my institutional collecting experiences, and then reflect on some of the changes in the past decade.

First perhaps we can note some of the differences between private and public collectors. Don't be surprised if this has elements of the privatisation debate.

Private collectors have much greater freedom to act, and to act quickly and decisively. They often lead the way in new collecting directions. They are able to change their own collecting direction.

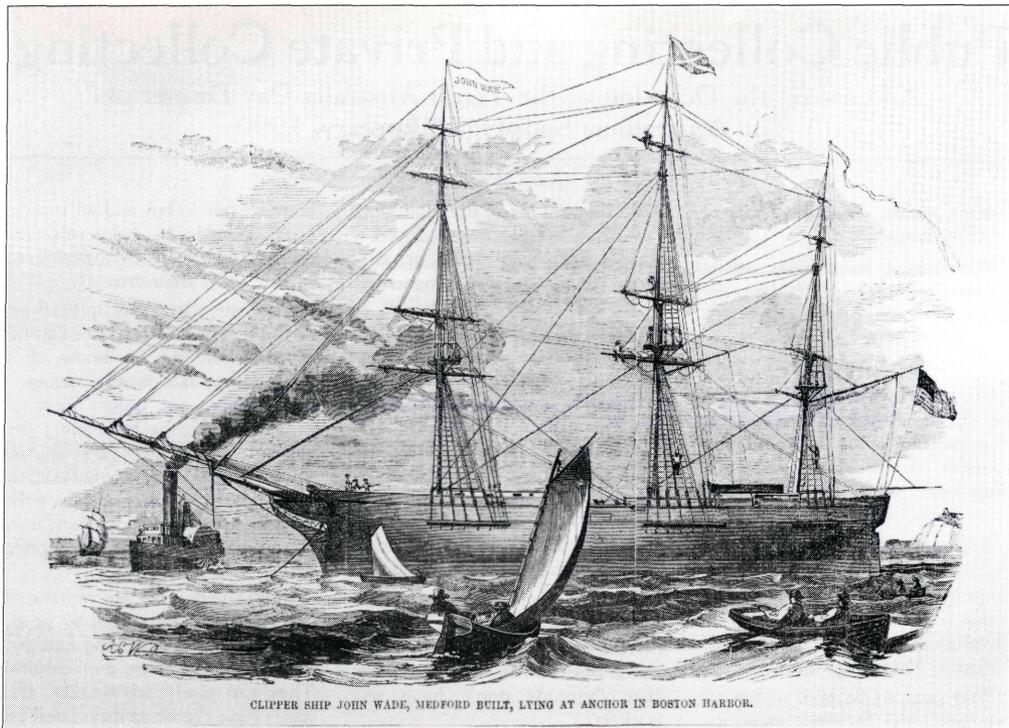
They are free to buy and sell assets. They are able to make mistakes and not only learn by experience, but to rectify their errors.

They are sometimes spurred on by the incentive of tax-free capital appreciation. As we know after some recent sale results, dealer – who operate for quick financial gain can suffer by misreading the market. There is a very limited demand, from dealers or collectors, for items which are already well-known from recent appearances in the market place, where their price was well established.

Public collectors are motivated by considerations of public good, of preserving, researching and displaying our heritage and culture. They can rarely act quickly, and rarely have the flexibility to sell off unwanted objects or mistakes. Most have become increasingly conscious of the need for good documentation and good environmental standards of display and storage.

They struggle with the interpretation of objects so that visitors – all visitors, not just the specialists who have their own jargon and their own precious ways of looking at things – can appreciate and understand them. They are rarely market-aware; one of the paradoxes of institutional collecting is that putting an object in a museum almost automatically adds premium to its cost price. Public collectors are unconcerned about asset appreciation, as the items are rarely sold off.

The two groups are linked by competition in the marketplace and by cooperation in their activities. There is a weak Australian philanthropic tradition with



CLIPPER SHIP JOHN WADE, MEDFORD BUILT, LYING AT ANCHOR IN BOSTON HARBOR.

The American clipper ship John Wade, described as "a beautiful little vessel, very rakish in appearance". Built in Medford, Massachusetts in 1851 for the China trade and lost in the Gulf of Siam in 1859. Private collection. Photo Jenni Carter, ANMM.

names like Felton, Lennard, Power and Ervin. The 1970s Tax Incentives for the Arts Scheme has encouraged philanthropy.

Ours is not as strong as the American philanthropic tradition, based on the concept of public duty. As an example, even the small Philadelphia Maritime Museum has a capital fund of around \$30 million, and very close connections with collectors.

At the National Maritime Museum, I've been involved in manufacturing Australiana out of Americana.

For the Bicentennial, the US Government gave us \$US5,000,000 to build a permanent gallery commemorating Australian-American Maritime

relations; a great idea for a birthday present, which gives as much benefit to the giver as to the receiver.

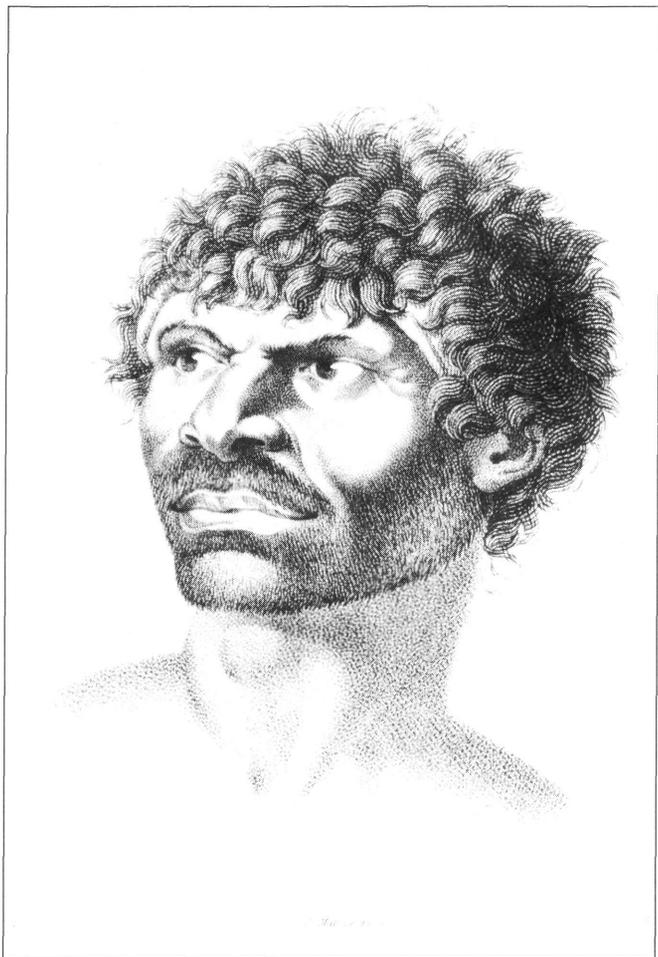
The USA gallery will be one of six exhibition themes selected for the opening displays in the Australian National Maritime Museum, located in the centre of Sydney's, and Australia's, No.1 tourist attraction, Darling Harbour.

The theme of the exhibition is the development of maritime ties between Australia and the USA. It is not generally known that the first American visitors to our shores, three of the crew Lt Cook's *Endeavour*, came here in 1769-1770. They were Lt John Gore, Midshipman James Matra, and conscripted seaman James Thurmond.

Shortly after the foundation of the colony in 1788, the first Australian visited North America in 1793-4. He was an aborigine, Gnoonng-a Gnoonng-a, on board the HMS *Daedalus*. A portrait of him will be among the first items visitors to the exhibition will see.

The first foreign trading vessel to reach the colony at Port Jackson was the U.S. brigantine *Philadelphia*, carrying a cargo mainly of beef and rum, in 1792.

American whalers in the southern Pacific and Indian Oceans often touched our shores in the 19th century to replenish. Captain Eber Bunker, a whaleman from Nantucket, was one of these, settling at Liverpool in his house "Collingwood" which still survives. Whaling tools, a whaleboat on



Gnoong-A-Gnoong-A, the first Australian to visit North America in HMS Daedalus under Lieutenant Hanson, 1793-94. Engraving after a drawing by Nicholas Petit made during the Baudin Expedition's visit to Sydney in 1802. Australian National Maritime Museum, US Bicentennial Gift Fund. Photo Jenni Carter, ANMM.

loan from Mystic Seaport, scrimshaw, a model of a whaling bark and illustrations of whaling will recall this gruesome industry.

Our first US naval visitors, the US Exploring Expedition in 1839-40, were grateful to rediscover civilisation in NSW. The scientists with the expedition spent several months here. The work of the geologist Dana and anthropologist Hale was especially important,

while the expedition leader Lt Charles Wilkes was off discovering the Antarctic continent.

Dana rambled over the Illawarra district south of Sydney with a local geologist, the Reverend W. B. Clarke. They postulated that the deep valleys of the South Coast escarpment were caused by erosion and not laid down in that form, as Darwin thought till the day he died.

Australians crossed the Pacific to join the Californian gold rush of 1849. The entrepreneur Ben Boyd was one of those who did not reach home safely, being lost at Guadalcanal and his yacht, *Wanderer*, wrecked at Port Macquarie. Two elaborately decorated whalebone stanchions from the yacht show the level of its appointments.

Among those who did return were Edward Hargraves, the brothers William and James Tom, and John Lister, who found the first payable gold at Ophir in the Bathurst district in April, 1851. Californian technology was transferred to Australia for the first time in the use of gold washing pans and cradles.

The voyage to Australia was slow. But with the impetus of the gold rushes in California and Australia in the late 1840s and the 1850s, American shipbuilders designed and built fast clipper ships which operated on the England-Australia run, carrying passengers, wool and gold.

American ships also bought passengers and US manufacturers directly to our shores, mostly from Boston and New York. Among the passengers were theatrical entrepreneurs like actor J. C. Williamson and writers such as Mark Twain.

Early this century, the US Navy's Great White Fleet brought out the celebrating crowds in Sydney, Melbourne and Albany in 1908. In more troubled times, the Australian and US navies fought side by side to turn back the Japanese military advance in World War Two.

Today of course, there are still close defence ties, while the US is Australia's second largest import supplier, and our second largest export market. Australia is the US'tenth largest export market, and second largest surplus market.

This exhibition will be going into a gallery of 600 square metres, designed by Iain Halliday of the

Sydney design firm Burley Katon Halliday. The museum has been working closely with the Washington D.C.-based Exhibits Service of the U.S. Information Agency in developing the ideas.

On display will be objects from the collection of the Australian National Maritime Museum, as well as objects borrowed from other sources including museums in the USA, Australia, Eire and Britain.

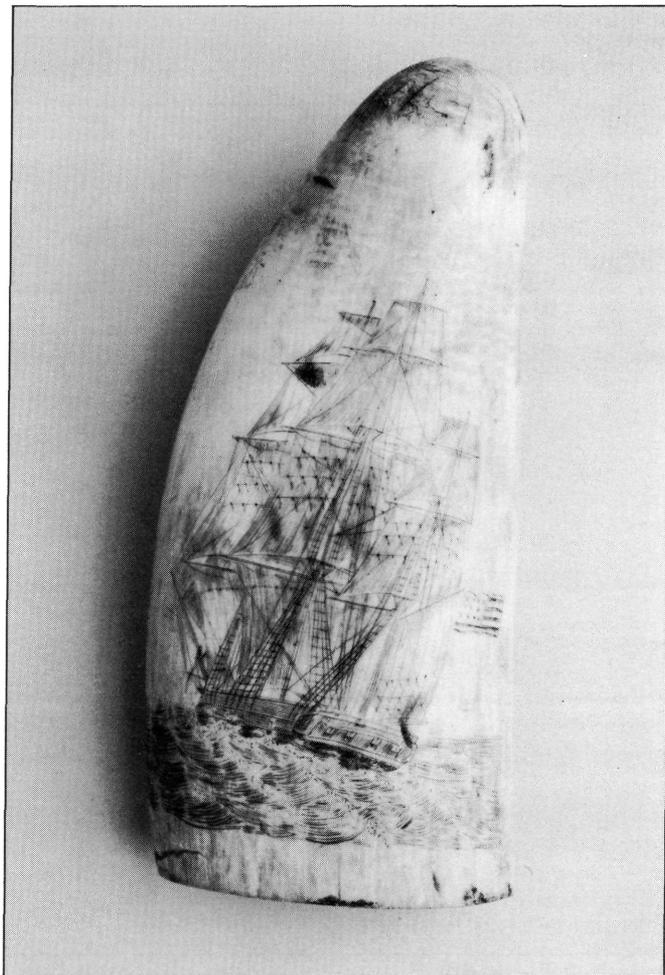
Interactive and audiovisual displays – including a videowall with a multi-screen presentation – will add to the vitality of the Gallery.

Plans are already underway for changes to the exhibition after opening on 1 December 1990, so that it will be continually changing and developing.

This has been an interesting exercise in cheque-book curatorship. You would think that it would be easy. But we have a very specific brief; the items have to be maritime and they have to relate to the Australian-US connection. There are times when it gets depressing going through a catalogue of 650 maritime works and finding not one lot that is relevant.

I have been fortunate in making several trips to the US in search of collectables. At first sight it may seem surprising that most of our maritime connections have been with the north-east, particularly with Philadelphia, New York and Boston. They were the mercantile centres, and the centres of the early whaling industry which fished the southern oceans. And, of course, California was part of Mexico until 1848.

It is salutary to visit a museum like the Peabody Museum, founded in 1799 in Salem, Massachusetts, by the sea captains of the East India Marine Society. Salem – where the witches of Salem come from – is 20 miles north of Boston, and in the 1790s it was the sixth



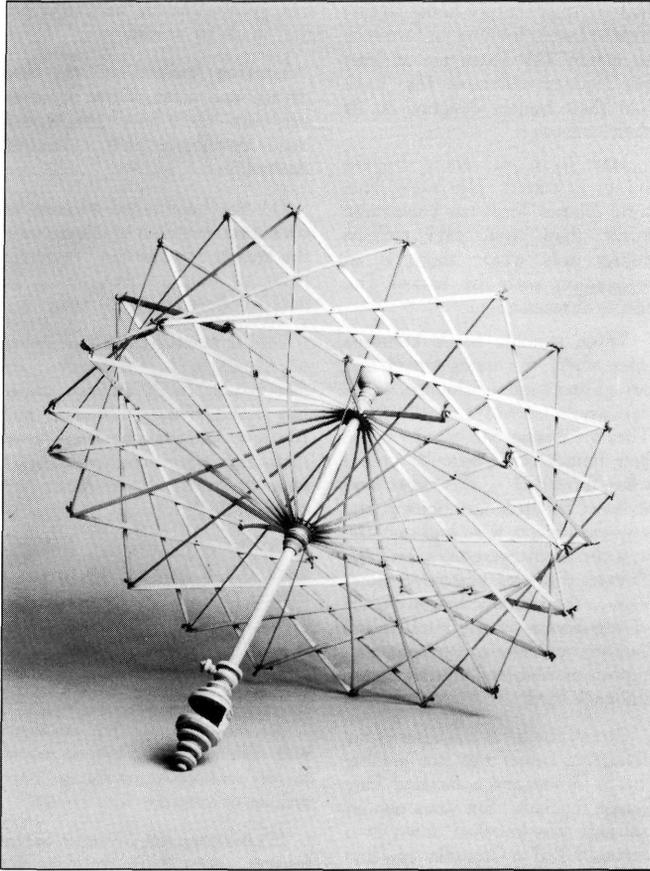
Scrimshaw sperm whale tooth, engraved with a ship flying the Stars and Stripes, a seated figure of Neptune on the reverse, mid 19th century. Australian National Maritime Museum, gift of Mrs E.M. Farram, 1989. Photo Greg Piper.

largest city in the United States. The Peabody Museum is the oldest museum in the USA that has been in continuous operation. They have a modest 9,000 watercolours of ships, mostly American, in their collection. That's in addition to oil paintings, lithographs, pencil sketches and so on.

I was pleased to find that they had three illustrations of 1851 clipper, *John Wade*, described as a

"beautiful little vessel, very rakish in appearance". Its owner was John Wade, its captain was John Wade, and its figurehead was carved with you guessed it. Unfortunately, the closest it came to Australia was China, before being wrecked on 28th March, 1859.

In building up the Museum's Australian-American collection, sometimes we have had to stretch credulity a little in deciding what



Whalebone swift, constructed of carved and polished whalebone spokes fastened with iron pins and pink wool, used for winding yarn. Whalers in the 19th century often made gifts for their womenfolk on the long voyages. Australian National Maritime Museum, US Bicentennial Gift Fund. Photo Greg Piper.

fits the bill. But broadly, we have managed to buy or borrow the material to tell a good story of the contact between the two countries.

Where our story suffers is in being able to tell it from an Australian perspective. Partly this is because the US has always been bigger than Australia, with a large merchant marine in the 19th century. Partly it is because we don't have museum collections going back to 1799. And partly it is

because Australia did not exist politically until 1901.

Just as we used to carry British passports until 1975 or so, the British controlled most of the shipping to Australia, and even locally-owned vessels flew the British flag until the Whitlam era. Many "Australians" are not Australian at all, but British immigrants. So the Australian elements of the story are very hard to discern. But it did give me enormous pleasure to find that the first person from this con-

tinental to visit North America, Gnounge Gnounge, was undeniably Australian, and there is an elegant and strong 1802 French engraving of him by Nicholas Petit, the artist on Captain Baudin's expedition, published in Francois Peron's *Voyage de decouvertes aux Terres Australes*.

It's been interesting seeing the way Americans present their colonial heritage. Last year, when I was at Colonial Williamsburg – the recreated 18th century town in Virginia – apart from showing off my Australian tan in the heated pool during the middle of winter – I attended part of their annual antiques forum. Hundreds of collectors, *amateurs* and *dilettanti* attended. The theme in 1989 was devoted to English antiques, partly because that's what the paying public wanted, and partly because when Williamsburg was the capital of Virginia, North America was a colonial British possession, with a British Governor. The Americans don't seem to make the strong distinctions we do between collecting imported English antiques and collecting American; they happily co-exist.

But let's come back to Australia. When I started work at the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences in 1975, most of the previous two generations of decorative arts collecting had been of traditional and conservative English collectables, such as Chelsea and Royal Doulton.

This Museum has very interesting origins. It grew out of Australia's first international exhibition held in the Sydney Domain in 1879-80. The 800-foot-long Garden Palace which housed the Exhibition burnt down in 1882, and what was left of the museum collection was displayed in the former cattle shed. It moved to its *Ultimo* site in 1891, and opened its doors as the Sydney Technological Museum in August 1893.

After the fire, the curator started out again to build up its collections. One of its aims was to catalyse the development of Australian manufactures and design. Early contemporary acquisitions were displayed together with their prices, so visitors could judge the value of the local and imported product. But if you looked at the early ceramics for instance, the British ones were listed as art works, and the Australian ones as geological specimens. At least the catalogue entries were more accurate for the local ones.

Gradually in the 1970s the Museum moved to more Australian-based collecting. In the 1980s, a social history element was added, acquiring objects not only as manufactured items or examples of technology, but especially prizing and recording their history of use and associations. At the same time, there was a strong drive to collect and document the rise of the Australian contemporary craft movement.

In the 1990s, the collection policy emphasises collecting artefacts as evidence of material culture, and which show Australia in its international context. Artefacts that do not have a direct connection with Australian material culture will be collected in exceptional cases only. Priority is given to contemporary materials.

Of course, that collecting focus is supplemented by temporary exhibitions relying on other collections. An exhibition of Lord McAlpine's private collection of Australian bush furniture, toys and making-do things, is in the pipeline, tentatively scheduled for a June-August display in the temporary exhibition gallery. There is also a forthcoming publication on decorative arts in the collection.

Collecting to furnish a house? We all have an interest in furnishing houses. As an Alexandria Virginia, collector, May Joynt said, "I

had an 18th century house to furnish so I went looking for furniture to match".(1) There are at least two Sydney collectors who have had their houses designed to fit their collection.

May Joynt no doubt bought things in period. The NSW Historic Houses Trust has gone more purist than that, and collects things only where there is an association with the house. The rest is deaccessioned.

Those genuine house contents sales where the items are of one period and form a coherent, original whole should be cherished. They are a great opportunity to see how houses of a particular period were furnished – the types and styles of furniture and objects, the way the objects were laid out, the way the rooms were used, and the changes that took place over time, such as the introduction of labour-saving devices in the kitchen and laundry, with the consequent relegation of obsolete equipment to the back shed.

One of the great tragedies of my collecting career was not reading the *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader* regularly. Six years ago an old lady was knocked down by a car and killed at Cronulla. She had no surviving family, her brother having died just before her. The Public Trustee put her collection up for auction through a local real estate agent.

I found out about it afterwards, through a man who came to the Museum to sell me some of the silver – bits stamped by Alexander Dick and others. I bought it, and chased up what I could from other sources. Miss Oxley's great grandfather had been Surveyor-General John Oxley, and it was clear that she and her brother had retained much of the family possessions from the 1830s. Tragically, it was split up and dispersed through ignorance. The closest I got to seeing her sideboard was the sinu-

ous, grubby line on the wall of her flat, made by dusting it.

Looking back over the last decade and a bit of the Society's existence, there have been several major developments in collecting Australiana.

(1) the heightened interest in collecting Australiana, particularly the greater emphasis and resources being devoted to Australiana by public collecting institutions;

(2) the much greater availability of published research on Australiana, with massive tomes like Kevin Fahy, Christina and Andrew Simpson's book on furniture, and Noris Ioannou's encyclopaedic book on South Australian ceramics;

(3) the recognition of, and vacuum-cleaner approach to, new collecting fields, such as Lord McAlpine's passion for Depression furniture and honest, working class artefacts which are elevated to an art form;

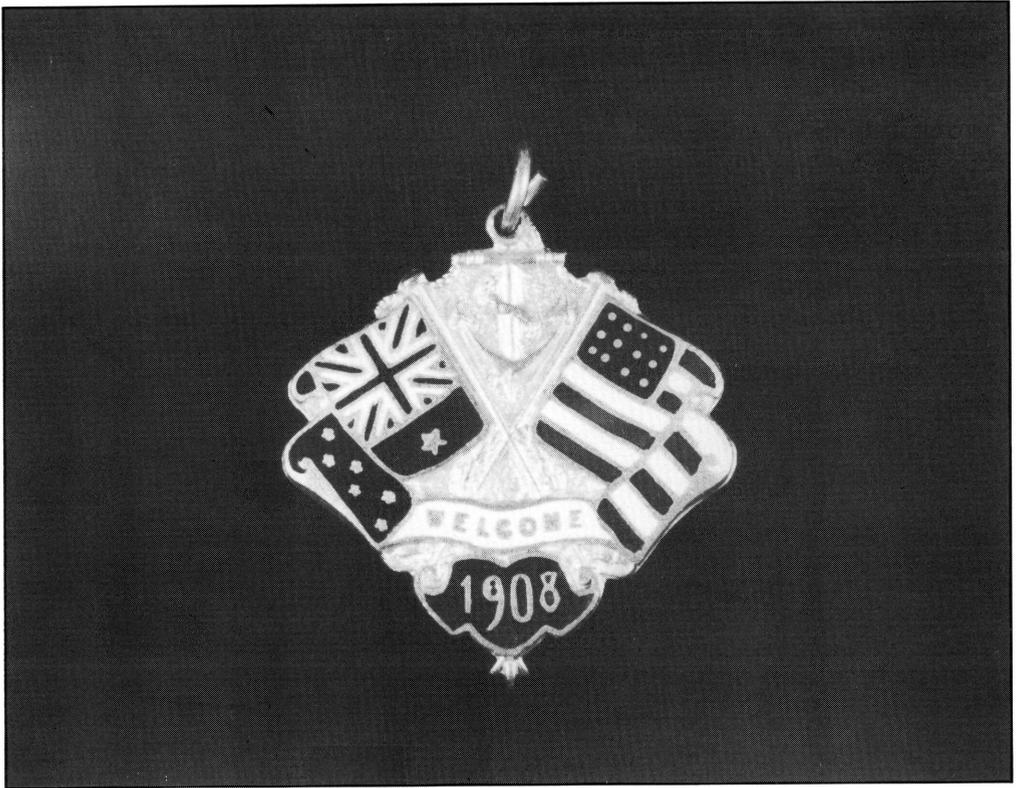
(4) the emphasis that museums and collectors have put on social history and collecting the ordinary articles of everyday life;

(5) the commercialisation of the market, principally through the financial orientation of some auctioneers, who readily exploit publicity and promotion of price and product;

(6) the development of an informed market, with an appreciation of cultural and aesthetic significance and technical quality of Australiana.

Loss of records

The message that I want to leave with you tonight is based on the *Pirates of Penzance*. Dealers and collectors, as well as museums, have a *sense of duty* to the objects they acquire. The loss of association, social context and meaning of artefacts is a tragedy.



Enamel badge, to welcome the US Great White Fleet on its visit to Sydney, Melbourne and Albany in 1908. English, 1908. Australian National Maritime Museum, US Bicentennial Gift Fund. Photo Greg Piper.

There are some extrinsic factors which add value, historically and financially, to an historical artefact. No collector should be blind to the asset-enriching value of documenting an item, of conserving it, and having it published or displayed. What picture dealer would not have a work researched, conserved, and illustrated, to add to its value for re-sale? There are public and private benefits in doing so. Collectors, both public

and private, should do the same.

So this Australia Day, let us pay tribute to all those who have enriched our knowledge through research and publication – to the people like Marjorie Graham for her books on silver and glass, to Kevin Fahy, Andy and Christina Simpson for their massive work on furniture, to Ken Cavill for his series of articles in *Australiana* on little known silver manufacturers, to our other authors, and to everyone else who is helping us

find out more about the things around us.

Do what *you* can to document, publish and make accessible your collection, to give it added value, to add to our store of knowledge, and help satisfy aims of this society.

(1) Quoted in Christies NY Sale Catalogue of the Collection of May and Howard Joynt, Alexandria VA 19-20 Jan 1990 p.11.



What Price Originality?

Mike Darlow



An armchair of considerable originality depicting a well known grazier from the Western District of Victoria.

The author surveys lookalikes – reproductions, forgeries and copies – and comes to some strong conclusions

Just how far is it legitimate to draw inspiration from other people's work? I ask myself this question when I visit exhibitions of contemporary woodworking and spot pieces which remind me straight-away of work by other craftsmen. And the problems of copies – reproductions or even forgeries – are a recurring hazard for collectors of antique furniture.

In this article I shall try to clarify some of the issues involved across a spectrum that stretches from original – or at least highly individual work – at its zenith to the forgery at its nadir. References are given at the end of the article.

Forgery

An excellent discussion of forgery and its associated intellectual gymnastics in the fine arts is given in *The Forger's Art*¹ where Denis Sutton defines a forgery as 'represented as genuine with the intention to deceive'. In woodworking, however, I suggest that accidental misrepresentation is far more common. Through carelessness, ignorance or wishful thinking, non-contemporary pieces tend to be misrepresented as being older, or rarer, or by a more famous maker, or out of more costly materials than they truly are.

Why are forgeries despised? It isn't because of inferior technical or aesthetic quality: in these aspects some forgeries surpass the originals. Nor is it necessarily because they are copies, for some aren't: they may be unique designs by their forgers in earlier styles or the styles of particular makers.

Consider for a moment what happens to a supposedly genuine piece that is discovered to be a forgery: its value and worth are decimated. Yet the piece has not changed: what has changed are the criteria by which we judge it. Its essence has vaporised: it has lost the romance and the associations that we attach to a particular maker or a particular period. Discovery that this intangible quality, which may have constituted the major component of the piece's value, was but a mirage causes the piece not merely to be downgraded but to be assessed as if it were now a different category of object. The exotic sports car has been exposed as a billycart in drag.

It can be argued that forgeries are not necessarily harmful. Many unrevealed forgeries give great pleasure to their proud owners in addition to having given financial succour to their conceivers, yet the only harm they would seem to promote are distortions in the history of objects and the reputations of makers. An undermining of public confidence is not of course possible until the forgery is exposed.

Forgeries aren't always made from scratch: many are the result of what are known euphemistically as 'improvements' or 'marriages'. In furniture, reducing the size to suit modern rooms, carving plain surfaces, changing mouldings, feet and handles to those of an earlier period; such are the techniques exposed in *Is it Genuine?*². Elsewhere Chinnery³ informs us that improvement by the incorporation or addition of pieces of earlier carving or turning was a popular and accepted practice in the 19th century.

Improvements were and are sometimes carried out by restorers. Their profession is in a continuing state of controversy regarding the proper degree of restoration. The current practice is toward conservation rather than restoration: this

change in philosophy is fundamentally a change in the concept of ownership. No longer is a piece regarded solely as private property to do with as its owner wishes. There is now a growing belief that we are minders for posterity, that we are curators of links in the chain of human history. Obviously the poorer the condition of a piece the greater the restoration required. Indeed, the restoration may need to be so great that it could be argued that the restorer had created a reproduction; or, if the restoration work was especially well disguised, a potential forgery.

Plagiarism

For most contemporary craftsmen, forgery – in the sense that someone copies work and tries to represent it as the originator's – is not a problem. If your work was forged you might even be flattered, at least initially. But plagiarism, the appropriation or imitation of others' ideas or styles and the passing them off as one's own, is much more relevant to the modern craftsman. The term plagiarism implies an intent to deceive, but I believe it is sensible to widen the definition to include copying (a word that has no moral overtones) which is perceptible and significant, where the plagiarist does not overtly claim to be the originator, and where naming of the original sources is omitted, either intentionally or not. In either case, I think, the viewer is deceived, for he would be led to believe the piece was an original conception by the plagiarist.

Concept and originality in art have been emphasised this century as never before. These emphases have sometimes been accompanied by a neglect or even a rejection of the worth traditionally accorded to skilled craftsmanship and sound practice. Such attitudes are no longer restricted to the rarified atmosphere of a few New York galleries: they have permeated to various degrees throughout the entire

value system. The result is that we have substantial numbers of artists and craftsmen whose primary aim is to produce original work.

You may not have had your work plagiarised, but I suggest that few craftsmen are innocent of the practice, although it may have been unconscious. Undoubtedly many accusations of plagiarism are well founded, but not all. The design progress is not a series of isolated original inspirations. It is rather a process in which new designs inevitably evolve from earlier ones⁴; a process in which new designs are usually fresh or unorthodox arrangements or associations of pre-existing design elements even when catalysed by new materials or techniques; a process which is in a sense impossible without copying.

The concept of plagiarism is dependant on the belief that design ideas are the property of their originators. Governments have judged the ownership of ideas inappropriate for legislative protection, electing instead to restrict protection to the manifestation of ideas. Patent protection was developed for the manifestations of new principles; design registration for new shapes and arrangements of parts. The legislation also recognises that after a period the protection should lapse. The rationale is to encourage invention and development by permitting a period of unfettered exploitation without allowing permanent progress-preventing monopolies.

Patenting and design registration are expensive to obtain and depend for their effectiveness on a willingness to litigate against infringements. There is some protection under copyright, but this is appropriate only to one-offs and small quantities, and is again ultimately dependent on a willingness to litigate. Patenting is rarely appropriate for woodwork designs and the two other forms of protection become increasingly ineffec-

tive the further the plagiarism is from being an exact copy.

It is not only woodwork which is plagiarised. Woodwork writing is another fertile field for those short on ideas or experience of their own. Regrettably woodwork writers and publishers almost universally seek to expunge any hint of academic style by omitting footnotes and references, and this may be a factor which lessens the tendency to acknowledge sources.

In woodwork, unlike in literature, plagiarism is generally met with benign indifference. Further, it is harder to substantiate than you might think, for various reasons:

- similar design ideas occur independently to different designers.
- A 'new' idea may be an unconscious recollection or association by its later (re)creator.
- New ideas are frequently exaggerations, refinements or reappraisals. In woodturning the warping of green-turned bowls was, I suspect, considered until recently an inevitable evil. Its utilisation as a decorative feature is, I suggest, a modern innovation.
- Many techniques and design features are difficult if not impossible to attribute, particularly when of some antiquity. Also, the paucity of publishing on the Australian decorative arts until recent years is an obvious bar to successful research on design evolution.
- New design styles are often fresh associations of a number pre-existing design elements. Such compound plagiarism is rarely considered plagiarism at all.
- You can have inverted plagiarism – a design evolution which seeks to highlight or parody its ancestry.
- After a period of time knowledge becomes public. This doesn't imply that we shouldn't acknowledge the originator, but perhaps implies that it is less critical to acknowledge because

the relevant public should already be familiar with the knowledge and its source.

- Design elements may be plucked from other media. In this century ceramics and jewellery have tended to be aesthetically more advanced than say, woodwork, and have therefore been sourced by woodworkers for ideas. For example dimpled bowl bottoms which I have frequently used for 10 years have long been common in blown glass. I found recently that they are not new in woodturning either! One is shown in *Das Drechsler Werk'* published in 1940. Intermedium plagiarism is also less likely to be discovered and there is probably less onus to acknowledge one's sources.
- The level of design knowledge of those interested in craft is generally low which is a stimulus to covert plagiarism. Where there has been successful litigation against plagiarism it has not been well publicised.
- Many leading craftpeople teach, demonstrate and exhibit: a double-edged sword, it both encourages plagiarism directly and discourages it by making the original material better known.
- Major success in the art end of the marketplace is not solely dependent on originality: to truly reach the pinnacle one has to found a 'school'. One needs to encourage copying with source acknowledgement while ensuring that most of the limelight remains focussed on oneself.

There is widespread indifference to plagiarism that copying is permissible if one doesn't intend to sell it: others tend to treat plagiarism as almost a crime. If judgements are to be made then I believe that they should be on a three-tier basis. First we have to decide whether plagiarism has occurred and if so whether it was

intentional or not. I think that unless the person admits that it was, then like cricket umpires we have to give him the benefit of the doubt. Secondly, if the plagiarism were intentional, were conscious, then we might wish to judge the extent of the plagiarism, the difficulty being that copying is an inevitable ingredient of originality. Our third tier of moral judgement is concerned with the benefits resulting from the plagiarism, with how the plagiarism was exploited. It is only here, on the third tier, that one might look less harshly on the amateur than the professional. The amateur's plagiarism does affect the originator though: some amateurs do sell work; if the plagiarist is kept or given away the originator is possibly deprived of a sale; and judgements on the originator's originality may be affected by the visibility of amateur plagiarism.

There is also an understandable tendency to be more forgiving to the beginner. One's first pieces will inevitably, tend to be reproductions: books and magazines containing projects and designs are dependent on this. Many may not progress from this dependency, but others, particularly those who strive for originality, will tend to evolve recognisably individual styles.

I perceive a growing tendency to admit that copying and plagiarism exist. Exhibitors are sometimes encouraged to list their influencers in artistic statements. I believe that the advantages of such admissions far outweigh any resultant tendency to make copying and plagiarism more respectable.

I see plagiarism as a paradox; it is morally wrong yet almost unavoidable. It is also probably becoming more common and more conscious. The erosion of isolation has smothered regional and national styles: the once gentle pace of stylistic evolution and the forces of artistic conformance have been

blown away. Whereas originality was once the means to achieve the desired effect of greater beauty or greater efficiency, the tendency now is for means and ends to be transposed, for originality to be the prime aim and for bizarreness to be the result. A further result of media growth is that those rare individuals who do evolve styles of true integrity must exploit them quickly before they are rendered *passé* by the terrible twins of plagiarism and over-exposure.

Reproduction

As suggested earlier, many forgeries were made as reproductions which were then later misrepresented. A reproduction may be a copy of an earlier piece or an original contemporary design in a borrowed, often earlier, style: the Queen Anne television cabinet is an obvious example of the latter. Reproductions are often plagiarisms but of overt and benign forms: overt because they are advertised as or readily assumed to be reproductions; and benign because the original designers will usually be dead or will have given permission, or their styles will have become absorbed into stylistic schools, such as Deco, Pop or Chippendale.

Many choose to make reproductions because those styles are in demand – for the professional they are a safe option, for the amateur they tend to ensure acceptance and

admiration. Some reproduce because the design problems are essentially micro, concerned with the detail rather than the concept. The wish to concentrate on mastering and practising traditional skills is also a factor in the continuing popularity of making reproductions.

However the acceptance of reproductions is not universal. Richard La Trobe-Bateman has argued that reproduction is a sham, that it is untruthful not to strive to produce something fresh. I believe that he is correct, but although hundreds, perhaps thousands do strive, few achieve even one original design which will be widely admired in the long term, which will become a classic, which ironically will be therefore reproduced in the future.

Reproduction is perhaps an admission of inadequacy, but there is a problem as I have indicated for those who reject reproduction. We live in an age where, say, wood is a tried, known and almost obsolete material. All the techniques for working it are known, there are no new species to be discovered – in fact the number of available species and the range of available sizes are falling. Similarly the range of materials that we can combine with wood and the techniques for working them would also seem to have reached the end of a *cul-de-sac*. The major categories and functions of woodwork are old: even the stimulating philosophy of

industrial design has been largely absorbed.

In my view, most new designs are characterised by stylistic reworking, geometric and colourific playfulness, and figurative association. The giant strides, the leap frogging freshness of woodwork design during the first third of the 20th century have led us to believe that such a rate of progress is normal. It was, I believe, an atypical time: a time that for wood has passed. Reproduction and excessive plagiarism are a sham, are untruthful, bizarreness is only momentarily satisfying if at all: but I fear we will see more not less of all three.

• Mike Darlow is the author of *The Practice of Woodturning*, and has a turning business in Sydney, Australia employing six turners and seventeen lathes.

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2. W. Crawley, *Is it Genuine?* Eyre & Spottiswoode, London, 1971.
3. Victor Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, Antique Collector's Club, Suffolk, 1979, pp562-564.
4. Fritz Spanneagel, *Das Drechsler Werk*, Otto Maier Verlag, Ravensburg, 1940:reprinted Libri Rari, Th. Schafer, Hannover, 1981.

Correspondence

In our previous issue we published a letter from Mc McLeod, who is thanked for his interest, and his letter was referred to the author of "Concentrating on Concrete" (*Australiana*, November 1989), who replies as follows:

The private owner of the garden dwarf illustrated, supplied the information, to which may be added that the piece was presented by Mr Gay, c.1950. Since publishing, enquiries of those who knew Mr Gay have shed no

further light on this maker, who quite certainly lived and worked in Victoria. It is hoped that a Victorian reader may have recollections of the maker and his garden dwarfs.

Editor

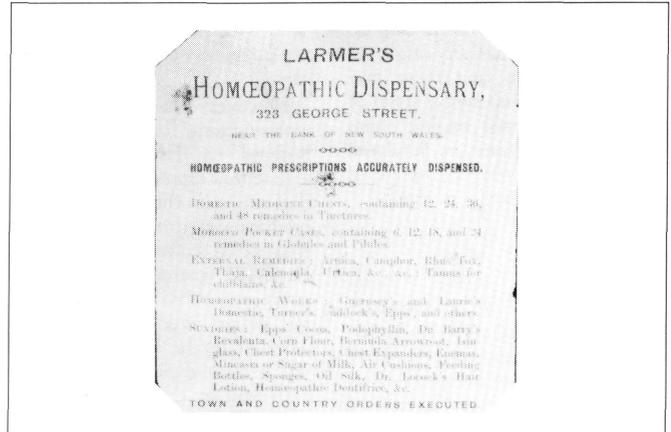
Larmer's Homoeopathic Dispensary

Margaret Carlisle

One of Sydney's early 'Chemist and Druggist' was William Larmer. The DOMESTIC MEDICINE CHEST shown is a cedar box containing twenty-four corked and labelled bottles of "remedies in Tinctures", supplied by William Larmer of 323 George Street (near the Bank of New South Wales) during the 1870's. Some information about the uses of the remedies was no doubt enclosed but has not survived. The cedar box measures 15cm (6") by 12.5cm (4¾") by 9.5cm (3¾").

William Larmer was born in Reigate, Surrey¹ c1817, the son of James Larmer and Frances nee Giles. He married Elizabeth Budgen in December 1841 at Reigate². His elder brother James, surveyor of Braidwood in 1835, could have encouraged William, his wife and daughters to come to Australia.

William Larmer was in Sydney by 1863, living at Nicholson



Street, Balmain with his Druggist business at 313 George Street³. Following him through the Sand's Directories, he moved his private residence to Clayton Street, Balmain by 1867 and to 162 Albert Terrace, Macleay Street, Darlinghurst by 1868. His business still in

George Street but now numbered 323. Only in 1871 was William Larmer listed as a Homoeopathic Chemist and Druggist so it is possible the pictured Domestic Medicine Chest dates from this period.

By 1876 William Larmer was living at Woollahra and was still in business in George Street ("near Barrack Street", 1883 Directory) where he stayed until his death in 1888. He was President of the Pharmaceutical Society in 1885⁴. Predeceased by his wife, his daughter Clara married Henry A. Perkins in 1873 and the son of this marriage, Norman Burgoyne Perkins was the beneficiary in the Will of William Larmer⁵.

References

1. Death Certificate of William Larmer (88 5203)
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4. THE GRAINS & THREEPEN'ORTHS of PHARMACY by Gregory Haines
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Potteries of 19th Century Hobart

Peter Mercer

Deposits of clay for brickmaking and pottery were among the first useful materials Lieutenant – Governor David Collins and his party looked for when they established camp on Hunter's Island and the shores of Sullivan Cove in 1804. Even the rough "wattle and daub" huts and tents of the first settlers required bricks for the fireplaces and chimneys for cooking and basic warmth. Convicts experienced in brickmaking were soon put to work under a trained supervisor to produce bricks made from local clay. By 1808 work had commenced on an ambitious project, the brick commissariat store, which became the first permanent building in Hobart Town. This building survives, albeit altered somewhat from its original appearance, in Macquarie Street to this day. It now houses the administrative offices of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Completed in 1810, it is the oldest surviving building in Tasmania and one of the oldest in the nation.

Supply self-sufficiency and indeed, survival relied heavily on the availability of suitable containers to transport and store essential goods. Wooden casks, of course, played a vital role in transporting goods from Britain to Australia, but they had a limited use in the domestic situation. However, basic clay products were as indispensable to the orderly conduct of the domestic and commercial life of the day as they had been for more than 5000 years in the western world. Ordinary earthenware products such as plates, cups, bowls, pitchers, jugs, storage jars, vases, flowerpots and tiles, being easily broken were not considered a very viable product to bring to the Australian colonies unless, of course, they contained something

necessary stored inside them. Many storage and preserving jars consequently found their way to Australia as containers for imported commodities.

Local demand for a wide range of essential earthenware products was there from the beginning of

European settlement in Australia particularly as it was such a great distance from England. Potteries were therefore among the first industries to be established. As early as 1816 a pottery seems to have been operating near to Hobart Town' to supply the needs of the growing population who



*Storage jar: James Sherwin c. 1840.
Private collection. Photo S. Cuthbert.
16.5 x 12.3 cm.*

were by this time having to rely less and less on the United Kingdom for basic items and looking more and more to their own resources.

The location of the earliest of the potteries was a hill north of Hobart Town. It became known as Potters' Hill and was on the southern side of what was known as Lenah Valley. The first clay pits were apparently near the upper end of Argyle Street on the New Town Road.

The pottery in this location appears to have initially thrived,

but in April, 1819 the kiln and two "commodious" houses were advertised for sale in the local press.² What transpired is not known but a pottery with kiln, probably the same one, was again offered for sale in 1826.³ By 1826 the making of pots in the Hobart Town region seems to have ceased.⁴ Several factors could have caused this shut down of operations. Temporary over supply or lack of experienced workmen are two possibilities. Clay deposits around this part of New Town were apparently not a problem for they were extensive and of a fairly reliable quality.

Four years later the outlook for the industry changed. An emigrant with a considerable degree of expertise in the art of pot making disembarked at Hobart Town from the emigrant ship, *Wanstead*.⁵ He was James Sherwin (b.1790), from Burslem, Staffordshire, England. He was accompanied by his son, Henry. James Sherwin was well trained and skilled at his craft and had served his time at one of the many well-known Burslem potteries. He also had the experience of having been in business on his own account for some years at St.Petersburg in Russia, producing



Storage jars: Charles Tibbs, Goulburn Street Pottery c. 1848.
Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Photo S. Cuthbert.
20.4 x 11.5 cm, 13.9 x 10.7 cm.

earthenware products on the banks of the Neva River for the local market. Disastrous flooding in 1824, however, stifled his ambitions there and devoured his capital. The depressed economic conditions prevalent in England offered little future at home, so he was forced to look afield to the distant Australian colonies where things to all accounts looked much brighter for his future and that of his son.

James Sherwin's brother, John, formerly a merchant of Burslem, had already emigrated to Van Diemen's Land in 1823 and had secured, near Bothwell, a grant of land which he had named "Sherwood".⁶ James decided to join him, but when he arrived he found that things were not as good on John's property as he had been informed. His brother had lately sustained heavy financial losses with repeated attacks by aborigines who burnt his buildings and killed his livestock.

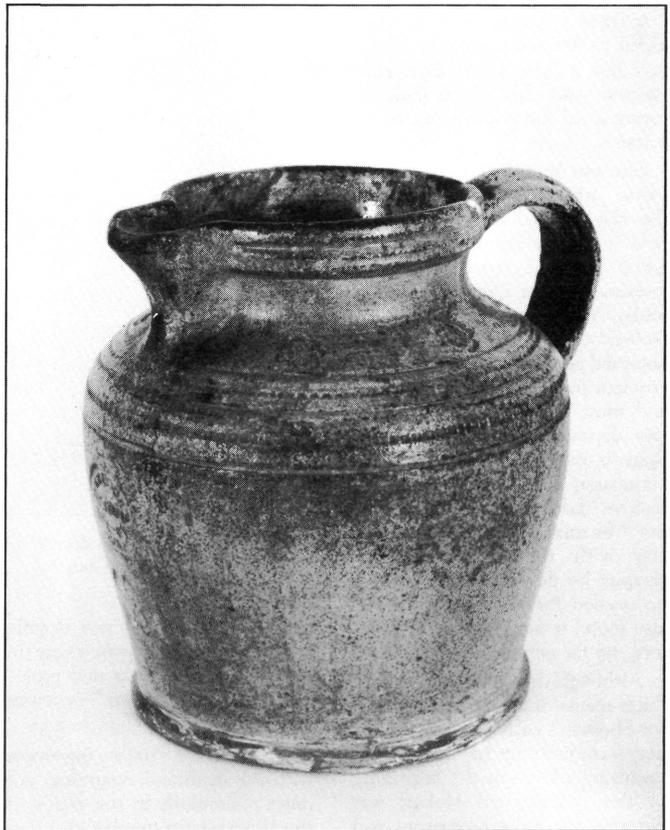
Deciding against the dangerous life of a pioneer pastoralist, and with very little capital at his disposal, James Sherwin applied to Lieutenant – Governor George Arthur for assistance to set up an earthenware pottery business near Hobart Town. Arthur responded warmly to Sherwin's request. Relief from the colony's dependence on imported domestic goods was a consideration well worth encouragement. Accordingly, Sherwin, in 1830, received an initial grant of 100 acres at Potter's Hill.⁷ The transaction completed, he lost little time in getting the necessary equipment together and setting up the pottery for within a year he is referred to as "producing milk pans and other useful articles for domestic purposes and of excellent quality ... on the New Town Rivulet above Roseway Lodge" at Kangaroo Flat.⁸

Sherwin, according to the press "seems to have succeeded better in this undertaking than any of his predeces-

sors, either here or in Sydney. Some of the jars and other vessels lately imported from the latter place, though apparently neat and well made were nevertheless in some degree pervious and allowed the liquid in them to escape. That most particular part, glazing, however, is well executed in the present instance and the vessels are good and sound."⁹

The demand for his work certainly appeared to be there. By October 1831 business was so good for Sherwin that he had established a branch pottery on a town allotment he had acquired at the top of Murray and Harrington Streets where there was a deposit of suitable clay.¹⁰

Undoubtedly the secret of Sherwin's business success was the standard of his products. Comments were made about the excellent quality of his stoneware. He knew what to do and the convict labourers he selected were experienced in various aspects of pottery production. One such artisan was Thomas Lea who had been "regularly bought up in the glazing and firing department".¹¹ Lea was excellent at his work but on more than one occasion became drunk and belligerent. After one such instance he was sentenced to work in a chain gang for his intemperate behaviour but such was Sherwin's



Jug: Charles Tibbs, Goulburn Street Pottery c. 1849.
Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Photo S. Cuthbert.
18.3 x 14.4 cm.

need of his services that he was retrieved for the pottery after only a few days, Sherwin, according to the Colonial Secretary, preferring "convenience to discipline".¹²

It is obvious from this incident that James Sherwin's early manufacturing enterprise was not without its problems. A further difficulty was security. At one stage specially cut wood for the kiln was being stolen from his land, as he supposed, by Government employees. The New Town-Kngaroo Flat area was, in the early 1830s still well timbered and isolated except for cleared areas near the main road to O'Brien's Bridge, now Glenorchy.

In 1834 a further 80 acres were added to Sherwin's holdings. This gave him a farm of 180 acres with claypits and his improvements consisted of the pottery and three cottages.

Sherwin from the outset was not particularly satisfied with quality of the clay he had on his grants of land, so he looked elsewhere and found what he required on the foreshore of the Queen's Domain south of Cornelian Bay. In November 1831 he sought and obtained permission from the Government to take clay from this area and must have continued to use this deposit for many years, for there is record of him requesting permission again in 1846 to remove more clay from this region.¹³ By mixing the Cornelian Bay clay with that from his own claypits he developed the quality he needed for his stoneware. He also found it made a very satisfactory slip for glazing his wares.¹⁴

Although the quality of his products seems to be the main reason for Sherwin's early success, he was also fortunate that he chose to set up his operations at the beginning of the 1830s when Hobart was entering the most prosperous and expansive decade of its entire history. His pottery also had some advantage in being conveniently



Lidded storage jar; Alexander Worbey c.1885.
Private collection. Photo S. Cuthbert.
24 x 13.5 cm.

close to the exclusive new dormitory suburb of New Town where the *nouveau riche* business and professional people of Hobart Town were beginning to build their houses.

A lucrative trade developed with the mainland Australian colonies particularly in the 1840s. In the 1830s a large number of storage jars were needed to send essential supplies to Port Phillip, but as the settlements in the hinterland of

Melbourne and Adelaide in particular, expanded, the demand for domestic earthenware products became almost insatiable.¹⁵ As a consequence it is now much more likely for collectors to find a Sherwin pot on the mainland than it is in Tasmania.

In July 1854 James Sherwin died leaving his illiterate son, Henry, to carry on the pottery. Unfortunately, Henry did not possess the

business ability of his of his father and a steady decline in the value and output of the business took place. The fate of the New Town pottery was sealed in 1868 when Henry through insolvency was forced to sub-divide the original land grant and sell all assets. Stephen Bell purchased the farm, cottages and pottery, but whether he operated the pottery at any stage is not known. Henry Sherwin died at Kangaroo Flat in 1877 and there is a possibility he still worked there until the time of his death. Bell sold to Morton Hickman in the late 1870s.¹⁶

The Sherwin enterprise produced mainly quality stoneware domestic utility products. Unfortunately, like most early potteries, by no means all the wares were branded so there are still probably many pots, particularly on the mainland, made by Sherwin but which cannot positively be identified. The distinctive pumpkin glaze is a help. Marked pots usually have a small impressed brand "J. Sherwin" on the side near the base. They are now rare Australiana collectables.

The New Town Pottery in the 1880s went through a modest but brief period of revival of activities with the arrival of Alexander Worbey about the beginning of the decade.¹⁷ Worbey rented the works, kiln and claypit from Hickman and started to produce mainly rustic decorative wares. Alex Worbey's enterprise appears to be much more of a cottage industry or studio pottery than a business run on purely commercial, mass-production lines. His output was small so perhaps he worked on his own. Few examples of his work were either produced or appear to have survived and Worbey pieces are now very hard to come by. His decorated earthenware pots that have survived have a very distinctive appearance and are identifiable at a glance even if the name "A. Worbey" is not stamped on

them. Most of the known examples of his work have a very shiny dark brown glaze. They are usually decorated with conventional grape vine motifs applied to the surface in an informal, crudely symmetrical way. These decorations are sometimes glazed a lighter shade of brown.

Although certainly not to everyone's taste there is undeniably a high degree of rustic charm about Worbey's known pottery examples. They all possess a very original and enticing folk craft quality and are greatly prized by collectors of Tasmanian ceramics. Besides making decorative products Worbey may well have made some earthenware or stoneware utility products but so far none appears to have been positively identified with his pottery.

The enterprise of Alec Worbey ceased to operate about 1890 and thereafter the works fell into disuse. In 1907 the kiln was demolished and the bricks used to build the chimneys for nearby houses under construction.¹⁸ Today the pottery is remembered by the name Pottery Road.

Much still remains to be researched about Worbey and, for that matter, Sherwin, and their pottery activities. Worbey's background is unknown and it is possible that there were two Worbeys, perhaps father and son potting. After he ceased to make pots at Kangaroo Valley, "A. Worbey" is listed in the Tasmanian Post Office Directory, 1892-3, as living at 76 Wellington Street, Launceston, next door to McHugh Bros. Potteries. It is therefore possible that he later worked for McHughs or Campbells which were side by side. But whatever he did it was not longer in the distinctive style he practised at Kangaroo Flat.

Five examples of Worbey's output are on display at *Narryna* at the Van Diemen's Land Memorial Museum in Hampden Road, Battery Point. These consist of a stor-

age pot and a comport which have Worbey's name stamped on them and a teapot, vase and pot plant container which are unmarked. The Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery has a teapot. The *Narryna* collection was presented in August, 1961, by Mr. K.M. Hickman, son of Morton Hickman, Worbey's landlord.

Another early Van Diemonian potter, albeit not very successful, was Charles Tibbs, a native of Hobart Town, who was born on 19 December 1830.¹⁹ Tibbs as a young man set himself up in the pottery making business at 33 Upper Goulburn Street in 1848. His principal lines of manufacture were storage jars and flower pots in embossed pitcher style ornamented with scrollery, cornucopias and male and female figures.²⁰

In the *Hobart Town Courier* on 13 December, he placed this advertisement:

"Ornamental Pottery, Goulburn Street.

"The lovers of flowers are respectfully informed that Charles Tibbs has now ready for sale five hundred ornamental flower pots of a superior description which he offers at prices sufficiently moderate to ensure the patronage of all classes.

"Charles Tibbs is determined to establish an earthenware manufactory, which shall obviate the necessity of importing from England and trusts that the superiority of his manufacture will ensure him of a share of public support.

"Goulburn St. Pottery Hobart Town opposite the White Pheasant."(hotel)²¹

Unfortunately, from the beginning of his operations, despite his claims to the contrary, he had problems with the quality of his product. Although the pots were well finished and attractive, they soon gained the reputation of being too porous. As a consequence the demand dropped as the word got around.

Tibbs' early domestic storage jars are particularly porous, their body being more of brick clay than that used to make stoneware. As a

tradesman he soon profited by his mistakes and later items are much better, but unfortunately the damage to his reputation was already done. Tibbs went to some lengths to advertise even branding some of his later wares with "warranted not to absorb" in a vain effort to counteract the bad name they had acquired.

Business was in fact going so poorly for Tibbs that during 1850 he took a job in the public service to give him a viable income while he continued to operate his pottery as a part-time business. It is not known how much longer after 1850 he conducted his pottery but he remained resident at the Upper Goulburn Street address until his death in 1906 at the age of 75, holding various positions in the public service until his retirement in 1896.²²

Very few of Charles Tibbs' ceramic products have survived. Some of those are particularly poor storage jars made to hold semi-liquid substances and bear witness to the porous quality of his wares. There are two storage jars in the collection of the Tasmanian Museum and Art gallery. Both are badly flaked due to the porous nature of the finished product. Interestingly enough Tibbs' domestic wares, like Sherwin's are characterized by the distinctive pumpkin coloured glaze which means that he probably used the

same source at Cornelian Bay for his slip clay.

The Museum also has a stoneware jug made by Tibbs obviously after he had learnt from his inexperience. It is in sound condition and, unlike the jars, seems to hold water.

Charles Tibbs' wares are recognised usually by an impressed mark with "Goulburn Street Pottery, Hobart" enclosed in an oval. Peter Mercer Curator of History Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

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1. *Hobart Town Gazette*, 8/6/1816.
2. *Ibid.* 18/7/1818.
3. *Ibid.* 16/1/1824.
4. *Ibid.* 30/9/1826.
5. F.H.Nicholson: *Shipping Arrivals and Departures, Tasmania, 1803-1833*, Australia, 1983; p.171, the barque Wansted arrived 11/4/1830.
6. Ann Fysh, *The Early Days of the Sherwin Family of "Sherwood", Bothwell, Tasmania and "Alice Place", Launceston*, Launceston, 1964.
7. Phillip Hoysted, *There's real money in old bottles, pots*, article in *Mercury*, 31/12/1986, p.12. on James Sherwin. The 100 acres was held in trust until 1834 when it was formerly granted to James Sherwin.
8. *Hobart Town Courier*, 23/4/1831. Kangaroo Flat was also known as Kangaroo Bottom. Part of this area is now called Lenah Valley.
9. *Ibid.* 29/10/1831.
10. Brian E. Easterbrook, *Pottery in Tasmania - the history and collecting of pottery in Tasmania from 1816 to 1960*, unpublished m.s., completed 1984.
11. Hoysted op.cit. Correspondence between James Sherwin and Colonial Secretary, John Burnett. Sherwin pots have survived and are very well glazed. Lea's expertise in this area of production could in no small way account for this fact.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Easterbrook op.cit.
14. Miss Mylie Peppin, well-known Hobart studio potter using this clay as a slip had the same results as Sherwin. The clay is very fine in texture and pale grey. When fired it glazes to a pleasing pumpkin brown colour.
15. *Wood's Almanacs* 1848, 1849, 1850.
16. Hoysted, op.cit.
17. F.B.Maning's *Tasmanian Directory for 1881-2*, p.135, "Alexander Worbey Kangaroo Valley".
18. Easterbrook, op.cit.
19. *Ibid.* Charles Tibbs was the son of an ex-convict, James Tibbs.
20. *Hobart Town Courier*, 13/12/1848.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Easterbrook, op.cit.

- Peter Mercer is Curator of History, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, Tasmania.

Research Request

I am currently preparing an exhibition on the work of the convict artist Thomas Bock. It is known that he possessed a very fine square framed piano which I believe he had imported from Broadwood's in London. In addition he was a friend of the composer Vincent

Wallace, who is said composed the opera 'Maritana' in Bock's house in Hobart.

I would be pleased to obtain information on early music in Hobart, on Wallace and particularly on Thomas Bock. I would be

interested to know if there are any Wallace papers held in Australia.

Diana Dunbar
Curator of Fine Art, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery
Launceston, Tasmania.

Mrs Macquarie's Piano

John George Lang (1816-1864)

This extract from Lang's *Botany Bay; or True Tales of Australia* was first published in book form in 1857. The author, a barrister, was Australia's first native born novelist. The book is a thinly disguised account of often identifiable events and people. Its fact and fiction are not always easy to separate.

The Captain Romer, referred to could likely be Henry Colden Antill (1779-1852). He arrived in Sydney a captain in the 73rd regiment in 1810. Appointed aide-de-camp to Governor Macquarie, in 1811 he was promoted to major. In 1821 he retired from the army and, in 1825, settled on his estate, Jarvisfield, near Picton, 50 miles south of Sydney, which was named after Macquarie's first wife. Antill also had large land holdings further south on the Molonglo Plains. In 1818 he married the daughter of the emancipist Edward Wills by whom he had 6 sons and 3 daughters. Lang's description of Captain Romer and his family appears too close to the above to be co-incidental. The story would appear to be set about 1840. (Editor)

Music a Terror

My recollections of Australia relate to some years back, long before the colony had a legislative assembly or a free press; long before emigration had carried to its shores shoals of men and women "unconnected with the crown"; long before gold was discovered in the district of Bathurst, or Sir Thomas Mitchell had explored that vast tract of country called by him "Australia Felixm". I write, indeed, of those times still spoken of by some as "those good old times", when the assignment sys-

tem prevailed, and Governments were glad to get rid of their convicts to masters who would feed, clothe and work them; when "summary punishments" were the order of the day, and every gentleman was his own magistrate; when the quartern loaf sold for half-a crown, and beef and mutton for three-halfpence a pound; when the value of a hogshead of rum was £200., and an acre of land five shillings; when money could not be borrowed, even upon good security, for less than thirty per cent. per annum.

In those good old times, I had, in partnership with a gentleman who managed it, a cattle station about 120 miles from Sydney, at a place called Bong-Bong. My partner had formerly held an ensign's commission in the 73rd regiment of his late Majesty George III.; but shortly after his arrival in the colony he had fallen in love with a handsome girl of humble birth, whom he married, and then retired from the army, took a grant of land, and "settled" permanently in New South Wales.

My friend and partner, Mr. Romer, was blessed with a numerous offspring – seven sons and four daughters. The eldest was a boy fourteen, and the youngest a baby "in arms". They were all remarkably fine children, strong, healthy and intelligent; but they were uncultivated, of course – like the wilds in the midst of which they had been born and bred. The only white people whom they had ever seen were their parents, the convict servants (some twenty in number), and sundry stray visitors and stockmen who happened occasionally to pass the station and require shelter for the night. Nor had their children ever seen any

buildings beyond the mud and slab house in which they lived, and the bark huts occupied by the servants. Nor had they seen pictures or prints save those to be found in the old-fashioned spelling books, by the aid of which Mrs. Romer, in her few leisure moments, had taught the elder children to read. The only music they had ever heard was that which a very rude fife discoursed, when played upon by a hut-keeper; and the only airs that he could compass were "God Save the King", "Rule Britannia" and "Poor Mary Anne". Neither Romer nor his wife had much of an "ear" for melody, and never did more than hum the words of some old song.

It was my wont to visit the cattle station once a year, and upon every occasion I used to take with me a variety of presents for my young friends in the bush. Toys, such as tin barrelled guns, brass watches, Dutch dolls, various wooden animals in deal boxes, &c.: of these they had grown tired, and it now became with me a matter of great difficulty to get anything likely to please and amuse them. One morning while walking up George Street, Sydney (the houses in George Street were in those days all detached residences, standing in their own grounds), I observed an unusually large crowd in front of the auction mart. Curiosity prompted me to ascertain what was the object of attraction. It was nothing short of "A piano – to be sold at auction to the highest bidder. Terms, cash; or an approved bill at three months, bearing interest at 25 per cent".

There was not at that time more than five pianos in the colony, and *this* piano was considered by far the best inasmuch as it had once

belonged to Mrs. Macquarie, the wife of Major General Lauchlan Macquarie, Governor of New South Wales and its dependencies. At the sale of the General's effects, when he was going home, it had been purchased by the provost-marshal, whose necessities subsequently compelled him to part with it to a Jew, who exchanged it with an officer who particularly desired it for an allotment of land containing eleven acres on the Surrey Hills, near the old race-course, a part of which allotment of land has since realised upwards of £20,000. To trace the old piano through the different hands into which it afterwards fell would be no easy matter. Let it suffice that it was now the property of a butcher, with whom I had frequent dealings, and who bought periodically the fat bullocks which were reared at the cattle station under Captain Romer's superintendance (I say *Captain*, because everyone called him Captain Romer).

It may be as well to describe the instrument now about to be submitted to public competition. It was three feet two inches long, and two feet wide. Its mahogany case had become almost black, and its once white keys were now as yellow as the claws of a kite. The legs were rather rickety; and constant use and frequent removal had greatly impaired and weakened the tone, which, in the infancy of the instrument, had never been very powerful. However, it was a piano, nevertheless; and there was "all Sydney" waiting to see it sold, and half of those present ready to bid for it.

An auction room – like love and death – levels all ranks; and on that day were to be seen government officials, merchants who had come out "free", merchants who had originally come out "bond" (emancipist), traders, wealthy farmers, Jews, *et hoc genus omne*, straining and jostling to get a sight of, and close to, this (in the words

of the actioneer) "eligible opportunity of introducing 'armony in the buzzim of a family circle'".

Amongst the crowd was a Frenchman, whose ignorance of the English law relating to chattels (he had "taken" some valuables belonging to another person) had led to his being furnished with a passage to Botany Bay. This Frenchman had been a teacher of music in London, and, at the request of the auctioneer, he "favoured the company" with a few pieces of music, and thus spared the auctioneer – so he said – the trouble of "hewlogising the instrument – since it could speak for itself". Had pianos been common in New South Wales, silence on the part of this one would have been more prudent, so far as the interests of the owner were concerned.

No sooner did I witness the delight which the cracked tones of that old piano afforded to so many of the bystanders, than I made up my mind – was determined to become its purchaser. I was certain that I should be vehemently opposed on all sides; but I did not care about that, especially as I knew that my friend, the butcher, would have no objection to be paid in cattle instead of coin. I need scarcely say that it was not for myself that I wanted the old piano, although I could play a little; it was for the children of my friend and partner, Romer – whose surprise I longed to witness, when they saw me touch the keys and produce a sound – that I craved for the ownership of that antique instrument.

After a brief while, when the Frenchman had ceased to edify the throng, the bidding commenced. "What shall we say, gentlemen, for this elegant instrument?" the auctioneer enquired. "Start it at what you please; £150 if you like".

"Fifty!" said a voice in the crowd.

A roar of laughter followed this ridiculous appreciation of an

instrument – a piano – that once belonged to Mrs. Macquarie, while the auctioneer, with an expression of face which plainly betokened how deeply his feelings had been hurt, remarked, very solemnly: "Those people who come here to joke had better wait till the sale's over, and not interrupt business." Eventually it was "started" at £100., but it was very soon run up to £130. Here it stopped for a while, and I nodded my head. "£140 – £140!" cried the auctioneer, who refused to take any bid under £10. A very brisk competition now ensued between several individuals, and I remained silent, though unshaken in my resolve.

The piano was now "going for £175 – going for £175 – once – twice – third, and the –". I nodded my head "£185 – £185!" said the auctioneer. There was "no advance" for some minutes, and I was in hopes that I would get it for that last bid of mine, but I was mistaken. A gentleman known as Billy Hatcherson – an expatriated highwayman – a very wealthy man, wanted it for one of his daughters, who was about to be married, and he roared out, in a very defiant manner, "£200 – there!" and confident that it would be his, he left the room triumphantly, and went "over the way" to refresh himself with a glass of grog.

Another spirited competition now took place, and eventually the piano became mine for £250.

I was quite right in my conjecture that the butcher would be glad to take cattle in payment, and, before leaving the auction, we concluded a bargain. I was to deliver to him within three months of that date, seventy fat oxen, such as I had previously sold to him.

In the days of which I am writing there were no post offices in New South Wales, much less public carriers, and I had to wait several weeks before I could find a

dray going to any station within forty miles of Captain Romer's abode (settlers usually accommodated each other by carrying packages to and from the interior), and it was not until after I myself arrived at the station, that Romer received the news of "a large box for him at the station of Major Belrington", another retired officer who had settled in the wilds of Australia.

The despatch of the piano I had kept a secret, and when Romer heard of this "large box", he could not comprehend it, for he had ordered nothing, and expected nothing, from Sydney. He sent off, however, a cart drawn by a pair of bullocks, and on the third day the large box arrived. "With great care", was painted on the lid; and with very great care it was removed from the cart and placed in the verandah.

The advent of a package, and the opening thereof, was always a great event at the station, even when it was expected. There would be seen Romer, with a mallet and chisel in his hands, ready to break into it, no matter whether it was a cask of sugar, a chest of tea or a case full of slop clothing for the men, while Mrs. Romer, with the youngest child in her arms, might be seen dividing her anxiety touching the condition of the stores with her fears for the children's safety – for they would all flock around their father, and frequently go much too close to the implements in his hands. But here was a *special* case – a most mysterious box. Romer said he had dreamt that some of his relations in England had sent him an assortment of saddlery, which would have been particularly acceptable; and he was hoping in his heart that "saddlery", it would turn out. Mrs. Romer had also a dream – that her father had sent a large box of clothing for herself and the children, and she was hoping for the realisation of *her* dream. It would be in vain to

attempt a description of the surprise and disgust of Romer and his excellent wife when they beheld the old piano.

"Such a useless thing!" said Romer.

"Who could have sent it?" said his wife.

While they were thus expressing themselves, the whole of their children, each in a different key, were shouting out – "Papa! Ma! What's a piano? what's a piano?"

I laughed so heartily at the scene, that both Romer and his wife were perfectly satisfied that I had something to do with "the joke" – for as such they regarded the appearance of a piano in that Australian wilderness; and at last I confessed to them that I had bought the instrument for the amusement and instruction of their young ones.

The piano, which was locked and the key in my waistcoat pocket, had withstood all the attempts of the children to open it, in order to see what was inside; and Romer and myself carefully carried it into the room wherein the family were accustomed to dine. (It may be needless, perhaps, to inform the reader that in those remote regions where Captain Romer resided "drawing-rooms" were dispensed with.

I was just as impatient to witness the effect of music (such as the old piano was capable of) upon the children as the children were to see "What's inside!" I therefore hastily unlocked it, and, placing my foot upon the pedal, swept the chords as vigorously as was prudent, considering the shaky state of the piano.

Alas! instead of delighting the children, I terrified them. Some ran out of the room, shrieking, "It's alive! it's alive!" others stood aghast with their mouths wide open. One of the little boys fancied the keys were a row of huge teeth, which would bite me if I

continued to touch them; whilst a little girl of four years of age begged of her mother not to let the baby go near it. The eldest girl, observing that the instrument was perfectly harmless, was approaching my side, but was violently pulled back by two of her brothers. Presently, those who had run away returned to the door, and finding that there was no real danger, re-entered the room. By degrees the whole of them were not only reconciled to the belief that the piano was inanimate, but vastly pleased with the tunes which I played upon it. Ere long they became both bold and familiar, and, approaching the old instrument, they dealt it several blows with their clenched fists, which, had they been repeated, would soon have silenced it forever.

When the children had gone to bed – and it was a rather difficult matter to prevail upon them to retire, so maddened had they become with the sound of the music – I played several airs which in former days had been very familiar to the ears of Romer and his wife, but which they had not heard for upwards of sixteen years. Amongst others was "The Girl I left behind me", an air which the band of Romer's old regiment, the 73rd, used to play constantly on parade, when the regiment was marching past the colours.

When I had finished playing the air, I turned around, and said to Romer, "You remember that don't you?"

What was my astonishment to find my friend in tears. The large drops were rolling down his sunburnt cheeks. "What is the matter?" I inquired of him.

"Ah, sir!" he replied, "you have bought back to me the morning when I embarked for this country and, when, for the last time I saw my mother and sisters. That old piano makes it seem as though it were only yesterday that I parted from them".

And Mrs. Romer was crying. Why? Because when she knew that Charley really loved her, and they were engaged to be married, she used to go every morning to see the old 73rd paraded, and kept her eyes upon the colours, which Charley, as junior ensign, used to carry when the regiment marched past them and played that old tune – “The Girl I left behind me”. And a very happy air it was, and sweet to her ears; for shortly after it had ceased, Charley and herself had their morning meeting, and used to walk around the spot which was called “the Government domain”. The tears that were shed by Romer and his wife were not tears of unhappiness; for, although they were not musical, their domestic life had never known a single discord.

“Play it again!” said Romer and his wife simultaneously – the latter now sitting on her husband’s knees, her arm encircling his neck – “oh! play it again. Do, please!”

I obeyed them, but was soon interrupted by the children, who rushed from their beds into the dining room, and began to dance, or rather to “jump about”, in imitation of the gestures of the aborigines in the act of choral exercises. The boys were clothed only in their night-shirts; the girls in their bed-gowns; and to the best of their ability they followed the air I was playing with their voices. Such a scene! Had the old piano cost me double the number of fat oxen I had contracted to give for it, I could not have grudged the price.

One of the house dogs began to bark fiercely, and Romer went to the door, whence he saw the whole of the servants, attracted by the sound of the pianoforte, drawn up in line, and listening most attentively to the music. Romer, who was one of the most kind hearted men that the world ever produced, entered completely into their feelings, and invited them to sit down in the verandah; and he sent them

out two bottles of rum and several ounces of tobacco, where with to regale themselves, while the music was gladdening their souls, and carrying them back to scenes in the land which, in all probability, they would never again behold . . .

The next morning soon after daylight, Romer came into my apartment, and, with a smile upon his face, said, “This old piano, it occurs to me, may be turned to very profitable account”.

“How?” I inquired.

“We make it an instrument of terror to the blacks. Of late they have become awfully troublesome in the matter of spearing the cattle, merely for the fat wherewith to grease themselves, and only last week we lost in this way a very valuable cow. I will send for some of the tribe and frighten them, or rather *you* must, by playing on the bass keys.”

I liked the idea vastly. Besides, I was very curious to see the expression of a savage’s face when, for the first time, he heard music.

The encampment of the blacks was only three or four miles distant, and a stockman was sent to bring several of them; and at noon, about eight or nine of them, in all their nudity, made their appearance. Mrs Romer had a strong objection to admit them in or near the house, and so Romer and I carried the old piano out into the open space in front of the dwelling.

The aboriginal native of New Holland – just like the native of India – cannot help touching and examining everything that is strange to him; and no sooner did “the blacks” whom we summoned observe the old piano, than they moved towards and examined it very attentively. One of them at last opened the instrument, and touched the keys rather heavily, and (like Fear in the “Ode to the Passions”), terrified at the sound he had produced, recoiled backwards, his spear poised ready to be thrown, and his brilliant black eye

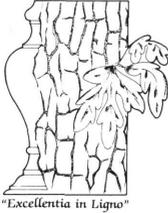
firmly fixed on the demon, for as such he regarded the old piano. His companions also poised their long spears, and retreated cautiously step by step.

Romer now begged of them not to be alarmed, and with some little difficulty bought them back to the piano, where he represented to them that inside was a fearful demon, who would eat up the whole of their tribe if he were told to do so; but that, if they did nothing to offend or annoy him (Romer), they had nothing whatever to fear.

I corroborated this statement by nodding my head; and, advancing to the instrument, I touched the keys and began to play as loudly as possible. Who shall describe their faces and their attitudes? Some of them grasped their boomerangs, others poised their spears ready to repel any sudden attack that the demon might make upon them. It was a scene such as I would not have missed on any account.

When I had ceased playing, Romer explained to them that I had been telling the demon what he was to do, on the next occasion of a bullock, a cow or a calf being speared on the run; and they must have believed every word he said, for from that day forward the nuisance abated, and the tribe very rarely came near the forest where our cattle used to graze; so that the old piano, after all, was by no means dear at the price I paid for it, to say nothing of the amusement which it afforded to Romer’s children.

The old piano is still extant. Not long ago I had a letter from Romer, who is now both old and rich, in which he said: “There are thousands of pianos in the colony now, of all sorts, sizes and prices, £25 up to £100; but not for any one of them would we exchange our old friend here, which has a place of honour in one of our drawing-rooms, and reposes its tottering legs on a Turkey carpet”.



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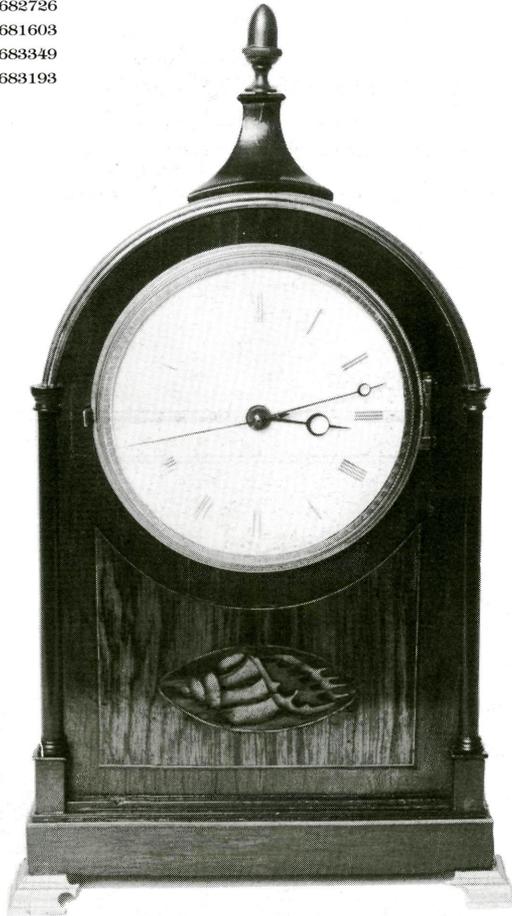




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