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# AUSTRALIANA

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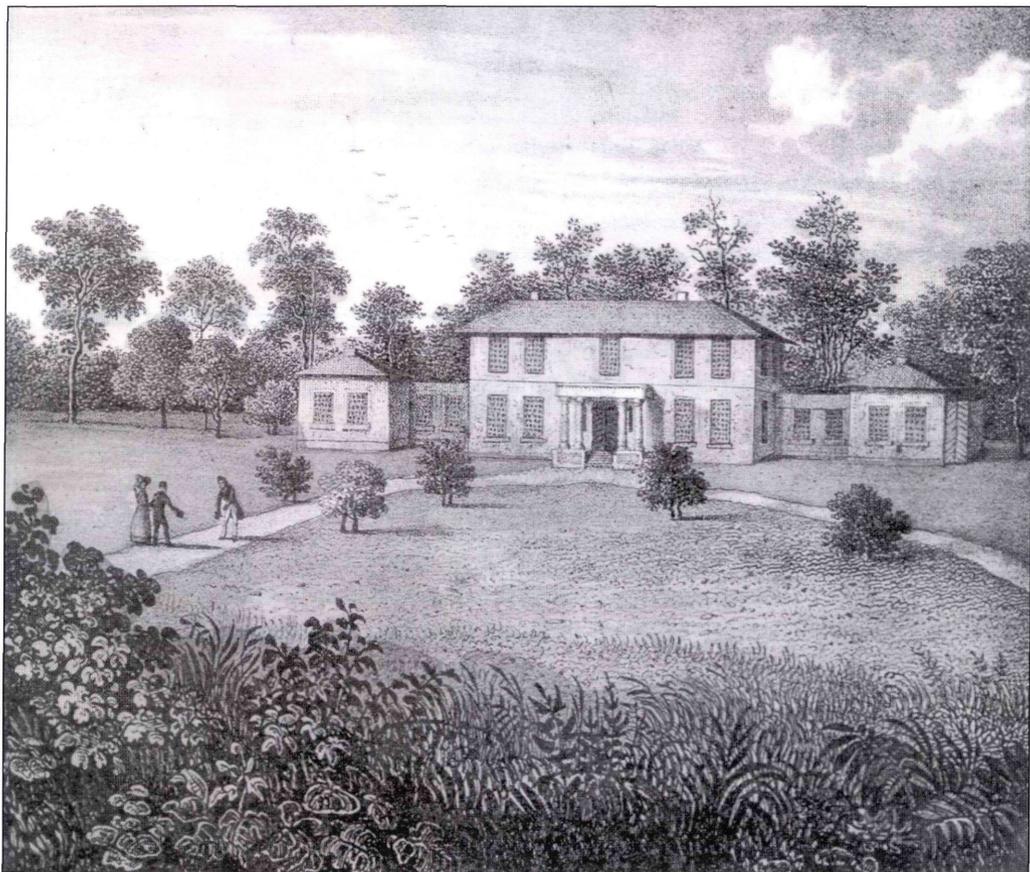
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## SIMPSON'S ANTIQUES

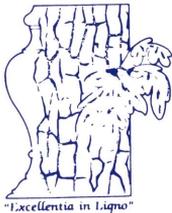
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**Cover:** A rare coloured engraving of Old Government House, Parramatta, published in Meissen in 1850. It is based on an engraving in Louis de Freycenet's *Voyage Autour Du Monde*, Paris 1822-44.

# THE AUSTRALIANA SOCIETY

PO BOX 643, WOOLLAHRA NSW 2025



## — SOCIETY PROGRAMME —

### MEETINGS — 1997

Thursday  
3 July 1997

Michael Bogle, Curator of the Hyde Park Barracks will speak on his new publication **Design in Australia 1880-1970**. This talk will explore the style and design of mass produced goods in Australia. Illustrations of furniture, motor cars, textiles domestic wares and other items of virtue will be shown. A book by this title will be published by Craftsman House this year.

Thursday  
4 September 1997

Annual General Meeting. Lecturer to be announced.  
Members of the Australiana Society are invited to nominate in writing for membership of the committee. The Society requires your active support, so if any members wish to join the committee, please send in nominations prior to the Annual General Meeting.

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### SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

Please note that Society meetings will be on the first Thursday of every alternate month:  
March, May, July, September, (A.G.M.), November.

They are held in the meeting room of the National Trust Centre, Observatory Hill.  
Ample parking available.

Drinks served 7.30-8.00pm, followed by Australiana showcase  
(bring your Australiana treasures along for general discussion).  
The lecture will commence at 8.00pm.

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# Australia Day Luncheon 1997

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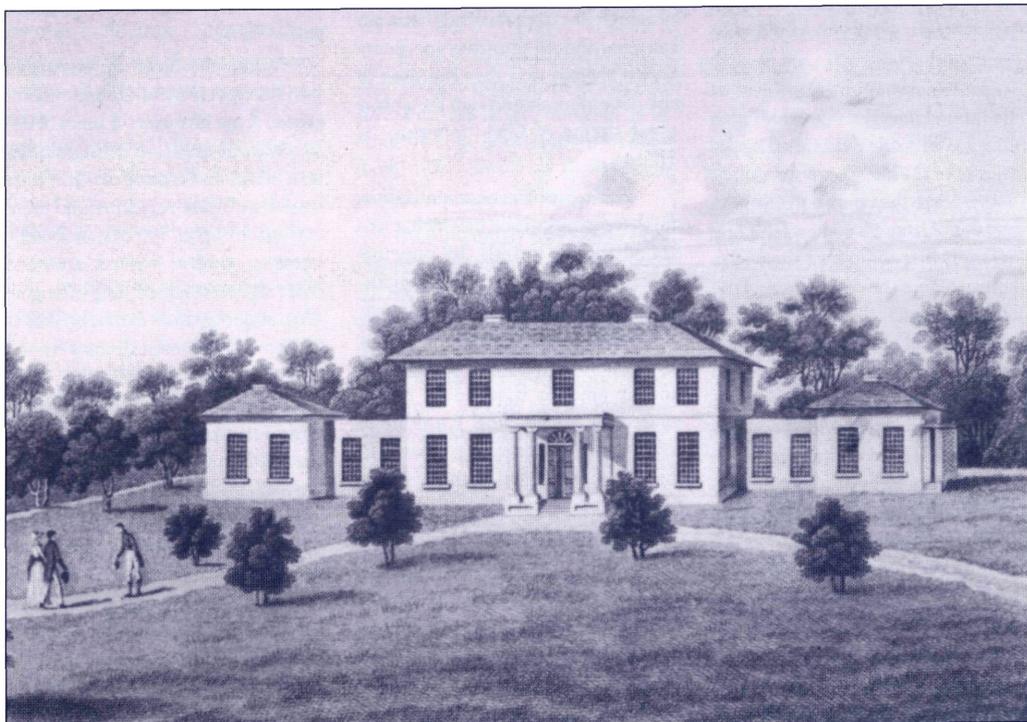
*Text of talk given by Kevin Fahy on the National Trust's collection of Australian colonial furniture at Old Government House, Parramatta and the recent refurbishment of the building.*

Old Government House was vested in the National Trust by the NSW Government in 1967, 30 years ago. Long before that event, the Trust had begun overtures to secure the property in the face of some local opposition who sought to obtain the property for their own varied purposes. In 1968, the Trust established a restoration committee of six members to supervise the restoration and furnishing of the house. The numbers of this committee were increased during the following year and the present system of managing the house by voluntary guardians was

organised and commenced operation in 1970, following the official opening of the house by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The existing committee was renamed the Parramatta Properties Committee and it continued to supervise the management of the house until its replacement in 1983 by the Curatorial Committee of the National Trust.

The problem of obtaining suitable furniture for some 24 rooms was a daunting task. It had begun by 1966 with attempts to locate suitable items subject at the time to the approval of the Portable Antiquities

Panel of the National Trust. While some \$1,400 was provided for this purpose in 1967, a proposal to establish a fund to enable furniture to be purchased as it became available to the value of \$1,000 per month for twelve months was rejected. From that time to the present relatively small amounts of funds have been available for the actual acquisition of furniture. It is unlikely that the Trust ever spent the current value of a single major item in its present collection on all its purchases over the years. An examination of its furniture catalogue published in 1971



*Government House, Parramatta, in 1819 from de Freycinet's Voyage Autour du Monde.*

shows that of over 200 listed entry items less than half were by purchase and over a third were by gift, the balance being made up of loans from institutions and private collectors. Later purchases of furniture were made by the Womens' Committee of the National Trust and by a number of generous benefactors including the House's Guardians. Over the last 20 years I am only aware of a single purchase of a pair of hall chairs by the National Trust, although, I suspect, or at least hope, that there were others. It is a pity that the Trust did not avail itself of so many opportunities that are unlikely to present themselves again.

The policy of furnishing Old Government House was strongly influenced by a report prepared by Daniel Thomas in 1964. This outlined four themes in using the house as a museum. They can be summarised:

1. A museum of the governors. The house being the one building in existence which was occupied by the majority of the early governors up to 1850, prior to the change to self-government. Although some of the first governors had completed their term of office before the completion of the building as it stands today the house and its site is nevertheless the one building in Australia to have had a lengthy personal association with these men who so moulded our history Daniel Thomas envisaged each governor should have a strictly biographical exhibit covering his life both before and after his Australian appointment but would be of course chiefly concerned with his time in Australia. His personal character should be defined and likewise his particular contribution to the history of Australia. Various effects that could be related to the governors and

their families could be incorporated into the various personal exhibits but they should not predominate and in general be kept in the Period Museum section.

2. Period Museum. As Australia's oldest major residential building some of its principal rooms should exhibit the decorative arts of the period the house was built 1799-1816. The report recommended a fairly elaborate furnishing of the rooms more along the lines of a decorative arts museum and the exclusion of any cottage style and unsophisticated objects.

3. The Building. A display to illustrate the history of the building right up to the twentieth century and its occupation by the Kings School.

4. The history and topography of Parramatta was also mentioned although the report stated that no museum should illustrate too many varied themes and that the lives of the governors should remain a principal theme of Old Government House.

This report was augmented by a further report in 1968 in which it was stated that to furnish the principal rooms to the decorative arts and furniture of the period 1799-1816 was too restrictive and it would be almost impossible to acquire furnishings in any amount that would be required for the building. Furniture of colonial manufacture was known to have comprised less than a third of the total.

Rather than confine the furnishing to any one governor, a policy was directed to its period as a Vice-Regal residence or to the first half of the nineteenth century. It was felt that cottage furniture should not be excluded. Apart from the furnishing of servants quarters, such pieces

could well be found in minor rooms where utility rather than quality would have been the guide. The term "cottage" style had wide shades of meaning and could be easily applied to much colonial-made furniture. While furniture of a predominant English or colonial origin was sought, it was felt that pieces of other origins such as Anglo-Indian should also be considered.

It was noted in this report that the main guides to the furnishing should be the furniture inventories made in 1821, 1831 (recently located), 1837, 1846 and 1855 as well as other documentation and the several auction notices of the dispersal sales of various governors' effects on their departure from the colony together with a number of newspaper advertisements indicating the furniture and furnishings available in the early colony.

While the furniture envisaged for Old Government House encompassed some fifty years, a unity of design was still apparent in English pattern books and catalogues that were issued with few revisions and were current for up to 30 years and while current London fashion changed older styles remained long in vogue. One major Sydney cabinetmaker is known to have used designs from a pattern book of 1808 as late as 1845. It is unlikely that the furnishings of Old Government House were ever high fashion. Its erratic use by the various governors and the large amount of government-owned furniture as described in the several inventories suggest that much of its furnishings changed very little between the time of Governor Macquarie to Governor FitzRoy even if they were augmented by the various governors personal effects. It is certainly true that between 1800 and 1850, Gov-

ernment House was occupied by no less than nine families with different, often unrelated interests, backgrounds and furniture requirements. Room usage was frequently changed, far more than would be likely encountered in a usual residence which over a similar time span would probably relate to no more than two families or generations with their various additions and subtraction of furniture.

Despite the existence of several furniture inventories and a limited amount of documentation from other sources, no pictorial evidence of the interiors at Old Government House during its use as a vice regal residence is known. Casual claims have been made for a few items of furniture as having once been in the house but none can be seriously entertained. Of all the furniture in the present collection only one chair from a set of six ebonised drawing room chairs could possibly be claimed as appearing in the 1855 inventory prior to their removal to Government House, Sydney. Various claims have been made for furniture belonging to several governors. Even if correct it would be largely impossible to determine whether such items were ever at Parramatta as in most cases they would more than likely have been placed at Government House, Sydney.

The earliest reference to furniture at Old Government House can be found in the *Returns of Government Labour* kept by Richard Rouse, the Superintendent of Carpenters at Parramatta between 1811 and 1821. In 1816 there is an entry "*making looking glass frame for Government House*". During November of that year "*one side Board 8' long and 2' wide for the use of Government House*" was received from Sydney. In January

1817 "*16 single and 2 elbow drawing room chairs, 12 hall chairs, one round table and 2 sofa tables, 1 dressing table and 1 bedstead*" arrived from Sydney for the house, "*2 elbow chairs, 2 chests of drawers and 2 butter boxes*" followed a few days later.

Important guides to the furnishing of the house are the several inventories made in 1821, 1831, 1837, 1846 and 1855. While mostly incomplete (with the exception of the 1831 and 1837 inventory), they list only the government-owned furniture in the house, they do serve to show the range of furniture to be found throughout the house as well as providing an indication of the various alterations in room usage.

Copies of the 1821 inventory, and a floor plan at that time can be found in Helen Proudfoots, *Old Government House*.

In 1973, a letter from Elizabeth Macquarie written in 1835 was published in the RAHS Journal. It included a copy of this plan with fuller details of room usage on both the ground and upper floors.

The inventory was prepared by Henry Colden Antill in March 1821 almost a year prior to Macquarie's departure from the colony. Despite the absence of small items, pictures, curtains, floor coverings and lighting almost a third of the furniture listed, numbering some 70 pieces, was of local manufacture made from cedar, rosewood, beefwood and blue gum. These pieces would have been probably made by convict labour at the lumber yards or government workshops in Sydney and Parramatta. The inclusion of several of these locally-made items of furniture in the furnishing of the principal rooms of the house suggest that they were of some quality.

In 1831, Governor Darling was to describe that much of the furniture at Parramatta was unfit for use and in the following year furniture and values totalling £677.8.6 were made.

The 1837 inventory, made a few days before the completion of Governor Bourke's term of office, was prepared by the Colonial Architect Mortimer Lewis. It appears to list far more than just the government owned furniture. Apart from an increase in the amount of furniture to be found in the various rooms, a number of smaller decorative items are listed as well as rugs, mats, carpeting and oil clothes, together with curtains and blinds. The absence of pictures and more personal furnishings suggests that this inventory may have omitted the governor's own effects even though the caption for this inventory has had the word "Public" crossed out. The only lighting mentioned in this inventory is a pair of diamond drop candlesticks and eight lamps four of which were stored in the "*Lamp room*".

In July 1846, a few days before the departure of Governor Gipps, a fourth inventory of furniture at Government House, Parramatta was made. Vague descriptions can be identified with items appearing in the earlier inventories including "*2 half circular Tables old*" and floor covering carpets are described as Kidderminster and Brussels. The fifth and final inventory was made in February 1855 a month after Governor FitzRoy, the last vice regal resident of the house, had left the colony. Various items were noted as being removed to Government House, Sydney. Others were noted as being removed to Maitland Police Court and a number of items were despatched to Andrew Lenehan, the

Sydney cabinetmaker, possibly for repair or sale. Lenehan was active at this time for work with the government. Throughout the period the house was used as a vice regal residence, much of its furniture would have been augmented by the personal furniture of the various governors which would have been brought out with them from England or provided locally. This furniture would have been taken back with them to England or disposed of locally at the end of their term of office.

In the *Sydney Gazette*, 4 January 1822, the "Household Furniture, Books, Plate, Table linen, China ware, Carriages, &c. belonging to Major General Macquarie" were offered for sale at public auction by Simeon Lord. "Ornamental Lamps" were sold a few weeks later and during the following year the balance of Macquarie's effects "consisting of several Articles of Household Furniture, table linen, napkins, books, chandeliers (beautifully ornamented), pictures, window curtains and a complete mounting for a carriage, with other items too numerous to mention" were auctioned. Although the earlier advertisement mentioned catalogues available, none are known to have survived.

In the *Australian*, 8 December 1825, is an auction announcement of the "valuable effects, the property of Sir Thomas Brisbane KCB ... comprising an elegant and substantial yellow bodied carriage, with silver mounted harness for 4 horses, complete, capital double and single barrelled fowling piece ... choice books, maps, charts, beautiful dinner service, globe and hall lamps, excellent saddlery, a very handsome and highly finished French clock with glass shade, a musical time beater, &c." His astronomical instruments in the Observatory were purchased by the government and later transferred to the Sydney Observatory.

The *Australian*, 16 September 1831, reported that the effects of Governor Darling including the family plate, pictures, carriages, etc. "are all going-a-going to the hammer" and readers were promised "rare bargains". The *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 January 1855, offered for auction the "neat substantial and well selected furniture" of Governor FitzRoy prior to his departure from the colony "consisting chiefly of 18 bedsteads, 8 arm and easy chairs, 24 tables, 12 washstands, wine, brandy, ale and stout".

With the exception of a few pieces of furniture removed to Government House, Sydney and to Andrew Lenehan and some government departments the government owned furniture at Government House, Parramatta was sold by public auction on the site in June 1855.

The *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 May 1855, announced "Mr. J. Staff has received to sell by auction as above, a quantity of household furniture consisting chiefly as follows, of 32 dining, loo, card, square, dressing, and kitchen tables; 9 clothes presses, 40 easy, arm and single chairs, 2 sofas, 4 chests of drawers, lamps, carpets and rugs, 2 bidets, a first rate Norfolk Island drip stone, 4 side-boards, 1 cellaret, cupboards, a large flour bin, a set of bed steps, wash-stands, pier glass, a number of single iron stump bedsteads, &c. The whole to be sold in lots to suit purchasers".

The dispersal of this furniture was brought about by the abandonment of the house as a Vice Regal residence, a result of the refusal by the English and local government to maintain two official residences following the completion of the new Government House at Sydney. No items of the original furniture that were sold at auction in 1855 have yet been located and authenticated. While a few pieces were sent to

Government House Sydney, the balance which would appear to have included items from the various inventories were probably sold to local residents of Parramatta. Future research may be able to identify some of this furniture which hopefully will one day be returned to the house.

Much of the furniture at Old Government House today has been selected from the information based on the several early inventories and other documentation mentioned. This applies particularly to those items of colonial manufacture which reflect the varying levels of craftsmanship in the colony during the early nineteenth century ranging from the sophisticated and high quality design to the mundane and cottage quality that was to be found in the lesser rooms on the colonial interior.

The reader of isolated inventories should be cautioned. Valuable as these documents are, they must be used carefully, ideally in conjunction with others of similar households, in similar areas and of the same period. They cannot tell us of the placement of furniture in a room and more frequently than not include only the type of furniture with no mention of its timber, style, size or fabric upholstery.

The major achievement of the National Trust at Old Government House, Parramatta, was that in the space of a few years it was able to assemble and display an unrivalled collection of early colonial furniture, a task that would today be almost impossible and beyond the resources and opportunity of even the best endowed public institution and wealthy private collector. Its collection of well over 100 items dates from the early years of the nineteenth century to the second half of that century and includes several items that can be

attributed to known cabinetmakers. The earliest and best known is the Packer cabinet which was made in 1815. This is the earliest known pieces of Australian furniture signed and dated by its maker. Made by the first major native-born Australian cabinetmaker, it is a key documentary piece providing us with a means of firmly dating and attributing on style, materials and construction those few examples of locally made furniture that have survived from this period. It was undoubtedly made in the workshop of Lawrence Butler, Packer's master, who was the first active cabinetmaker of note in Australia none of whose work has been firmly identified. Other important items from this period include two chests of drawers, two four - post bedsteads and a rectangular breakfast table as well as a number of lesser items including work tables and a tea caddy.

There is no public collection in Australia to rival the quality and quantity of this collection and only one private collection can equal its coverage of furniture of the Macquarie period and earlier. The quality of its coverage of the latter periods is more varied and while individual items in private collections may be superior no private or public collection can equal its coverage of Australian furniture of the first half of the nineteenth century.

The current widespread interest by collectors and institutions has been almost entirely due to the interest aroused by this collection, which has been widely featured in numerous newspaper and magazine articles as well as a number of more serious publications on the subject of colonial furniture which have drawn heavily on this collection (together it should be added with those

pieces belonging now to the National Trust and housed at Experiment Farm Cottage). It is no coincidence that all this apparent sudden interest dates from 1970, when Government House Parramatta was officially opened to public inspection.

The Trust with the assistance of a number of private collectors and antique dealers have succeeded in arousing a public interest to an aspect of our heritage which only a few years ago was regarded of little significance other than of a quaint curiosity. Not only has the Trust drawn public attention to early Australian furniture by its displays at Old Government House and Experiment Farm Cottage but it has further created a public awareness of the subject by several exhibitions, the best known being "First Fleet to Federation" at Lindesay, Darling Point in 1976 which succeeded in attracting a record attendance and a renewed interest not only in colonial furniture but also into other aspects of early Australian decorative arts. Regrettably the Trust has unleashed a monster it cannot control. Alas, the day is long gone when it was able to acquire for little, examples of early Australian craftsmanship because no one wanted "*club footed copies of English provincial furniture*". A different song is now sung in antique shops and auction rooms. But thirty years ago it was a different story.

Following a seminar on the interpretation and presentation of Old Government House in 1985 and recent discussion in 1993, the Trust resolved to implement in stages a re-interpretation programme commencing with the recreation of the ground floor to focus on the Macquarie period. This will include changing room usage and furniture relate to the Antill Inventory and early plans.

Architectural and archaeological research on the fabric of the building over the last twenty years together with scholarly studies on furniture, decorative arts and Australia's social history has greatly expanded our knowledge and enables us to adopt a more rigorous approach to Old Government House's redefinition, reinstallation and reinterpretation.

The present reinterpretation has brought a new look to the once familiar interiors, but not without some disquiet. Some have claimed that its inaccurate furnishing arrangements deserve to remain untouched because of its importance to the history of the preservation movement in Australia. Old Government House may never be perfectly furnished but its furniture arrangements are not immutable.

Although the ground floor is to present the Macquarie period, the upper floor will include displays relating to other Vice-Regal residents utilising post - 1825 items in the collection as well as related changing thematic exhibitions.

The economics of maintaining the house must involve it in attracting Trust members and visitors on a regular basis. I hope and believe the re-interpretation of Old Government House will achieve this. The Australiana Society is grateful to the National Trust for making today's Australia Day lunch possible. I imagine we are all members of both worthwhile organisations, those who are not, I invite to join.

A number of guests here today are collectors of early colonial furniture. I would like to remind them that the National Trust would be delighted to receive by donation or bequest suitable pieces of furniture to enrich this outstanding collection.

## 1821 Inventory

List of Furniture &c. at Government House Parramatta belonging to Government:

### Breakfast Room

- 1 Large book-Case
- 6 Cedar Chairs with red backs and Cane bottoms
- 2 D° Scrolled back arm D°
- 1 Large round breakfast Table
- 1 Grate

### New Bed Room

- 2 Large Arm Chairs, Cane bottoms, backs and Elbows
- 7 Cross backed Cane bottom Chairs
- 2 Arm Chairs to D°
- 2 Dressing Tables with Drawers
- 1 Large Swing Glass
- 2 Cloathes Horses and 1 Grate

### Dressing Romm

- 1 Chest of Drawers with turned Nobs
- 1 Cloathes Press
- 1 Dressing Table with one Drawer
- 4 Nursery Chairs with wooden bottoms

### Small Lobby

- One Cedar Chest of Drawers

### Colonade

#### Governor's Office

- 1 Large Writing Table with 2 Drawers
- 1 Cedar Wash-hand Stand
- 1 Arm Chair and 2 Small D° cane bottoms
- 1 Chest of Drawers inlaid with beef Wood
- 1 Cloathes Horse, fire Irons, Grate and Fender

### Middle Hall

- 2 Arm and 4 Small Cedar Hall Chairs
- 1 Child's D°
- 1 Stool

### Pantry

- 1 Large Side board
- 2 D° Cedar Trays
- 1 Plate Warmer

### Front Hall

- 2 Small Round Tables made to fold
- 8 Cedar Hall Chairs

### Drawing Room

- 2 Sofas
- 4 Cedar cross backed Arm Chairs, cane bottoms
- 1 Rose-Wood Scroll backed Arm Chair, Cane D° and backed
- 9 Scroll backed Cedar Chairs D°

- 1 Chimney Glass GUILT frame
- 1 Grate and a Fender

### Dining Room

- 12 Double flapped Dining Tables and 2 half Circles
- 2 Imitation Marble D°
- 2 Cross backed Arm Chairs, with Cane bottoms
- 9 Scroll backed Cedar D° with D° Grate fire Irons and fender
- 1 Small square Side board, with Drawers at each End

### No. 1 Room

- 1 Dressing Table with Drawers
- 1 Chest of Drawers
- 6 Cross backed Chairs with Cane bottoms
- 1 Cloathes Horse
- 1 Fender and fire Irons

### No. 2 Room

- 1 mattress 1 Bolster and 3 Blankets
- 1 Beef Wood Dressing Table with 3 Drawers
- 1 Cedar Bason Stand
- 4 D° Wooden bottomed Chairs
- 1 Grate, and 1 Cloathes Horse

### No. 3 Room

- 2 Dressing Tables one Drawer each
- 2 Wash hand Stands
- 4 Cedar Chairs Wooden bottomed
- 2 Matrasses
- 2 Bolsters 2 Blankets and 1 Cloathes Horse

### No. 4 Room

- 1 Tent Bed Stead (Blue Gum)
- 1 Mattress 1 Blanket
- 1 Dressing Table and Wash hand Stand
- 2 Cross backed cane bottomed Chairs
- 1 Clothes Horse, Grate & fender

### No. 5 Room

- 1 Dressing Table
- 2 Wash hand Stands
- 4 Rush bottomed Chairs
- 3 Cross backed Cedar bottomed Chairs, Fire Irons and Fender
- 1 Small Pembroke Table

### No. 6 Room

- 1 Chest of Drawers with turned Nobs
- 1 Dressing Table with 2 Drawers
- 8 Cross backed Chairs Cane bottomed
- 2 Arm D° D°
- 2 Cloathes Horses
- 1 Grate, fire Irons and Fender

### Water Closet

- 1 Cistern

### Loft

- 1 Large Size 4 post bedstead (7 feet 7 In. high 5 D° 4 D° Wide 6 feet in length)

No bed[d]ing or furniture belonging to it.

### No. 7 Room

- 1 Tent Bedstead
- Old Printed Furniture to D°
- 1 Window Curtain of same
- 2 Wool Matrasses
- 7 Blankets
- 1 Wool Mattress
- 1 Cedar Table with Drawer
- 2 Old Cedar Rush bottomed Chairs

### Servants Hall

- 2 Large Hall Tables and 4 Stools
- 1 D° Cedar Case

### Small Larder

- 1 Safe and 1 Leaden Salting Trough
- 4 Harness Casks

### Large Larder

- 1 Safe 1 Baking Trough
- 1 Large Cedar & 1 Bacon Rack
- 4 Harness Casks

### Small Larder

- 1 Safe 1 Baking Trough
- 1 Large Cedar & 1 Bacon Rack
- 1 Coffee - and 1 Pepper Mill
- 1 Old Oak Table
- Half Bush<sup>1</sup> Measure

### Kitchen

- Two Kitchen Tables. - 1 Cedar D°
- 1 Kitchen Range - Copper and Stoves
- 1 Dripping Pan, Stand and fender
- 2 Iron boilers lined with Tin
- 6 Sauce Pans of Sizes
- Frying Pan and Grid-Iron
- Tongs Poker & Shovell

### Scullery

- One Common Table
- One Iron Pot (fixed in brick)
- One Small Dripping Pan Stand

### House-keeper's Room

- 2 Small Cedar Tables with Drawers
- 6 Rush bottomed Chairs
- 1 Old fender

### Servants Bed Room

- 3 Cedar Sofa Frames (old)
- 2 Small Wool Matrasses
- 1 Small Old Table
- 2 Common Stump Bedsteds

### Laundry

- One complete Mangle
- 1 Large Ironing Table
- 2 Water Casks - 2 foot Tubs
- 3 round Washing Tubs - 1 Bathing D°
- 5 Blankets - 1 Cloathes Horse
- 1 Table & washing Stool
- 1 Copper and Iron Dogs

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# The Earthen Floor in 19th century Australia

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Michael Bogle

The earthen floor has not been widely studied in Australia (or elsewhere). This brief essay seeks to investigate the issue by examining reprinted primary source material on Australian housing and to form some hypotheses about the use of soil floors in domestic interiors. The ingenuity demonstrated in developing three-dimensional structures for shelter is often considered a measure of a culture's technical achievements and floors should be considered of equal importance.

In Australia's European and Aboriginal past, *terra firma* quite often provided serviceable floors. But as the colony developed, an earthen floor became a concise indicator of the resident's social or economic status. For example, Watkin Tench's 1790 tour of Rose Hill (Parramatta) on 16 November found that "*The main street of the new town ... contains at present thirty-two houses completed, of twenty-four feet by twelve each, on a ground floor each, built of wattles plastered with clay and thatched.*"<sup>1</sup>

Why did Tench find the earth floors of these structures worth noting? The passage is rich with meanings: these small, ordered wattle-and-daub structures were intended to hold ten transported convicts per hut.

Tench's inferences rest on British prejudice. This is illustrated by London's Samuel Johnson's observations on earthen floors in the Scottish Hebrides in 1775. "*Of the houses, little can be said.*" Johnson notes,

*"... With want of cleanliness it were ingratitude to reproach them. The servants, having been bred on the naked earth, think every floor clean..."*<sup>2</sup>

The socio-economic implications of earth floors in Australia persisted. In 1847, the anonymous "*Emigrant Mechanic*" comments: "*[In] the worst parts of the Rocks [Sydney] ... [W]e went into a little weather-boarded shed, not much bigger than a large chest of drawers, built up to the back of the house for a sort of wash house. Here the two occupied one small bed on the bare ground.*"<sup>3</sup>

A fictional treatment of Irish convicts in the novel, *The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh* (ca.1845), set in Liverpool, New South Wales, describes drinking and dancing to "*Ould Ireland*" inside an earth-floored hut. After the revels, "*...Rashleigh and his travelling companion ..[were] given a straw shakedown on a sheet of bark before the fire. They were the first to wake next morning, and at once the younger made a fire, swept up the earthen floor, and tidied up the hut...*"<sup>4</sup>

Although there was an unmistakable social stigma about a domestic earthen floor, they remained popular amongst those for whom social achievement meant little; free settlers and former convicts who needed inexpensive shelter.

In 1827, Peter Cunningham's memoir of his two years in the colony recalled an eight pound house: "*I have known a house ... twenty-four feet long by twelve [feet] broad, with a backskilling, or lean-to, of the same length seven feet wide ... put up for the small*

*sum of 8 pounds ... The house was thatched, had a chimney, and was divided into four compartments... . The floors are laid with well-wrought hard soil, mixed with sand...*"<sup>5</sup>

What is well-wrought hard soil? There were several ways to prepare an earth floor. One could do nothing, of course, but some builders chose to prepare a "hard" stabilised earth floor. "Stabilised" earth is described by G.F. Middleton, a CSIRO scientist specialising in earthen architecture, as a mixture of soils such as clay with agents such as sand, cement, lime, bituminous emulsions, ant-beds or termite mounds, rice husks, straw and cow-dung.<sup>6</sup> A sand and clay mixture is a common stabilised soil.

To harden or stabilise an earthen floor could improve its resistance to water as well as wear. Samuel Johnson's experiences with earth floors in eighteenth century Scotland illustrate the potential dangers of water. "*We were driven once ... to the house of a gentleman, where, after a very liberal supper, when I was conducted to my chamber, I found an elegant bed of Indian cotton, spread with fine sheets. The accomodation was flattering; I undressed myself, and felt my feet in the mire. The bed stood on the bare earth, which a long course of rain had softened to a puddle.*"<sup>7</sup>

Dampness and uncontrolled drainage was the earthen floor's greatest enemy. As J.C. Loudon's 1869 *Encyclopedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture* says of earthen floors: "*A great object, in all ground floors of cottages, is to lay such a foun-*

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Michael Bogle is a curator with the Historic Houses Trust of NSW.

dition as to insure their dryness..."<sup>8</sup>

John Everett's experiences in 1838 shows the effects of wear on an unstabilised earth floor in a bush hut in Guyra, New South Wales. "On entering, mind the step," he warns, "for though the earthen floor was level with the door sill at first, the frequent brushings out have sunk it not a little and I expect if we lived in here very long we should sink so low that we should not be able to look over the door sill."<sup>9</sup>

While jokes were made of earthen floors, they could possess a modest charm. An unidentified and undated poetry fragment from a twentieth century memoir provides

an illustration of an embellished earthen floor:

*"The old hands told me how to  
build a clean dirt floor:*

*Beat it hard with spades and tread  
of feet.*

*Then soak with green cow dung  
and sweep it again.*

*Now sprinkle water, fire and clean  
creek sand,*

*And sometimes strew it with cool  
green leaves;*

*Sprinkle and sweep it twice a day  
Until, clean and sweet and hard,*

*It gleams, black, polished like a  
board."<sup>10</sup>*

The common use of earthen floors in the bush settlements seems to have continued until the late nineteenth century and perhaps beyond. Mrs Lance Rawson's Publication subtitled *A Practical Guide for the Cottage, Villa and Bush Home* was released in 1894 and addressed the topic of "House Building" in the following manner: "In this plan [for a four-roomed house] I have not provided for a floor, so many huts in the far bush are made without flooring where time and trouble are considered, but a floor is easily made. Joists would need to be laid across, and slabs or boards nailed across them. Another way I once



An Earthen Floor in Mrs Donaghue's kitchen, Manaaring, NSW 1905 (detail). Bourke Historical Society. Bicentennial Copying Project, State Library of NSW.

saw was with sheets of bark laid upon the earth floor. This is not a very even flooring, nor for that matter are slabs.”<sup>11</sup>

In this analysis of domestic earthen floors in Australia, it is evident that a crafted floor of timber, stone or brick is seen as a progression from a “natural” earth floor. A shelter is created with a roof and walls upon an earthen surface. The need for the construction of an additional floor of timber or other material is an acknowledgement of the hierarchies of the materials of a the domestic house. Creating a floor over *terra firma* is part of the transition from a hut to a house; the move from itinerancy to permanence.

This evolution is illustrated in an 1886 memoir of a recently married Gippsland selector’s wife getting her first introduction to a new bush home. “[In the cabin] [t]here was a large fireplace, made of wood outside and lined with stones and mud. There were also windows and a door, but it was not easy to get inside, as there was a large stump in the doorway. My husband had brought down some floor boards on horseback and had made a table of what was left over, after flooring the two rooms...”<sup>12</sup> Considerable effort had been expended to make this modest bush home presentable by the addition of floorboards over a raw earth floor.<sup>13</sup>

In conclusion, an earthen floor provides the first spatial dimension of the most rudimentary domestic architecture. The earth, like all natural phenomena, has considerable variability and one must intervene

to reconcile its inconsistencies. This is described by authorities in earthen architecture as “stabilisation”. Attempts to “improve” an earthen floor by the addition of other soils, chemicals or natural substances are progressive acts.

In the nineteenth century, residents who elected not to improve their earthen floors were judged harshly. A domestic dwelling with a bare earth floor had negative social and economic undertones for contemporary observers. An earthen floor in a new bush home, however, provided a foundation for later improvements. Timber floors were assumed to be the next step in the architectural evolution of an Australian settler’s home.

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13. John Archer’s 1987 volume, *Building a Nation* also explores early timber flooring. “The first thing to do in the way of improvements was to cover the earthen floor of the hut with smoothly dressed slabs bedded on the earth, for which purpose a hundred were split for us...” Alfred Joyce. *A Homestead History*. (G.F. James, editor). 1949. p.51, cited in Archer, p. 76.

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# Te Wherowhero, Tawhiao Matataera Potatau II (1825-1894)

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*John Hawkins*

King Potatau II was the son of the first Maori king, whom he succeeded in 1860. At the outbreak of the Waikato War in 1863, he commanded the Maoris against the British troops under General Cameron. His patriotism was beyond question and after the signing of the general amnesty of 1871, he either surrendered or refused his personal pension and privileges from the British and served the Maori Kingdom reigning as an absolute monarch over one of the most extensive and fertile portions of New Zea-

land. His illustrious descent and exalted titles caused him to be venerated by his people. Portraits of King Potatau exist in The General Assembly Library and the Alexander Turnbull Library in New Zealand.<sup>1</sup>

I recently purchased the bust of the King and that of his Queen, Hera, in England. The Auckland Museum has a pair of similar Royal busts in its collection which were acquired by purchase in Scotland. The King visited England in 1884 and it might be suggested that these regal represen-

tations were taken to the United Kingdom as royal gifts. A further bust of the King only is in the collection of the Matakoho Kauri Museum in New Zealand.

A fourth bust by the same sculptor, also in the Auckland Museum, is accompanied by the following label: "*Teto Te Wheoa – chief whose tribe reside near Mt Egmont on West Coast of NZ. Carved out of kauri gum – a rare and unique specimen of native workmanship and a good likeness of this well known chief. It was given to me by ...*



Rich ... to E. Graham at Bay ... in 1886. Geo Graham."

A fifth bust subject unknown was presented by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks, the first keeper of British and Medieval Antiquities and Ethnography, to the British Museum before his death in 1897. His magnificent collection of medieval and European silver was also bequeathed to the Museum.<sup>2</sup> The Auckland Museum contains a further two unidentified busts, one of a woman and child and the other of a Maori man. This completes the location of all known nineteenth century large busts by this yet unknown Kauri gum sculptor.

It is unlikely that these busts would be made after the death of the Sovereign in 1894 and it should be noted that the bust of Chief Te Wheora has a provenance from the label of no later than 1886, the bust belonging to Franks was in the British Museum before his death in 1887. The size of the specimens averaging 13 inches in height requires a large piece of semi fossilised Kauri gum for its creation. The portraits are exact in the delineation of the individual moko thereby allowing accurate identification of the subject.

Kauri gum, a type of amber, is formed as a result of the bleeding from the wounds of the conifer Kauri tree, *Agathis Australis*. This tree is one of the worlds largest living things, second only in size of the giant redwoods in California. The largest tree in timber content was burned in the forest fires of 1889. This tree was 97 ft 6 inches to the first limb and 18 ft 6 inches in trunk diameter. The largest tree that exists today known as Tanenahuta (God of the Forest) is only 46 ft to the first branch with a diameter of 14 feet across and is estimated to be in excess of 1,200 years old. The Kauri's predecessors most of which have been cut or burnt down grew to an age of 3,000 years plus.

When a branch broke, as with our Australian gum trees, the resulting bleed formed as a sticky mass covering the wound, if this happened in the fork of a branch a large mass could result. When the tree fell the wood rotted but the gum remained.<sup>3</sup>

In the early nineteenth century, Maoris used the gum for lighting fires, for it is very flammable, and also for colour pigment to stain the newly tattooed Moko designs on the face and body. This was done by burning the gum to a black soot and adding animal or bird fat. With the advent of the European, the gum was exported as a base for varnish or lacquer for furniture polish. At the peak of the industry in the early 1900s, there were over 4,000 Dalmatians (Croats) digging the semi fossilised gum from the vanished Kauri forests, over eleven thousand tonnes being exported in 1899.

It is tempting to think of these representations being carved and created by a Maori as is indicated by the quoted label above. It is unlikely that Franks as keeper of the Ethnography

collection at the British Museum, would bequeath a European sculptors work to that institution, could it possibly be another gift from the Kings visit in 1884. I would date these sculptures circa 1875, being presumably created from life by someone with an understanding of the importance of Moko and considerable skill in repressing accurately the features of the human face.

I would like to acknowledge the following for their help in the preparation of this short note: Mr Ian Strang, Matakoho Kauri Museum and Ms Rose Young, History Department, Auckland Museum.

#### Notes

1. G. H. Scholefield. *A Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*.
2. Sir Hercules Read, *Catalogue of the Silver Plate, bequeathed to the British Museum by Sir A. W. Franks 1928*. Major General Robley in his book on Moko, published in 1896, refers to this bust on page 97, stating it to be "presented".
3. Notes supplied by the Matakoho Kauri Museum.

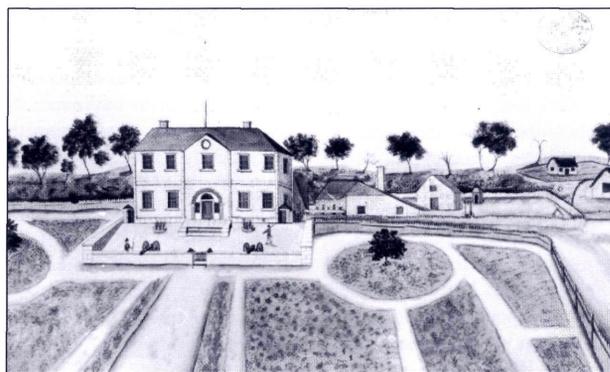


Illustration from *The Australian Colonial House* by James Broadbent. It shows Government House, Sydney by Thomas Watling. Entitled a *View of Governor Philip [sic] House Sydney Cove Port Jackson taken from NNW*. Courtesy: Watling Collection, the Natural History Museum, London. *The Australian Colonial House* is a new publication by Hordern House.

# Souvenirs from the Land of The Long White Cloud.

Frederic A. Sinfield

The first known souvenir from New Zealand was a tattooed head acquired by Joseph Banks in January 1770. This macabre trade continued into the 1830s and eventually ceased as the number of relics became exhausted.

During the 19th century there was considerable to-ing and fro-ing as the Europeans established themselves and as export and import contacts were made. One New Zealand "commodity" recognised during the latter part of the 19th century was visitor traffic or today's term "tourism".

New Zealand was the first country to create a government department responsible for the establishment, running and the promotion of tourism. The Tourist and Health Resorts Department was established on 1 February 1901. When the first tally of visitors was made in 1903-04, some 5233 had been counted.

In the 19th century the tourist destinations were not always the easiest to visit but gradually the railway and roads opened up the country. These modes of travel supplemented the sea lanes which were the main means of moving around and between the islands. When sea travel was in its heyday this was the only way to go. These floating hotels offered all kinds of attractions on board as well as a base from which to visit the attractions on land.

Of course, part of the whole venture was in purchasing mementoes of the places visited and gifts for those left at home. Nowadays air travel is the way to go but the huge range of souvenirs still accounts for a fair amount of the visitors purchases and still add

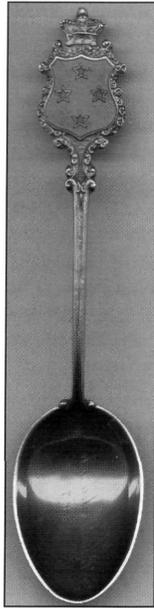


Fig. 1

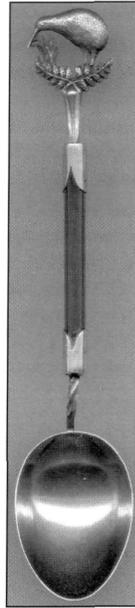


Fig. 2

considerably to foreign earnings.

An innovation brought about by the Industrial Revolution was the development of the international exhibition. The building of something appropriate for the staging of an exhibition was an expensive proposition. These exhibitions were showcases for the promotion of local as well as imported products. Just how popular these were can be judged by the number that were staged, nineteen were held in New Zealand alone between 1865 and 1925. The halls never filled with all kinds of products, inventions, consumer goods and other attractions. The crowds could marvel at the exhibits and buy some souvenir of their visit to the Exhibition. The most produced souvenir was a small die-stamped commemo-

rative medal struck at the exhibition and issued in their hundreds. (Figs. 4 & 6). Many survive as the interest in them soon waned and the medals relegated to a drawer or a box lay undisturbed for decades.

In New Zealand precious metals were being mined and exported by the late 1850s. One unusual find was in the Thames area where the gold-bearing ore was 1/3 silver which posed certain smelting problems. Even though locally smelted gold and silver was available not that much was used by the local workers in precious metals. There seemed to be a consumer bias against locally made goods as somehow being inferior to imported goods. This perceived bias was unjustified as many of the jewellers and gold/silversmiths had been trained overseas prior to settling in New Zealand.

New Zealand has unique designs for souvenirs to offer. The Maori



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

decorative arts, stylised flora and fauna such as the silver fern (*tripinnate*) and the kiwi, greenstone (nephrite from the west coast of the South Island) and paua shell (*Haliotis iris*). These lend themselves for incorporation into souvenirs, as do the coats of arms of the various cities which make colourful enamel spoon finials.

Not all the items made for the visitor were manufactured locally. Souvenir spoons were made in the USA in styles similar to those made for their home market. These date from the early days of the Edwardian era. Certain local firms had branches or agents in the UK through whom souvenirs were imported. The most often seen mementos are commemorative teaspoons or nephrite-handled flatware. (Figs 1-3). The working of nephrite by Europeans started with C. Chilcott, lapidarist, of Hokitika in 1868. H. Kohn is listed, from 1871, as using nephrite in conjunction with precious metal. Nephrite handles were in vogue from the 1880s onwards. Many of the handles were cut and polished in Ger-

many from boulders exported from the west coast. A popular piece of gold mounted jewellery, from round the turn-of-the century, was a nephrite brooch with "NZ" or "Kia Ora" in gold set with seed pearls as shown in the Stewart Dawson & Co NZ Ltd catalogue of about 1910. (Figs 5 & 7).

A check of the spoon's maker and standard mark shows that the bowl and stem were, often, manufactured and assayed in the UK – usually Birmingham. The finial added locally as required. A spoon, with only a "STERLING" punch featuring the "Queen's crown" and engraved in the bowl "Christchurch 1917" was widely circulated. This item seems to have been made during the period when Queen Victoria was alive but remained in stock for about 2 decades. Or the die was used without the crown being altered after the accession of King Edward VII. Because of the UK marking system one may date the year of assay, so with this information, the New Zealand souvenir spoons and butter knives seem to have been made between 1900 and the 1930s.

Paua shell souvenirs are restricted by the size of shell. So kiwi cutouts for spoon finials, cuff links or asymmetrical finger rings are the most often seen. The colourful shell is



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

shown off well when mounted in silver and is the easiest recognised New Zealand souvenir.

Tourism had become such an important earner of foreign currency that by the late 1920s overseas offices of the Tourist Department had been established in most Australian cities, as well as Bombay, Calcutta, Rangoon, Vancouver, San Francisco, Durban, Johannesburg and London.

As in bygone days the tourists needs of today are catered for by the contemporary workers in precious metals. Displays in the main centres of quality New Zealand souvenirs are as interesting to today's taste as those that appealed to our grandparents.

With the publication of the first work on New Zealand Gold and Silversmiths, silver and gold pieces are gaining the respect which up to now few were accorded.

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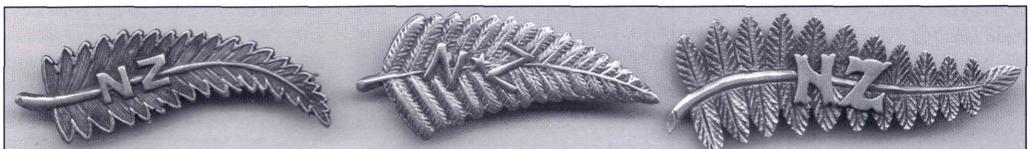


Fig. 7.

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# English Furniture and the Australian Market in the late 19th century

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*"Our Trade in Australia" The Cabinet Maker & Art Furniter (London) Vol 10, October 1, 1889*

In this enterprising commercial world of ours where we "live, more and have our being," when the telegraph and the steamship are annihilating distance and daily bringing us in closer touch with all foreign countries, it distinctly becomes the duty of the prudent, energetic man to turn his serious attention to those far-of possessions of ours across thousand of miles of ocean, and after learning as intimately as possible the requirements of life there, to utilise his knowledge in supplying all their wants in the fittest and completest manner. Viewed in this light, the words of that wise old merchant (as Ruskin terms him) whose ledgers have been preserved and handed down from a thousand years before the Christian era to this present age, may well be revived, and the maxim "The eyes of a wise man are in the ends of the earth" serve as a stimulus to those who set the limit to their business areas only on the furthest borders of civilisation. At all events, they may well serve in this place as a peg whereon we may hang certain observations and reflections gathered from a long residence in what we may be pardoned for thinking of as the most important of our Colonial possessions—Australia and New Zealand.

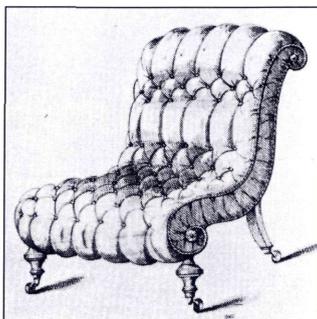
The section of the business community to which the majority of our readers belong, concerning itself as, it does, with the furnishing of the home, stands somewhat in need of a little reliable information as to the character of the home life in the Colonies, and the most suitable class of goods to send out to meet the demand and exigencies of that life. Any course of action based on a compari-

son of Colonial life with that of our country is certain to fail lamentably at many points, for the conditions are so dissimilar and various. This latter observation is not to be wondered at, seeing that the territories we refer to embrace 40 degrees of latitude, an area four times greater than that of the parent country, and having climates ranging from that of the south of England and north of France to those of Abyssinia and Ceylon. But with this important reservation we may safely say that, on the whole, furniture is the same all the world over. The domestic fittings of the Sumali and Malayan races differ very slightly in form and design from those of the more civilised and mixed populations of the Australian Colonies; the English type is the one invariably chosen, and the whole difference lies in the material and its construction.

We may say, therefore, that Colonial houses are furnished almost exactly like the English, but on a more moderate scale, this being influenced, of course, by local surroundings, which set hard and fast limits to the decoration of the home. The migratory character of the population

which so largely preponderates at present, owing to the better classes—the bankers, insurance agents—loan and mercantile companies, removing from one centre to another as trade ebbs and flows, and the opening of fresh agencies demand, has a most marked effect on the style of furniture indulged in. Freight and carriage are such serious items that in every case of removal to some town, perhaps 600 miles off, perhaps only 100, the furniture is sent to the sale rooms and sold by auction for what it will fetch. This being the case, it is a very difficult and almost impossible matter to persuade a Colonial buyer to indulge in expensive and high-class work. He simply answers with the bugbear "Sale room", and proceeds to select cheap articles that will be likely to wear a couple of years, and fetch perhaps half their original value at the end of that time. Bearing this in mind, it is no wonder, then, that the numerous auction rooms are such formidable competitors of the more legitimate stores, and possess their own particular batch of clients, who buy regularly and consistently everything they require, from a saddle to a sofa, at these nondescript, heterogeneous rooms.

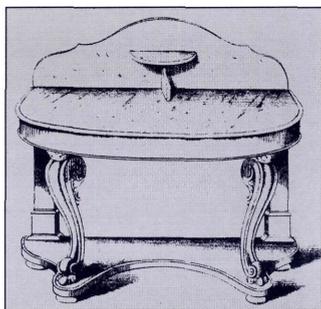
The centres of population may be classed, for the purposes of the house furnisher, under three heads: first, the large metropolitan cities (e.g. Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, etc.); secondly, the provincial capitals and smaller towns (such as the New Zealand coast towns and Ballarat, Newcastle, Rockhampton, etc.); and thirdly, the Bush townships with populations ranging from 700 to 5,000 and which are too numerous to mention.



From *Light's Cabinet Furniture Designs and Catalogue, 1881.*

The importance of this knowledge to exporters cannot be over-estimated; the class of furniture required, with the exception of division 1, being the cheapest compatible with durability, all the fine high-class work being practically out of the market. In fact, expensive furniture is only useful to Colonial cabinet-makers as an advertisement – showing what could be imported or made if required – and as a means of education, teaching, perhaps imperceptibly, what the artistic decoration of the home really means. But Colonial store-keepers are scarcely philanthropic enough as yet to keep private museums at the cost of their own purse, and consequently many a London firm has been put down as too expensive to be bought from, simply because the work sent out was too high-class.

The one important fact to be kept in mind is the enormous difference in the cost of furniture in London and in the Colonies. The impossibility of selling furniture at even double the English wholesale price has to be recognised. This is startling, but nonetheless true. A large percentage of profit on landed cost is necessary, good wages are paid, shipping charges are heavy, rates of insurance are abnormal, and a good run of business in most cases absolutely dependent on the weather of the preceding six months. To give an example – which has surprised as many in the Colonies as it will at home – furniture which cost £100 in the London wholesale house, has frequently to be sold at £250 to realise the expenses of shipment (including protective dues at the various ports – with the exception of Sydney, the only free one), and pay a dividend on working expenses. When 60 and 70 per cent has to be added to the invoiced price to get the landed cost, it will readily be seen that the ratio of profit is not excessive, especially when the chapter of accidents is taken into con-



From *Schoolbred's Furniture Designs*, 1876.

sideration.

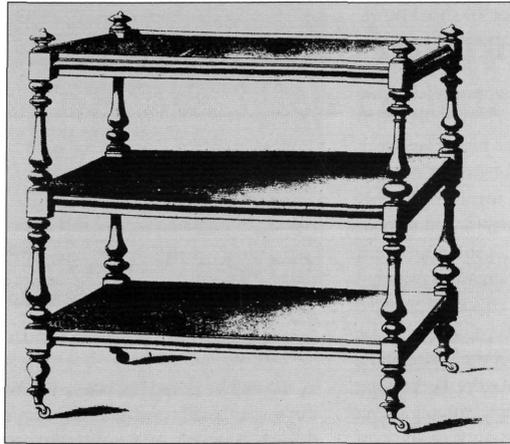
It will be noted that we say good wages are paid, and we may have something to say at a future time to our workshop readers on this point. Meanwhile it is enough that the rate of wages paid to cabinet makers, upholsterers, polishers, etc, is not a *high* one. Many artisans have been grievously disappointed and misled by highly coloured statements and glowing language concerning the so-called "workman's paradise". It may be a paradise? We do not say it is not – but it is of a particularly mild type. The expense of living in the Colonies is very much heavier than at home, and heavier in some Colonies than in others, while the rate of wages, and we say it deliberately, is *not* proportionately higher.

As we have already mentioned, the furniture most suitable for the Colonies is a plainer and more substantial class of work altogether than that usually exported. The usual bread and butter goods so well known to Colonial importers – inlaid, veneered, and only half constructed and not at all the kind of furniture to withstand rapid transitions of temperature, and the long handling to which they are subjected. Indeed, such work is only bought because nothing better is to be had except at prohibitive prices. Chiefly on account of the low price, and sometimes for the attractive finish given to them, these goods form the most portion of exported

furniture, and their poor unsubstantial quality afford a splendid opening for local competition. Thus we find every Colonial cabinet maker advertising his Colonial made furniture as a speciality, and challenging comparison with the imported work. So successful is this local manufacture that fully 50 per cent of the stock in many of the large stores is made up from it. As a rule, Colonial-made furniture is substantially constructed on simple lines, in solid wood (never veneered). It easily brings a higher price than does the more showy imported article. What is wanted is not high finish and an attempt to emulate the decoration and design of high-priced work on a foundation of wretchedly constructed pine framing, but simple, solid, well-made homely furniture, finished off in a plain manner. Could some of our manufacturers spend six months in the warehouses of Australia or New Zealand, they would see the fallacy of sending out such poor, slim, highly decorated goods, which year by year falls back farther before the sound, honestly made Colonial work.

At the same time we must admit that preference is frequently given to imported work, and this for numerous reasons. One which is often given by Colonial customers when buying imported work, is that after the long trying voyage, with its rapid successions of heat and cold, and the time it has stood on show in the stores, if it is in good condition then it is likely to remain so. This, however, is very superficial, and does not merit serious consideration, as it goes no deeper than the mere appearance of the work, and does not question its power of resisting fair wear and tear. This preference is a counterpoise in some measure to the heavy expense of shipment, which handicaps imported work against the cheap class of local manufacture. But the great fact which operates in favour of the

imported article is that it cannot possibly be of Chinese production. It may perhaps be the result of 80 hours' work per week in a London garret, and be an excellent specimen of what the sweating system can produce, but at all events it bears not the taint of the detested Chinese, and this to the majority of Colonial buyers is an all-sufficient recommendation. The pity is that the feeling of antagonism to Chinese furniture does not pervade all classes, and thus, by checking the demand for it, effectually prohibit its production. Its competition with European-made furniture is most unfair. The Chinese cabinet maker does not make a piece of furniture differing in any way in appearance from the European work. He imitates exactly, and to the smallest detail, the work of the white man, and it requires a smart practical judge to deter their handiwork when fresh from the workshop. The detection, by the way, is not so difficult twelve or eighteen months afterwards, when joints are gaping, drawers sticking, polish in patches, and the work a general wreck. Where the Colonial employer can only reckon on eight hours' work from his men at the rate of say 8/- per day, the Chinese competitor will work 11 and 12 hours willingly for from 3/- to 4/- per day. When the public cannot distinguish between English and Chinese work, and the retailer is lax enough in his principles to palm off unblushingly, the one to the other, the rank injustice to English cabinet makers is too strong to be overlooked. It is natural to expect that the legislatures of the Colonies would step in to correct this evil. But although the Governments see plainly enough the necessity of prohibiting the yellow-skinned Mongolians from flooding the Colonies, and to this end have framed numerous laws which rigorously exclude their entrance and settlement, still they refuse to protect the people against those already domi-



*From Schoolbred's Furniture Designs, 1876.*

ciled amongst them. The Chinese are excellent market gardeners in a country when vegetables would be unobtainable were it not for their patient industry, but as cabinet makers their gingerbread productions ruin the sale of good cheap work, and slowly but surely they are pulling their European brethren down nearer their own level. The Colonial employer cannot possibly pay big wages to his men when he has to regulate his prices as far as possible by the production of the Chinese. For example, an ordinary chest of drawers with two long and two short drawers either on plinth or stump feet, cannot be sold by the white man under 45/- (i.e. without the help of machinery, which few workshop possess), whilst the Chinese sell apparently the same article for 30. Quite recently, a number of the Queensland Legislative Assembly endeavoured to get a bill through the House which would put a tax and a distinguishing mark on all Chinese furniture, and thus equalise in some measure the competition. It failed, however, to pass its second stage, probably owing to the great difficulty in putting the Act into operation. The evidence then brought to light the fact that in Brisbane the Chinese cabinet makers far outnumbered the

European craftsman – which latter include a large number of Germans. There is, of course, a strong feeling amongst the better classes against buying Chinese furniture, this enabling legitimate firms to do away altogether with that class of work, many

making capital out of the advertised fact that “no Chinese goods are kept in stock”.

We are glad to take this opportunity of remarking that the idea so long prevalent amongst being good enough for the Colonies, has now quite disappeared. Not very many years ago, furniture was sent out that would most certainly have been returned to the maker on account of faulty workmanship and finish had not the great distance and expense of shipment deterred the dissatisfied recipients. Certain it is that such vile specimens of the cabinet maker's skill, or rather want of it, would never have been sent to a British retailer, the sellers well knowing it would be so much carriage lost. Perhaps, however, the fault was not altogether on the manufacturers side. The goods were sold at a price which put the best workmanship out of the question, and it is quite probable that when placed in the cases they were apparently all that could be desired, the long and often tempestuous voyage being the cause of their opening in such an unsatisfactory state. The increased facilities of transport and high class of ships available now may go a long way to explaining this most salutary improvement.

A word or two about the proper packing of furniture may perhaps be useful to those who are just turning their attention to the growing trade of the Australian Colonies, and who may be anxious to avoid the errors and shortcomings so noticeable in first shipments. There are two methods adopted in packing bulky articles, some sending the goods complete, all polished and ready to be placed on show as soon as unpacked, and others preferring to have them in the white and taken to pieces. This, of course, is a question which is decided usually by the buyer, and much may be said for both ways. In our opinion the first method is the best. If the furniture has been properly packed, and not shipped by novices who are careless as to whether the ship they select is a dry, good weather boat or not, the goods arrive in very good condition. All they require is a little repolishing and repairing here and there, and they can be exhibited at once. In the other case, higher priced labour than that of London has to be employed in fitting parts together which do not thoroughly correspond, and have to be coaxed accordingly, and then there is the delay of polishing. But if this plan of exporting in prices be adopted, we should strongly recommend the complete fitting up of the work before leaving the factory, and a more careful numbering and distinguishing of the various parts.

All furniture should be packed in tin-lined cases. This fact does not seem to be so thoroughly accepted as we could wish. It must be remembered that the voyage from port to port is not all that has to be contended with. We have seen cases which had made the voyage in perfect safety thoroughly saturated and the contents ruined by half an hour's exposure to tropical downpour of rain, in which short space of time the rainfall might easily, and frequently does, equal the average for a month

at home. About the filling of open spaces in the packed furniture we have nothing to say, except that no an inch should be left if possible, seeing that the more value there is in a given space, the smaller will be the percentage of expense to be added to the invoiced cost.

As far as possible, all the parts required for one piece of work should be put in the same case. There is always a liability of a case or two being short shipped, and although it be forwarded by a ship leaving say a fortnight after the other, it may not arrive within a month or six weeks. The aggravation and annoyance occasioned by having a portion only of some much required article can be readily imagined, and there is always a risk of something being mislaid in the interval between the two arrivals. We can fancy we hear old experienced shippers remarking here that they are fully aware of all this, and might have been spared the infliction of so much trite matter. But we can say in reply that we devoutly and sincerely wish they would act up to that knowledge then, for it is the most common occurrence to find an invoice bearing the legend "These parts shipped per such and such a vessel" or "these goods charged previous invoice." More than one repeat order has been lost, or at all event imperilled, in our own recollection, by the inexperience evidenced by these and the before-mentioned delinquencies.

In conclusion, we think that our largest and best manufacturers are not giving the attention to the vast field of enterprise at the Antipodes which they profitably might, and with other excellent results. Business grows rapidly out there, and what is not but a small store is likely to be in twelve months a large warehouse. Energetic, pushing, practical men, who know the ground to be covered, and who have some idea of the particular requirements of the different

Colonies, should be employed to ensure the trade which bids fair to find its way through other channels, past the English houses. Others are out there already; the Americans have a large trade all brought about by their representatives working steadily away on the spot. The Germans, also, are building up a fair business, and large shipments of furniture – and good work too – are finding their way into the Colonies from Hamburg and Vienna. The expense, for a short time, might exceed the business done, but the example of some of our firms has shown us that the results are worth striving for. And when, by actual experience and life amongst them, the different wants of the Colonists are fully understood – when, for instance, the fact is grasped that warm colours in carpets which would sell in Victoria and New Zealand are totally unsuitable for the hot climate of Queensland – then our manufacturers will find that not the least portion of their business is done with their kindred in the growing cities and thriving townships of the "Greater Britain of the South".

We publish these particulars, which have been carefully collected by one of our staff in the Colonies, in order that our manufacturers may be able to properly estimate the forces and rivalry with which they have to contend in that part of the world. Unfortunately, many British houses have lost much business by ignoring the competition of their countries, such as Germany; and though we do not desire to play the part of pessimists in this matter, we do wish to awaken a determination on the part of Britishers that the foreigner should, as far as possible, be kept out of our Colonies.

*[Extract from copy held by the Lyndhurst Conservation Resource Centre, Sydney.]*

# Gold, Calico, Ski-ing and Archaeology

Frederic A. Sinfield

A gold presentation fob medal star with an inscription “Kiandra Snow Shoe Club, NSW, 1898” and “Presented to George Irwin as a “Mark of Esteem” has a place in the development of ski-ing in New South Wales. What lead up to the presentation and what has happened beyond 1898?

The story starts in the Australian Alps where little information is recorded before 1859. The area was part of the tribal lands of the Ngarigo people. The first Europeans to travel in the area were Captian Mark Currie, Brigade Major John Ovens and Constable Joseph Wild in 1823. Hamilton Hume and William Hovell in 1824 when they named the peaks as the Australian Alps. The next party through the area was lead by John Lhotsky who named the Snowy River in 1834. The Polish born explorer, Paul Edmund de Strzelecki, leading an exploration party left Sydney in January 1840 and headed south for Melbourne. On route he climbed and named Australia's highest peak Mt Kosciuszko after the Polish Patriot and volunteer general of the American Revolution – Tadeusz



Kiandra Snow Shoe Club 1893. Presented to George Irwin as Mark of Esteem. Unmarked gold. Wt 6.1g.

Kosciuszko.

Thomas Townsend, surveyed the area in 1846, which was followed by a geology survey by Reverend William Branwhite Clarke in 1851-52. This one-time Head of King's School, Parramatta and curate of various parishes is remembered for his association with the finding of gold, coal and tin. Others are known to have explored, surveyed or tried to settle in the high country such as the Pollocks.

This pioneering grazing family ran sheep on the alpine summer pastures in the 1850's, before finding alluvial gold in November 1859. A gold rush started in December just weeks after the announcement of “GOLD”. The following year, 1860, an estimated 15,000 miners were trying their luck in the area. The rush did not last much beyond a year but did produce rich pickings for the lucky few. The search for riches continued, intermittently, for decades after by the Kiandra Gold Mining Company. Kiandra took the name of the area which had previously been known as

Gianderra or Guyandra by the Bemeringal Aboriginies.

The gold rush attracted miners from around the world and some stayed on after the initial flurry of activity. Those who stayed included some Scandinavians who were accustomed to winter conditions. They had come from the frozen north of Europe where the oldest known set of cross country or langlauf skis is estimated to be some 5000 years old. A Norwegian named Amundsen is credited with making the first pair of “butterpats”. The idea of using skis



KAC. Cross Country H' Cup 1st Miss Hope Week 19.7.19. Maker Amor. Stg Silver. Wt 9.9g.



Australian KAC. Junior Test Kosciuszko 1918, I. H. Week. Unmarked Silver Wt 14.2g.



SCV. Enamel badge by Stokes, Stg Silver. Wt 5.9g.

was new in the Australian Alps in the 1860's. This "ski-ing" caught on with the locals who formed the Kiandra Ski Club in 1861.

Kiandra is acknowledged as the Australian birthplace of recreational ski-ing. "Ski" is from a Northern European linguistic background meaning – cut from a log – a plank. "Plank" describes the early skis well as they were long, wide and heavy with only

a leather strap across to hold the toe. Dexterity and sheer muscle power kept the skier on the butterpats, as they were called. None of the fancy bindings used these days. As time passed snow shoes became the name used for the tennis racquet shaped equipment for tramping across the snow.

This is where George Irwin appears to enter the history of the area. George Irwin was the school teacher from 1895-1899 and was the host at the Alpine Hotel from 1909-1916. Other Irwins were sawmillers of Jindabyne leading to the assumptions that they may have been related and that they could have been the suppliers of the skis made from mountain ash for the ski club.

The Club was established by the beginning of the 1880's and survived until 1909. There is no way of proving from whence came the fob medal, there is no maker's name or a gold standard mark. One would like to think it was made

from locally mined gold and engraved in Kiandra. A more likely explanation was that a nearby town jeweller supplied the piece.

The canvas township of Kiandra took on a more permanent appearance with the construction of substantial basalt and timber buildings.



Kosciusko, Enamel badge by Angus & Coote Ltd, Stg Silver. Wt 3.7g.



Kosciusko Gilded lady skier by AC Ltd, Stg Silver. Wt 5.9.

The hotel, the largest and warmest place in town in the bitter winters, replaced the numerous canvas "grog" shops that had formed part of the townscape. The town even had its own lock-up together with, the usual stores and shops. These are some of the sights being explored by the archaeological team from the ANU.

Probably the most novel claim to fame was an early recycling effort. A printer had set up the local weekly paper "Alpine Pioneer" using the conventional means of printing until winter snows isolated the township. With no newsprint available the printer struck upon a novel means of keeping the community informed by using calico. The news "rag" was printed, distributed, then after hav-

ing been read was collected. The calico was washed, dried and re-used each week during the remainder of the winter isolation.

The news of the winter snow carnivals beyond Cooma were reported in the 1860's but not until the 1890's were visitors attracted from Sydney. Some of the outsiders were familiar with downhill ski-ing while others were surprised to learn Kiandra was a ski resort before Switzerland or Austria realised the possibilities. The horse-drawn vehicles and pack horses of the pre-automobile era were often unable to transport the visitors all the way from Cooma due to the heavy snow. Visitors had to finish the trek on foot.

From this area of the Alps came an internationally used ski-ing word for wax known as "moko". The derivation has two possible sources, either from the Anglo "more go" or Sino "makee go". Various agents were used to try to speed up the racing: these ranged from goats fat, goanna oil to bees wax, boiled linseed oil and resin mixtures. Some hundreds of Chinese lived a segregated existence in Kiandra. This did not stop them from learning the new sport and speeding down the slopes with pigtails flying. The brake pole could be used to knock other ski-ers out of the way.

The next phase of the history of the area is the formation, of the Sydney based N.S.W. Alpine Club (c. 1898). Some of the names of this period involved were the Consul for Norway and Sweden Mr C.A. Falstadt, Sir James Fairfax and Sir Samuel Hordern. The literary talent of the period "Banjo" Paterson paid a visit and subsequently penned the classic "The Man from Snowy River" in 1890's.

The two clubs, Kiandra Snow



SCV, Enamel badge by Wittembach, Melbourne, Stg Silver. No. 267. Wt 4.4g.

Shoe and N.S.W. Alpine, held combined events until the emphasis moved to Kosciusko. The first structure at Digger's Creek was a snow hut. The purpose was for the geologist, Sir Edgeworth David, to be given instruction before joining the Sir Douglas Mawson Antarctic Expedition. The tuition must have been successful as he climbed Mt Erebus in 1908, before reaching the South Pole the following year.

The idea of a winter oriented hotel in the Kosciusko area came from Percy Hunter who had been Secretary of the first Agent-General in London. He had visited Switzerland and seen the potential of winter sports and tourism. The idea did not have universal approval but a route was surveyed from Cooma and a road constructed. The hotel was opened in 1909, the same year as the revamped Kosciusko Alpine Club and the Alpine Club merged. Women were in-

involved in the snow sports – downhill ski-ing and tobogganing from the beginning despite full length dresses which were the fashion of the period.

Few pre 1920's ski-ing related presentation pieces come onto the market. As yet no locally made quality silver "prize" teaspoons depicting skiers have been seen. The Kosciusko Alpine Club or Kosciusko lady skier badges from the early part of this century occasionally appear.

Though presentation pieces are rare there are many photographs of the early snowfield days taken by Charles Kerry or his field operators. C H Kerry is considered the "father" of ski-ing in Australia and instrumental in promoting the snow fields as a recreational area. These photographs give an insight into the days of gum boots, moleskins, heavy jackets and, of course, the hat. This is equipment a modern skier would not dream of taking near a snowfield even for a pre-ski.

The appeal of the sport has grown over the years. The snowfields have changed beyond recognition. The Snowy River Scheme drowned the saw mill as well as the rest of old Jindabyne. Kiandra slipped into icy oblivion until the ANU and NPWS chose the area to conduct a dig in 1995. What will be found? The Black Stump at the top of the racecourse has probably rotted away. Will there be finds other than the usual remnants of a goldfield town of bottles, clay pipes, opium pipes, coins and rusting metal? Maybe the Chinese Joss House will yield some rare ceramics or bronzes. Then, of course, there could be another find and so start another gold rush!

#### Further reading

*Kiandra to Kosciusko* by Klaus Hueneke.

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# The Australiana Society Meeting

## 6 March 1997

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*Caressa Crouch*

Scott Carlin, who is Curator of Elizabeth Bay House for the Historic Houses Trust of NSW, gave a lecture about the exhibition "Floor Coverings in Australia 1800-1950" to the Australiana Society. This lecture was not only illustrated with various slides of interiors, portraits, newspaper advertisements and catalogue pages, but Scott had brought with him a vast range of carpet samples and mats directly from the exhibition!

The floor covering exhibition is being held at the Greenaway Gallery Hyde Park Barracks and draws many of the samples from the historic conservation resource centre collection at the Historic Houses headquarters "Lyndurst" at Glebe. It has a large collection of soft furnishings, floor coverings and wallpaper samples, architectural pattern books, domestic manuals, old catalogues and other small works that relate to the history of domestic furnishings reflecting the history of New South Wales.

This exhibition was an attempt to put the Trust's collection of floor coverings on view to the public. Previous exhibitions at Elizabeth Bay House included "Soft Furnishings", "Our Home" a photographic exhibition of interiors and recently an exhibition entitled "British Wallpapers".

Scott explained that unlike the mistaken idea that most people have of early Australian house interiors, that floors consist of large Persian mats placed upon varnished or ebonised timber borders, in fact throughout the 19th century, prosperous Australians hid their wooden floors with wall to wall floor coverings of some kind.

There was also a large range of floor coverings available to Australians as an 1836 advertisement showed, which listed a host of floor coverings including floor cloth (that is oil cloths also used for table coverings), tufted carpets (probably Persian and oriental carpets or English made carpets with oriental patterns), Wilson and Brussels carpets (machine made carpets) and Kidderminster, Venetian and other carpets (woven carpets) and China matting. This advertisement from a Sydney newspaper also noted that the oil cloth and China matting could be laid down with just one hours notice!

From an Australiana point of view, there are only a small group of objects in the exhibition truly made in Australia, such as needlework rugs, rag rugs, hooked floor rugs, skin rugs as well as some of the runners and door mats. Largely the floor coverings in the exhibition had been made outside Australia, mainly in England, with their Australiana connection being in their provenance.

Scott explained that his interest in floor coverings started with his involvement in the search for carpets for Elizabeth Bay House. In an attempt to recreate period interiors in the Trust's interpretative houses, auction sales inventories were used. Elizabeth Bay had an inventory of 1845, which described the furnishing of several rooms in great detail. The drawing room had 94 1/2 yards of a Brussels carpet which had colours on a white ground. Brussels carpet was usually woven in 27" wide strips that were then sewn together to create rooms of carpet. The implication from the amount of carpet in this inven-

tory was that the house was decorated with a wall to wall carpet.

Scott showed us a slide of a photographic copy from the Royal Historical Society of the painted portrait of Solomon Wiseman, no longer extant. The portrait 1814-1827 shows an Australian interior with wall to wall carpet. Similarly the portrait of Robert Campbell of 1834 depicts an interior of a house of 1810, with a bold patterned carpet similar to that used in an English interior in North Hampshire of the late 1820's.

Scott's lecture clearly demonstrated that wealthy Australians spent their money on floor coverings. Alexander Macleay's son bought an extravagantly patterned carpet in London for Elizabeth Bay House consisting of 11 colours instead of the usual 7 colours. Scott showed the meeting a carpet sample, which was a design exhibited at the Sydney and Melbourne International Exhibitions, from "Wooden Grove" house. The carpet had a waterfall in the design and was known as a "landscape design". It was also used in the Ball Room of the Jamieson Street house owned by the Reverend John Dunmore Lang and at another house called "Normanhurst" both decorated around 1890.

Scott noted that Brussels carpet can be identified from the ribbed effect in the looped pile and from its construction in narrow strips which were then hand sewn together to make room sized carpets. Another type of carpet which was not a pile carpet, were the back woven carpets, which were woven in various widths from 18 inches to 36 inches, had dyed

warp yarns which formed part of the pattern, similar to woven cloth. These were cheaper to produce and were known by names like Kidderminster and Scots carpets. The earliest reference to this type of carpet in Australia was from a Woolloomooloo 1814 house sale which listed Kidderminster

carpet in such a quantity that it would also have been wall to wall.

The first floor covering which came to Australia was probably not flooring, but were the panels of Governor Phillip's portable house, bought in London in 1786. Oil cloths were

made on the wide looms which made canvas sail cloth for ship sails. They were then stretched on large frames and coated with oil and lead based paints, then a printed pattern could be applied. Oil cloth was used for temporary structures, on verandahs, under furniture to protect the more expensive carpet from crumbs and spills and used for table covers. Oil cloths were followed by the more durable linoleum from the 1880s which has been used to the present day.

A cheaper form of floor covering which again was used wall to wall, was China matting and Indian matting. Both were available from the early years of settlement which suggests that even the less wealthy saw the importance of covering bare floor boards. However an illustration of "Fairlie" house at South Yarra was decorated in the aesthetic movement style with matting used throughout, decorated with scatter rugs of various animal skins.

Photographs from the 1880s to the 1930s of prisoners in both Darlinghurst and Long Bay Gaols making coir mats were shown to the meeting. These mats were also made at the Sydney Blind Institute at Kings Cross. Coir mats were manufactured in Australian prisons for a very long time, initially introduced in the 1860s to Darlinghurst Gaol for disabled prisoners and this became a well established prison industry. The Mark Foy's catalogue of the 1940s had these coir mats for sale decorated with various greetings.

Finally various rugs from the exhibition such as a Berlin woolwork hearth rug c.1860 from the Goulburn district, a kangaroo skin rug and various rag rugs were illustrated. Rag rugs were hand made in many different ways from various coloured scraps of woven fabric, the method first being described in Loudon's "Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture and Furniture" 1830.



Artefacts from the Conservation Resource Centre established by the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales. The Centre is available to any professional or member of the public wanting access to specialised

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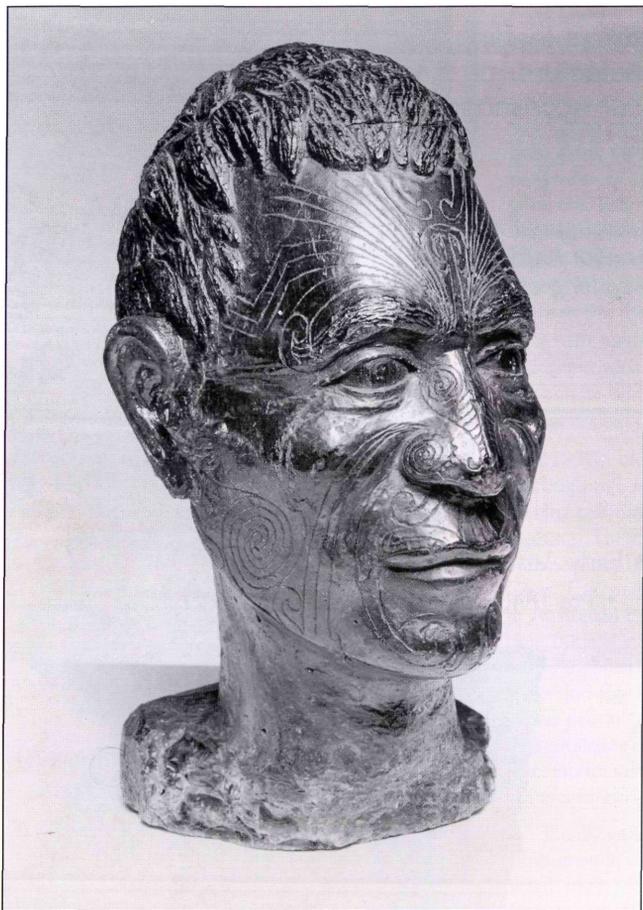
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## J. B. HAWKINS ANTIQUES



One of a highly important pair of Moko decorated larger than life portrait Maori busts in semi fossilised Kauri Gum, of King Potatau II (1825 to 1894) son of the first Maori King who he succeeded in 1860 and his Queen, New Zealand circa 1875, Height 38cm.