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TASMANIAN TITLES, JUNE–SEPTEMBER 2015

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The pleasures and perils of writing biography

JACQUELINE KENT

WRITING BIOGRAPHY is not an easy discipline to pigeonhole because it has changed so much over the years. The basic plot of a biography – the story of a life from birth to death – of course is true for us all. But those elements can be moved around in so many ways. A biography can be the story of a life from grave to cradle, like the English writer Alexander Masters’ *Stuart: a life backwards*, his life story of a young man with mental health issues. The actual investigation can be part of the biography, and the American writer Janet Malcolm has made a speciality of this: her books are as much about her own practice of biography as they are about her subjects. There are even books about not writing biography: I’m thinking of Geoff Dyer’s *Out of sheer rage*, a very funny discussion about his own inability to write about D.H. Lawrence.

One well-known homegrown example of playing with the conventions of biography is Brian Matthews’ *Louisa*, which is about Brian Matthews trying to write the biography of Louisa Lawson. Hailed as a post-modern groundbreaker in its time – it was published in 1987 – it creaks a bit these days, mainly I think because the author’s descriptions of his own struggles and opinions are so much less interesting than Louisa Lawson’s life.

The author’s freely given opinions haven’t been an accepted part of biography for very long; the great change came with Lytton Strachey’s *Eminent Victorians*, short biographies of Florence Nightingale, General Gordon, Cardinal Manning and Thomas Arnold of Rugby. Until then biography had generally dealt with the great deeds of great men for the edification of future generations. There was of course Boswell’s *Life of Johnson*, but the reader is left in no doubt that Boswell considered Samuel Johnson a great man, despite his eccentricities. And in the early seventeenth century there was *Brief lives* by John Aubrey, but that’s really biography as gossip. (So is Suetonius’ *Lives of the Caesars*, when it comes to that.) *Eminent Victorians* was a revolutionary book because in describing the lives of those venerated by his parents’ generation Strachey presented his subjects with all their idiosyncrasies, and he made clear to the reader when he felt they fell short of greatness, which they all did in his opinion. If you haven’t read *Eminent Victorians*, I highly recommend it.

Anyway, I started off working on this lecture by looking up biography on the Internet. The rules appear to be very simple.

- Select a person you are interested in.
- Find out the basic facts of the person’s life.
- Think about what else you would like to know about the person, and what parts of the life you want to write most about.

Easy, no?

There may be several reasons why you want to write about a particular person, the most obvious being that it seems like a good idea at the time. It wasn’t my idea to write a biography of Julia Gillard, but its timing was excellent: it was published in August 2009 and she became prime minister in June of the following year. I am bound to say that its sales have fluctuated over time. And because she was a living subject – a moving target, if you like – the book had to be updated constantly. In the end I revised it four times.

A personal connection is important too. I originally became interested in Hephzibah Menuhin, sister of the more famous Yehudi, because the Menuhin children were child prodigies, pushed to develop their talents as far and as fast as possible, and their precocious knowledge and abilities were venerated by their parents and peers. I come from a family where precocious knowledge was also highly valued. Because of my own experience, the emotional consequences of the struggle between intellectual and emotional maturity was the hook for my biography of Hephzibah Menuhin.

Anyone who writes biography knows that it is not an enterprise to be undertaken lightly. You have to want to know enough about your subjects to be digging into their lives for a long time. David Marr, biographer of Patrick White, is a great example. That book took him about ten years to write, and then he prepared a selection of White’s letters. His publisher later asked him to write a biography of John Howard – not someone with whom he was noticeably in sympathy – and he categorically refused, saying he knew how long these things take, and he wasn’t having John Howard in his head for five years.
The second point – find out the facts of your subject’s life – sounds pretty straightforward, especially if there is a lot on the public record. But sometimes there are difficulties with that too. Peter Fitzpatrick, who wrote a double biography of the Australian actor Frank Thring and his theatre and film producer father, had a hard time. Not only did his subjects have the same name, hence the title The Two Frank Thrings, but all their forebears seemed to name their sons Francis William or William Francis, and they never recorded their birth dates accurately. Which goes to show, I suppose, that you can never be sure, even of the public record.

Problems occur, of course, when you have most of the information but there are important gaps. In writing the story of Hephzibah Menuhin, I was stymied by the lack of material surrounding her divorce. I knew she married a Melbourne grazier when she was very young, and had two sons, and I also knew that she walked out on the marriage after thirteen years to live with someone else. But though I could work out her rationale for all this, I needed to know how she justified what she did to her family and friends. And then, in London, I visited Hephzibah’s niece Zamira, who looked at me calculatingly, walked out of the room and came back with a pile of letters about thirty centimetres high. She handed them to me and explained that her grandfather, Hephzibah’s father Moshe, had given her all the letters he and Hephzibah had written to each other from that time (Moshe, bless him, kept copies of everything he wrote). They were all about her divorce and proposed remarriage, written at white heat by two very angry, articulate people over a short period. Finding them made a great difference to the book.

However, it’s worth remembering these words of the historian and commentator Louis Menand. In 2003 he wrote in the New Yorker magazine:

When you undertake historical research [including of course for biography], two truths that sounded banal come to seem profound.

The first is that your knowledge of the past – apart from, occasionally, a limited visual record and the odd unreliable survivor – comes entirely from written documents. You are almost completely cut off, by a wall of print, from the life you have set out to represent. You can’t observe historical events; you can’t question historical actors; you can’t even know most of what has not been written about. What has been written about therefore takes on an importance that may be spurious. A few lines in a memoir, a snatch of recorded conversation, a letter fortuitously preserved, an event noted in a diary: all become luminous with significance – even though they are merely the bits that have floated to the surface. The historian clings to them, while, somewhere below, the huge submerged wreck of the past sinks silently out of sight.

I agree with him about the role of spoken sources. Memory can be a notoriously unreliable tool, as we all know, and if you’re interviewing you are absolutely reliant on someone else’s memory, prejudices and understanding of the subject. It is surprising, by the way, how much people will tell you once you turn the microphone on. Often they are really indiscreet. Therefore the onus is on you to decide what you are going to use. Indiscretion is fine, I think, but you have to evaluate it in the light of such things as the laws of libel and the worth of the information in the light of the whole work. And sometimes omission may be as telling as what is said, and so can hesitations and facial expressions.

But in the end what you are doing as a biographer is building up a picture of someone on paper, and that is akin to what a novelist does. You can get really carried away: I have dreamed about my subjects Beatrice Davis, Hephzibah Menuhin and Julia Gillard. (All good dreams, I might add, which included their total approval of their biographer … ) Hilary Mantel, the author of the novels Wolf Hall and Bring up the bodies has said she was completely taken over by her main character, Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII’s chief fixer. The journalist Larissa MacFarquhar described Mantel’s method:

When she’s starting a new book, she needs to feel her way inside the characters, to know what it’s like to be them. There is a trick she uses sometimes, which another writer taught her. Sit quietly and withdraw your attention from the room you’re in until you are focused inside your mind. Imagine a chair and invite your character to come and sit in it, once he is comfortable you may ask him questions. She tried this for the first time when she was writing [a story about an Irish giant] … the giant came in, but before sitting
down in the chair he bent down and tested it to see if it would take his weight. On that occasion she never got any further because she was so excited that she punched the air and shouted, Yes! But from then on she could imagine herself in the giant’s body.

It always helps to imagine your subjects doing ordinary things, even if you have little hard information.

But what about when your subject does something that seems out of character, or that you don’t really understand the reason for? For example, toppling the sitting prime minister in 2010? I remember watching the news that night in June and yelling at the television, ‘Julia, NO!’ But of course that’s exactly what Julia Gillard did, and we are only now finding out why in detail. Not knowing the full story – as no one did who wasn’t in Cabinet at the time – I had as Gillard’s biographer to try and rationalise, to understand why she had toppled Kevin Rudd. I did as well as I could and of course spoke to her, but she told me nothing more than she had divulged to the media, which was comparatively little. However, it took very little understanding of politics to realise how dire the consequences were likely to be, and they were. Even though Gillard herself has now written her autobiography, and discusses the events of that night, I don’t think we will truly know the whole story for a long time.

The biographer is always faced with the problem expressed by Grace Tully, Franklin Roosevelt’s personal secretary. In discussing many of the books written about FDR she observed: ‘[Nobody who met him] could know that for each minute they spent with the president he spent a hundred minutes by himself ...’. The question is, of course: What do you do, as a biographer, with those hundred minutes?

It can be interesting, often difficult, when biographers don’t know exactly why or how their subjects made important decisions, or what they thought about various people or events. You can come clean and say you have no idea. You can speculate in a negative kind of way, perhaps using the words of the hymn ‘There is a green hill far away’: ‘We may not know, we cannot tell ... but we believe’. You can throw up your hands and scold the subject: what on earth possessed X to do Y? These approaches have the merit of at least being honest, but they occasionally give the impression that the biographer isn’t really trying hard enough, especially if the stakes are high, and therefore the reader may cease to trust the writer.

My approach is to speculate, I suppose, making this clear to the reader, and giving the basis for this speculation. But there are some biographers for whom not knowing the unknowable is a real problem. It appears in a minor way in certain films, such as The Queen and Frost v Nixon, both of which include for dramatic purposes conversations that the writer cannot know ever took place. However, some years ago a biographer took this to extremes.

Edmund Morris, whose previous book, a biography of American president Theodore Roosevelt, had won a Pulitzer Prize, was given the job of writing the life story of then president Ronald Reagan. This was the first authorised biography of a sitting president, and Morris was given behind-the-scenes access never before granted to a writer at the White House. Apparently these privileges were of little use: Morris claimed to learn little from his conversations with Reagan and White House staff, or from the president’s own private diary. He eventually decided to scrap writing a straight biography, and he turned his piece into a faux historical memoir about the president, told from the viewpoint of a semi-fictional peer from the same town as Ronald Reagan: Edmund Morris himself. The book contains a few characters who never existed, scenes in which they interact with real people and other scenes that were dramatised or made up. Morris even invented sources and footnotes.

How he thought he could get away with all this, God only knows. He claimed, ‘Nobody around [Reagan] understood him. I, every person I interviewed, almost without exception, eventually would say, “You know, I could never really figure him out.”’ The book, Dutch (Reagan’s nickname), published in 1999 by Random House, is now notorious.

What of the question whether a biography is authorised or unauthorised? I tend to think that an authorised biography, that is, one over which the subject or the family has control of information presented and people who may be interviewed, may not be worth very much. Elizabeth Salter’s biography of Robert Helpmann is full of jolly anecdotes and very vague on dates and places, and it has no references. Salter said admiringly that Helpmann had total recall of every single thing that was important to him. She therefore wrote it all down and published it. The biography appeared in 1976; I think today’s biographers might be more sceptical.

On the other hand, a few years ago the journalist Margaret Simons published an authorised biography of Malcolm Fraser, which depended heavily on his own sources and suggested interviewees. However, quite a lot of material was available from other sources, and she drew attention to his reluctance to discuss, for instance, the events surrounding the 1975 Dismissal. So it was favourable, but not a hagiography.

Unauthorised biography has its own problems, of course, mainly hostility from the subject. If you can get reluctant agreement that’s probably
the best you're going to do. Julia Gillard at first refused to talk to me at all. It was only when I did some research and started interviewing some of the people who had known her at various stages during her career – fellow student politicians and lawyers, mostly – that she agreed. The only reason she did, by the way, was that these people contacted her before they agreed to be interviewed: I think she realised that the biography was a proper, serious one that would go ahead without her, and so she decided to co-operate. I eventually was given four interviews.

There's the question of responsibility in biography too. As I see it, there is a contract between reader and author; your job as the writer is to try and present the subject as truthfully and fully as you can. This often means including information that is not flattering, but if it is relevant you need to put it in. You can't libel the dead, of course, but the living, especially the subject's descendants, can make real trouble, and frequently they do.

Hephzibah Menuhin's two daughters by her second marriage gave me lots of information about their father Richard Hauser, all of which I included. Most of it was the reverse of flattering (indeed, he turned out to be a man nobody liked much). I gave them the final manuscript to read before publication. To say they did not like what I had written is an understatement. I was the worst person in the world. Some of the correspondence lives on my computer in a lead-lined box.

Fortunately nobody threatened to sue me or withdraw permission to use material – the biographer's bottom line, if you like – so it was relatively easy to wear the insults. But a copyright holder can withdraw permission to reproduce letters, photographs, poems, extracts from novels, lots of things, if he/she does not like what has been written. It has happened.

Biography is a hybrid form, having much in common with non-fiction and fiction. It has no fixed laws these days, and when rules are made they tend to shade into motherhood statements. Biographers are supposed to get at the truth of a person: how can you possibly do that, given the complexity of human beings? It may be safest to follow Virginia Woolf, who wrote that we are all composed of many selves, piled up like plates upon a waiter's hand. If as a biographer you can get hold of one or two of those and pile them up in your own words, I think you're doing well.

I'M FROM LAUNCESTON – a member of the exclusive club known as Swampies, kids who grew up around the Mowbray Swamp. The Mowbray Swamp doesn't exist now. The area of wetland east of Invermay Road has disappeared. It was reclaimed, and is now the Heritage Forest. But when I was a kid, it was a magical world of water and mist and mud, and frogs and wading birds, and danger and disease. No longer. And the street I lived in has transformed. Our house has gone, as have its neighbours. The corner shop has gone, and the butcher shop diagonally opposite. Racing stables and vegetable gardens have been demolished and paved over, replaced by light industry. So this begins as the story of a little lost world.

My father's father Cecil was born in Tasmania in 1880. He was a Post Office cyclist, then a mail sorter and later overseer. He married Elsie Webb, daughter of Launceston produce merchant Frederick Webb. My father Eric was the eldest of their children.

My mother's father, Edward John Pryor, was from a family of Cornish tin miners who migrated to South Australia. His father, James, brought the family to Lefroy, north-east of Launceston, in the 1880s. The family was devout Cornish Methodist, and James was choirmaster of Lefroy Methodist Church. Edward John worked for the gold mine at Beaconsfield, where his six children were born. He moved the family to Launceston in the 1920s, for a job with the tramways.

When I was born in 1944 my mother Mavis and sister Suzanne were living with Edward John, in his little weatherboard house in Park Road, at the foot of Mowbray Hill. My father Eric was in the army. Like many older
Our local sawdust heap belonged to a factory that made wood-framed windows. So in the inviting soft piles of sawdust lurked shards of broken window glass. No matter – to the sawdust heap we were drawn, even after Johnny Hawks almost sliced his thumb off, and my mother took him to the Launceston General Hospital, where we were well known. She then had to explain the stitched and bandaged hand to Johnny’s mother, who was caring for her terminally ill husband. My dear mother performed such tasks with elegance, diplomacy and stoicism.

Overcoated alcoholic war veterans sought solitude and solace on the fringes of the Swamp. Its permanent residents included abundant banjo frogs and wading birds. The water was so shallow you could paddle across without getting your shorts wet, but a raft was the thing. A timber platform with a 44-gallon drum at each corner and a couple of poles gave freedom to explore its Amazonian expanses. And frosty winter mornings promised ice, never, sadly, thick enough for skating.

I mentioned our street was called Park Road. I know for a fact that my sister, Suzanne, is the only person in the world to have lived in Park Road by the Mowbray Swamp, and on Park Avenue, Manhattan.

In my pre-school world the iceman called regularly, horse-drawn cart loaded with blocks of ice. He’d carry them in, wrapped in hessian, and put them in the ice-chest. My mother washed on Mondays, as was mandatory. She lit the fire under the copper, and prodded boiling sheets with a stick. I’d climb onto the washhouse roof and sit, back to the warm bricks of the chimney, surveying my domain. It was a long narrow block, with a manicured ornamental garden around the house, featuring man ferns and hydrangeas. Then came a fence bordering the lush bounteous vegetable garden, and beyond that, the chooks. I could expound on my father’s success as a chook-fancier, his cupboards full of blue ribbons from the shows, and my mother’s objections to his incubator in their bedroom, but that’s too long and traumatic a tale.

My sister and I went to Mowbray Heights Primary. We walked, about a mile each way. As a sickly child, my attendance was among the school’s worst. I spent about as much time at home in bed with bronchitis and asthma as I did in the classroom. But my sickbed was always heavy with books, and I maintained my academic status in spite of absence.

Caning was the norm at Mowbray Heights. Camelhead Sutton, Grade 5 teacher and an otherwise pleasant and caring human being, was famous for his public canings. But his canes kept disappearing. If he left one unattended it would descend through a knothole to join its fellows under the floor.
I wasn’t allowed to play football because I was too puny; or cricket, because in desperation to succeed I became overanxious. However I was told one day to come to an interschool cricket match and be the official scorer. A large landscape-format book was thrust into my arms, and a sharpened pencil, but no instruction about the many columns and compartments spreading across the page. I did my best, but I was summoned to the office of Maxwell Oswald Philips, the headmaster, known, naturally, as Mopsy. He confronted me with my smudges and scrawls and rubbings out, said it wasn’t good enough and he’d have to cane me. I think I was relieved. A caning virgin, I was held in contempt by my peers. I offered my palm. There was a swish and a sting. That was it. One cut, when the norm was six. Just one single cut, which I’m sure he delivered at half power – a shameful experience.

But I had interesting, engaged teachers, and Mopsy of the single cut was an imaginative headmaster. He established the school’s internal radio station, 7MH. My media career started from a microphone in Mopsy’s office, childish voice issuing through loudspeakers into every classroom and out across the playground to the world.

Even at nine and ten, the mysteries of sex and gender were tantalising. There were taboo words to be learned, and their proper usage, which could be tricky. An older boy once gave me a bloody nose when I called him something unacceptable, when I really meant to call him something less offensive, but euphonically similar. Dirty jokes I didn’t understand got such laughs I had to share them with my parents. Their shocked silence was disappointing.

We were driven and desperate. We needed to know. And no-one was prepared to enlighten us. We were walking original sin, so we did what sinful boys do. We examined the contents of the carefully airbrushed ‘naturist’, or so-called ‘health magazines’ in Boland’s Newsagency. And that was probably psychologically damaging.

Religion was a dilemma. Cornish Methodist grandfather. Heathen father. Fights about spiritual welfare. My mother had a solution. We lived near Presbyterian, Methodist, Church of Christ, Anglican and Catholic churches. My mother said we could visit any of them and make up our own minds. Except Catholic – that was going too far. So my sister and I co-opted my parents became more selective.

There were movies – The Pictures. To Swampies, the Star Theatre in Invermay Road was Mecca. When I was well the family went regularly. I saw MGM musicals, and occasionally something spicy, like the innocently titled Miss Sadie Thompson, an adaptation of Somerset Maugham’s story ‘Rain’. My parents glanced nervously at me from time to time. The next day I asked the older boy across the road whether he knew what ‘prostitute’ meant. My parents became more selective.

On Saturday afternoons the Star seethed with Swampies. Comics were swapped, Fantales unwrapped. The occasional scuffle was rarely serious. When lights dimmed and plush curtains parted, silence fell. Images flickered. In the serial the hero magically escaped last week’s deathly hazard, and taken home. In later life John would become the first popularly elected Mayor of Launceston, dying, far too young, in 2001, while still in office.
Once a year came the Launceston Competitions – a feast of amateur music, elocution and dance. We went along to enjoy whatever was offering. Marlene Matthews was a rising young elocution star, and when she set up a teaching practice my mother took the chance to combat the influence of The Swamp. She enrolled us for art of speech lessons, and so made it possible for me, a dozen or so years later, to pass the ABC announcer audition.

My mother did all she could to improve opportunities for her children. My father settled into his new career and did well. We got our first car, an old Ford Anglia, the Yellow Peril. It was yellow, and perilous, but gave us mobility. On hot summer evenings my mother would pack a picnic, we’d cram into the Peril and head down the east Tamar to one of my mother's idyllic swimming spots. She always knew the best place, depending on the state of the ferocious Tamar tides. My mother seemed prepared for anything.

But when I was in Grade 5 and my sister in her first year at Launceston High, a compulsory chest X-ray revealed that my grandfather had tuberculosis. Further tests confirmed my healthy sister was also infected. Our world was shattered. Ironically I, the sickly one of the family, was in the clear. Suzanne and old Edward John were sent to the Northern Chest Hospital, near Evandale, the sanatorium where fresh air and bed rest, the two major prongs of tuberculosis treatment at the time, were abundant. Drugs for the disease were very new. The process was protracted. My sister would lose more than a year of her young life. So our household on the margins of The Swamp became three. My parents now had to support two family members in the limbo of the sanatorium. I was more and more left to my own devices.

My other grandfather died and my father inherited his little house in Charles Street, near the Launceston General Hospital. We moved there when I was in Grade 6. We said goodbye to The Swamp and gained a foothold in a more elevated part of town. For the first time in their fourteen years of marriage, my parents had their own home.

My sister emerged from her time in the Northern Chest Hospital greatly changed. She’d been with adults, largely unsupervised, for over a year. She’d missed more than a year of high school, where she’d been a high achiever. What to do? She was enrolled in a secretarial course at Tech. She did well, and entered the work force. Very soon she became secretary to Frank Ellis, the director of the Queen Victoria Museum – a job that fitted her perfectly and boosted her colourful trajectory from Park Road to Park Avenue.

A new kid from Sydney turned up at my house one day with two pairs of boxing gloves, asking if I fancied a bit of a spar. His name was Ray Martin. In time he’d become one of Australia’s best-known and most beloved television personalities, but then he was a chubby little boy whose mother had fled Sydney to escape domestic abuse. Being still puny and having never engaged in fisticuffs I declined his offer, but Ray and I became best mates, and shared the mysteries of adolescence until he and his mother returned to Sydney after we matriculated.

HIGH SCHOOL was a turning point for me. I grew. I developed sporting abilities. I played tennis. I could run fast. I still hold Launceston High School under-fifteen sprint records – not because of brilliant performance, but because in 1965 Launceston High School ceased to exist, so my under-fifteen records are secure, frozen in time. Healthy at last, I binged on sport. I played football, basketball and tennis, and made the school team in all of them.

My lovely uncle, ‘Dutchy’ Pryor, famous Launceston used car dealer whose ambiguous advertising slogan was ‘A good deal more for a good deal less’, accepted a drum kit from one of his customers in part payment of a debt. My aunt Melanie refused to have it in the house, so he gave it to me. I read how-to books, listened to records by famous drummers, and taught myself the art of jazz drumming. I hooked up with a pianist, a couple of saxophone players, a guitarist and a double bass player, and we had the core of what became a respectable modern jazz group. We were serious enough to buy arrangements from America. We doubled as the school dance band.

There was another turning point. My parents sold the Charles Street house and we moved to Trevallyn, on the hill above the Tamar. I could look from my new bedroom window over the river to the Mowbray Swamp, once my whole world, now just a distant patch of green in my panoramic middle-class view.
Launceston High was on the elite level of the three-tiered state secondary system at the time – selective high schools, technical colleges, and secondary modern schools. It was a special place, and my recollections are bathed in gold, apart from the odd dark shadow.

I was not a good student. I did well only because I was reasonably bright. Most of my energy was directed to sport, music and social life. It was the era of rock and roll, and the invention of the concept of 'teenager', which we acted out enthusiastically. We had weekly parties in the houses of friends. After school we frequented the new cafés, with their hissing Gaggia espresso machines. Some kids went to Pierre’s, but we preferred Saint Anthony’s, further up George Street. From there we organised weekend bus trips, totally unsupervised. We chipped in and hired a bus, filled it with teenage boys and girls, and headed off to places like Greens Beach in summer, or the snow at the summit of Mount Barrow in winter. Good innocent fun. Well, almost.

I was no longer dependent on the Star for movies. There were three other picture theatres in Launceston – the Princess, the Plaza and the Majestic. Cinemascope and stereo came along. The Tatler newsreel theatre opened. With one ticket you could stay for as many one-hour sessions as you liked. Ray Martin and I once spent a whole Saturday there, to see the first ever Road Runner cartoon eight times.

At school saxophonist Ross Challender and I became specialists in supplying music and sound effects for school plays. The live theatre in Launceston then was the National, on the corner of Charles and Paterson streets, and some of our larger high school productions, including The Tempest, were presented there, with shaken metal sheets for thunder, and a hand-cranked rain machine.

I mentioned the odd dark shadow. The gold-bathed idyll was available to all who conformed and upheld the values of the school. But this was the age of Marlon Brando, James Dean, rebels without causes, fashions and hairstyles unacceptable to the establishment. L.E. Amos, known as Lou, was the headmaster, ferocious guardian of the status quo. He was small, about five feet two, but there was a legend he’d been a wrestler. He promoted its veracity by playfully threatening small boys with headlocks. He was dapper, always wore an academic gown and had black, close-cropped hair, which we suspected he dyed. If you crossed Lou, or threatened his notion of what was proper, you were banished from the light into dark shadow, where dwelled the bad kids, boys and girls.

My long-time friend John Lees and Lou became enemies. John was sometimes late for school, having been working on the orchard since four in the morning. He dared wear his hair more like Elvis Presley than the rest of us. His cap was never allowed to challenge the perfection of his do, and remained folded in his back pocket. He never wore full uniform. So he spent much time outside Lou’s office, awaiting the cane. The fact that he accepted canings calmly forced Lou to increase their savagery. He forbade John to see Mary Mulligan, who would later become John’s wife, on the grounds that he was a bad lot and his mere presence would defile a good girl from a Christian bank manager’s family.

John wasn’t a bad lot. He was bright, able, determined. But he refused to conform, and so was excluded from the sweetest fruits of the school system. And Lou, for his part, could never have imagined John wearing Launceston’s ornate Mayoral chain of office – unless he stole it. But who knows, without Lou’s ministrations John may never have been motivated to become Mayor.

I matriculated at the end of 1961, with results that disappointed my teachers. My final report suggested I relied too much on intelligence and was probably lazy. I couldn’t argue. I wanted to become a cadet journalist, but the school convinced my parents I should go to university. Mavis and Eric couldn’t afford to finance me, so I applied for an Education Department teacher studentship. I was bonded. I undertook to owe the Education Department a year’s teaching for each year of study.

Hytten Hall accommodated 120 young men, mostly science and engineering students. I was one of a handful of residents studying humanities. The university was a year away from completing its move to the Sandy Bay campus. English lectures took place in the Engineering lecture theatre while the Arts building was completed. I’d prepared for the experience of university by reading Compton McKenzie’s Sinister Street, set among the dreaming spires of early-twentieth-century Oxford. I could find no connection between Michael Fane’s seductive world and the Sandy Bay campus building site, but my disappointment passed when I realised I was part of something that was new, exciting, and happening in my own universe.

Hytten Hall was unique. One in five of its residents was Asian – mostly Indonesian or Malaysian. There was vigorous Asian–Australian social interaction at table-tennis and the highly competitive common-room bridge tables after dinner. Racism was present in pockets, but frowned on and opposed by most of us. A problem for Asian students was that the English they learned from Hytten Hall conversations was not necessarily standard. Many genteel Dynnyrne ladies returning home on the bus felt their ears burning from loud, unsentimental, Asian-accented colourful Hytten Hall English.
What defined Hytten Hall was its legendary Warden, George Wilson – always gruff, always calm, sardonically humorous, profoundly understanding of boys on the cusp of adulthood. He encouraged anything that improved Hytten Hall’s cultural profile. I became Hytten Hall librarian and occasional poet. John Lohrey (later Associate Professor of Performing Arts at the University of Tasmania, Launceston) and I established Intercol, a drama society for residents of the university colleges. George was proud the initiative had come from us, and not Jane Franklin or Christ College. I became aware of Bill Perkins, and attended his screenings of art movies you’d never see at His Majesty’s or The Odeon. My hitherto vague ambitions in the screen trade began to crystallise.

At the end of third year George Wilson confronted me. He said, ‘Well Honey, you got your degree. But what a degree’. He turned and walked away. But we remained friends. Ten years later I was making a short film about bereavement, for the ABC. I needed an elderly man to die in bed. I rang George, who was all of 67 at the time, and asked if he was up for it. He gave the performance of his life. Fortunately he lived for another seventeen years, so I didn’t cause bad karma.

Now, a shameful chapter of my story – my Diploma of Education year, 1965. I was heavily involved in theatre; Intercol and the Hobart Rep. John Moore, Supervisor of ABC Education, invited me to become part of the repertory of actors who performed in schools broadcasts, for the tempting sum of £3/1/3 per three-hour call. Many of the programs went live to air, and their schedule conflicted with lectures. Unfortunately one of the other frequent cast members was Tom Doe, of the Faculty of Education, who knew where I actually was when I was supposed to be in a lecture. Before exams I was notified I wouldn’t be allowed to sit two subjects, because of unsatisfactory attendance. So to this day I have half a diploma of education.

I’d let people down, particularly my parents. By this time my father was the successful and respected manager of Repco Replacement Parts. My mother was a tireless volunteer who taught swimming to polio victims and spastic children, worked on the kiosk at the Queen Victoria maternity hospital, and was part of the team re-establishing the gardens at Clarendon House, for the National Trust. It was my first big failure in life, and I learned my lesson. There was one positive in the bad year of 1965. I wrote a thesis for Bill Perkins on the teaching of media in schools, which he thought was good, and our acquaintance developed into a friendship.

I was posted to Deloraine High School. I chose to live with my parents in Launceston and commute every day. I had an Austin Healey sports car, so the drive was fun. I was an okay teacher, but was really marking time while I worked off my bond. I now had an 8mm movie camera, making my own films and using it with classes for film study. Halfway through my second teaching year, my mother, who knew I was in a rut, pointed out an advertisement in the Examiner, for an ABC radio announcer. In those days there was no Film and Television School or equivalent. The Australian film renaissance was yet to happen. The only way into a screen career was to learn on the job. If you could somehow get a foot into the ABC, a world of opportunity might open up.

I APPLIED, passed the audition, and said goodbye to the Deloraine kids. Within days I was on the air with celebrities like Ken Short, Bob Cure and Bill Brundle. In a typically Tasmanian twist one of my supervisors was Don Lette, who had married my former elocution teacher, Marlene Mathews. I was rostered on to a Saturday night news shift. On the same shift was a beautiful, intriguing young woman. Our eyes met. It was, as the French say, a bolt of lightning. She was Maria Mackey, and we’ve just had our forty-seventh wedding anniversary.

My announcing career lasted only a few months before I was asked to join the pioneering television current affairs program Line-Up as a reporter. Maria had already been promoted to a script assistant position on the same program. What could be better?

We decided to get married. The ABC promoted the wedding as a celebrity event, milking it for publicity. But after we tied the knot they told us married couples couldn’t work together, and Maria would have to move to another department. Working on Line-Up was a plum job. There were no others of equal status and interest. It was a huge unfair blow to Maria, and a tough start to our marriage.

Unfortunate headline! (Mercury, April 1968)
Barry Pierce and Roger Lupton joined the reporting staff. Bruce Grundy took over as compere from John Forster. The program was renamed *This Day Tonight*, and each state had its own version; live to air, five nights a week at 7:30. It was ‘in at the deep end’ in a big way. Serious studio interviews, short film satirical pieces created in a single day, film stories in the field all over the state on a vast range of topics – even half hour documentary specials filling the whole time slot. I did a special on poverty in Hobart, and another on the Tasmanian prison system, within twelve months of getting the job.

After three years as a reporter I was promoted to compere. Harry Holgate, formerly political reporter with the *Examiner*, was Executive Producer. In 1972 he announced his intention to stand for election to State Parliament as a Labor candidate. Roger Lupton, Bruce Grundy, Barry Pierce and I immediately asked ABC management whether, if Harry wasn’t elected, he would be re-appointed to his job as head of the ABC’s independent, politically neutral current affairs program. Under staff rules he could, at the ABC’s discretion, be moved to a job of similar status and salary. A series of secret cloak-and-dagger negotiations with Assistant Manager Keith Mackriell resulted in management deciding it had no problem with Harry’s re-appointment, even though under the Tasmanian electoral system Harry could potentially fail and still enter parliament on a recount, without facing election. In fact he did exactly that, two years later, on the resignation of Alan Foster. Anyway Harry wasn’t elected and when the ABC announced he would resume control of *This Day Tonight*, the four of us resigned.

We had young families and mortgages. We were out on a fragile limb. We conducted a national press campaign, which embarrassed the ABC and Harry to the extent that the ABC offered each of us alternative jobs – to shut us up as much as anything else. We needed the jobs, and agreed to accept them on condition we could submit our case to the Australian Broadcasting Commission – the ABC’s board – for adjudication. The Commission agreed with our argument, so we were vindicated, but none of us went back to *This Day Tonight*, and Harry remained Executive Producer.

I became a producer of educational television programs. Oddly enough the Holgate debacle meant realising my long-held ambition of becoming a genuine screen director. It also meant I could develop as a screenwriter, my other passion. So for me it was a happy outcome, a defining point in my career.

At that time the ABC had Education television production units in each state, contributing programs to the nationwide daytime schools’ television schedule. In three years as Senior Producer of the Hobart unit I pioneered a series of dramas on relationships issues, for Secondary Social Sciences. I devised a series called *Inside Creation*, which examined creative processes across the arts. The series included programs on Tom Samek, Max Angus, Stephen Walker, Peter Taylor, Jan Sedivka, and many other creative Tasmanians.

Then in 1976 I produced the mini-series *The Colonials*, an Australian history resource for upper primary children. It was written and directed by Judith Simpson, Roger Lupton and myself. Head Office in Sydney didn’t want Tasmania to produce drama, but by being devious we were able to get it into production. We borrowed costumes from the ‘Rush’ production wardrobe in Melbourne, used our Outside Broadcast crew as convicts, and wrangled horses ourselves. In spite of Head Office’s obstruction, when the series went to air it became a nationwide success. Educational television programs generally had long repeat lives, but *The Colonials* was exceptional. It was on air from 1977 to 1991, seen by vast uncounted numbers of Australian primary school kids.

The success of *The Colonials* earned me an invitation to join the newly formed Tasmanian Film Corporation. The renaissance of the Australian film industry was gaining momentum, and I wanted to be part of it. I started as contract producer/writer/director at the beginning of 1978. Among the thirty or so projects waiting on my desk was an incomplete manuscript of Beth Roberts’ novel *Manganinnie*.

The Tasmanian Film Corporation grew out of the post-war Government Film Unit and the Department of Film Production. At the initiative of Premier Bill Neilson, the Corporation was set up along the lines of the successful South Australian Film Corporation, to provide a self-contained, modern production facility in a state with no commercial film industry. It was a semi-government authority, supposed to be ‘profit oriented’ – that is, to offset its running costs with as much income as it could generate. A monopoly on production of short films for government departments was
its major source of funds. There was no limit to other commercial activity. There was also an expectation that the Corporation specialise in children’s and family entertainment. I won’t go into detail about the extraordinary amount and range of production that came out of the Bowen Road studios between 1977 and 1982, but in that brief time the TFC became Australia’s premier producer and marketer of short films, admired for the quality of its documentary and drama production.

*Manganinnie* was my baby. Initially I was development producer, overseeing the adaptation of Beth Roberts’ novel to the screen. But after I made several award-winning short films I was invited to direct Tasmania’s first ever complete, home-grown feature. *Manganinnie*, about fictitious events around the time of Governor Arthur’s Black Drive, was a high-risk venture, starring a non-acting Aboriginal woman and a six-year-old child in outdoor locations from the Central Highlands to the east coast, in unreliable spring weather. It was a fulfilling experience, due largely to the extraordinary Mawayul Yanthalawuy from Elcho Island, and tough, tireless little Anna Ralph.

*Manganinnie* was not a financial success. The distributor, Greater Union, wanted the name changed to something more commercial, but the threat of legal action from author Beth Roberts quite rightly prevented that happening. So Greater Union cut the publicity budget, and it ran for only a few weeks in Melbourne and Sydney. In Tasmania it ran for months, but the proceeds of those screenings disappeared, to cover exhibitor and distributor overheads.

Artistically it was acclaimed worldwide. It won awards in France, Russia, Japan and Australia. It was applauded at Cannes, and invited to the London, Berlin, Moscow, Cairo and Cork film festivals. In 2007 the National Film and Sound Archive selected it for restoration, as one of fifty important Australian movies. In 2012 it was re-released on DVD by Umbrella Entertainment. It’s been a staple on the world festival circuit for most of its 35 years of life.

After I finished *Manganinnie* I went straight into production on *Fatty and George*, a kids’ television series we’d pre-sold to the ABC. Dr Patricia Edgar had been lobbying for years for a C rating for approved Australian children’s television programs. *Fatty and George* became the first production awarded that C rating.

In 1980, Malcolm Smith, the Corporation’s founding director, came to the end of his term. I was asked to succeed him. I’d intended to finish my current contract and go freelance, but was told by sources close to Doug Lowe, Premier and Minister for the Film Corporation, that if I didn’t take
the job, the Corporation’s future was in doubt. So reluctantly I agreed to a two-year contract. I became an administrator.

The Tasmanian commercial television channels were lobbying against us, arguing we were subsidised to do commercial production that was rightly theirs. It wasn’t true – they’d never had the interest or expertise to tackle the sort of product we were making. But politicians listened to them. There was talk of selling the Corporation, and TVT6 was reputedly an interested buyer. Suddenly Doug Lowe was rolled as Premier, and who should become the new Premier and Minister for the Tasmanian Film Corporation? There was a call on my private line. A familiar but long unheard voice said, ‘John. Harry Holgate. Come in and see me’.

I entered his office. He sat in a pool of divine light. His smile was as broad as the room. He made it clear he’d deliberately chosen to take an interest in the Corporation, and me, and would be watching us closely. He mentioned buyers in the market, whose interest he was investigating.

As it turned out Harry was so busy protecting his back for the seven months he remained Premier that he left us alone. And potential buyer TVT6 was suddenly swallowed up by Edmund Rouse’s Examiner Northern Television. So that took care of them.

Then in May 1982 the Gray Liberal Government came to power, with a big program of privatisation. The Film Corporation was well down their list, but one after another priority items like the Government Printer were taken off the market, as their sale proved impracticable. Disposal of the Film Corporation became a Government face-saving exercise, in spite of the lack of a buyer.

My two-year contract expired well before the sale, and I left. I won’t go into the arguments for and against selling, or the fire-sale conditions negotiated, or the public money wasted in inducements to secure the buyer – entrepreneur Peter Hookway. In the next four years the Corporation’s film production assets were stripped and sold. Skilled staff members moved interstate or left the industry. The formerly buzzing Bowen Road production facility was then sold a second time, as a Hobart base for TNT9. The Tasmanian Film Corporation disappeared and now, few people under fifty remember it ever existed. But responsibility for the copyright on everything produced by the Corporation passed to the State Archives, and thanks to the care given to its film and videotape legacy by such people as Ian Pearce, Bill Taylor, Stan Draper and many others, the bulk of the output of the Corporation and its ancestors, the Government Film Unit and the Department of Film Production, has been preserved, and some of it, including Manga-ninnie and Fatty and George, energetically promoted and kept alive.

So, in 1982, Maria and I formed our own company; I got a Sydney agent, and launched myself as a freelance writer and director. Our daughter Emma was twelve and son James was six. I was still based in Hobart, working around Australia. I retained a romantic ambition to make significant movies in Tasmania, and developed projects to bring that about. To make a living I directed television commercials, made drama and documentary productions for SBS, the ABC, and commercial television. I wrote a great deal of television and radio for the ABC, including the successful children’s science series Hunter. But no big-ticket items made it to the screen. I had no interest in trying Hollywood. Opportunities there had come and gone while I was running the Film Corporation, and I wasn’t interested in Hollywood-style movies anyway.

I always saw Tasmania as the centre of my world, and the wellspring of my creativity. Unlike many of my peers I had no notion that somewhere else, for example Britain, was more important. Because I didn’t leave Tasmania when many did, straight out of university, I was lucky enough to have a role in the growth of television and film in my home state, and, despite reversals, I wanted to make the most of my considerable body of local knowledge. Maria and I also wanted our children to grow up in a stable environment. I wouldn’t put them through the disruption I’d seen other Australian directors’ families suffer in America. But I’d turned forty, and feared I might have missed my wave.

By 1986 freelance conditions were tough. I was asked to become Executive Producer of the ABC’s Hobart Children’s and Education production unit. Effectively it was the job I’d left a decade before. I hated putting ambition aside and stepping backwards. But sometimes retreat is necessary, so I accepted on condition that I could supplement the modest salary by working on freelance projects outside ABC hours.

Around that time a Hobart home-video salesman, Phil Osborn, asked me for advice on programs he was making for the new Discovery cable television channel in the USA. Phil was an aircraft buff. He and a like-minded friend, Barry Cawthorn, had started making specialist aviation documentaries. I ended up narrating their first two programs, one on the Second World War B-29 bomber, and one on the 1960s swing wing F-111. They were immediately successful in the US, and Discovery asked for more. Phil set up a small production unit, and churned out a series of very basic archival-film programs called Great Planes. Discovery lapped them up. Phil was taking advantage of a brilliant idea. He’d discovered that under American public domain legislation, anyone who could access American government agency archives was entitled to copy film resources and use
them freely, paying only the costs of duplication. With the assistance of Tasmanian politicians including Michael Hodgman he gained entrée to US Air Force archives. He and Barry Cawthorn established a relationship with the US Air Force, which strengthened as the Air Force saw the finished programs become popular.

Phil asked if I’d help him make programs of greater sophistication and ambition. He knew nothing about production, and was seen by many as a figure of fun. I admired his vision, but doubted he could realise it. We discussed ideas but nothing came of them and I continued with the ABC. In 1989 though, the ABC announced it was closing the state-based children’s production units and consolidating them in Adelaide. I was asked to move to Adelaide but declined, so I was declared redundant. Maria courageously agreed I should go freelance again.

The economy was looking bad, and we had to start from scratch. I had one stroke of luck. Graeme Foster asked me to make a documentary to mark the centenary of the University of Tasmania. I also began working on the development of a slate of feature film projects with producer Posie Graeme-Evans, and I had several other projects in the works.

Then one night I got a call from Phil Osborn in Washington DC. He told me we had a meeting with the Discovery Channel Executive, to pitch a ninety-minute documentary on the story of the American aircraft designer Jack Northrop, and his dream of building a ‘flying wing’. It’s a great story of ambition, skullduggery and sabotage. We’d already discussed it in outline, and Phil had done some groundwork in the US. I said okay, I’m in. I worked for 48 hours straight to prepare a treatment, then got on the plane. Our first hurdle was to get the Northrop Corporation on side. In Los Angeles we met Northrop senior management in their amazingly opulent boardroom in Century City. They agreed to co-operate and give us access to their archive. The resulting ninety-minute program, The Wing Will Fly, went to air in early 1991. It achieved big ratings, and an invitation to make a major co-production with Discovery. After consultation with the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, we proposed a thirteen part series in which each one-hour program would tell the story of an important aircraft in the museum’s collection. The series was called Frontiers of Flight. We made the whole thing, with input from Smithsonian historians, in one year. It was nominated for best documentary series at the 1994 Cable Television Ace awards, and I won an American Cine Golden Eagle for direction.

In a matter of months our lives had transformed – again. Our focus shifted completely to America. Maria was working with me. Our daughter Emma was living in Melbourne, and son James continued his education uninterrupted at Taroona High School, courtesy of his surrogate Hobart parents, Vicki and Ian Pearce. So my childhood model aircraft passion and aerodynamics reading wasn’t wasted. In 1993 we went to Russia to make Wings of the Red Star, a thirteen-hour series on the history of Russian and Soviet aviation, narrated by Sir Peter Ustinov.

Then, in 1994, Maria’s mother and our daughter Emma both developed cancers. Our working partnership was again disrupted as Maria came home to attend to more urgent matters. Her mother died, but Emma survived Hodgkins Lymphoma, and is now a fit and thriving 45-year-old mother.

I stayed in Washington, coming home to Hobart between productions. I made a four-part series on aviation’s role in the First World War – Four Years of Thunder – which is still recognised by the American League of World War One Historians as the standard television documentary on the subject. I developed a friendship and working partnership with distinguished American historian and former director of the National Air and Space Museum Walter Boyne. I adapted and produced three of his books, most notably Clash of wings, his account of the air wars of the Second World War, for the screen.

It wasn’t all planes. We made a series on cars, for the new History Channel. I made a ninety-minute special on the history of the United States Secret Service, the American Presidential Protection agency. Former President Ronald Reagan, an assassination attempt survivor, introduced it.

We were now employing a team of young American program makers, and selling our output worldwide – except, ironically, to Australia, where there was no cable or subscription television. We had become the world leader in making and selling television programs related to aviation history. Our success depended on access to specialist niche audiences, and Australian in the 1990s couldn’t give us that access. We financed the whole operation ourselves, living from hand to mouth, using earnings from sales to finance the next production.

We decided to establish our own cable television channel. We told Discovery of our intention and invited them to join us as partners. They declined, but wished us well. We launched Wingspan, the Air and Space Channel, on 1 April 1998. On the same day, double page spreads appeared in the trade magazines announcing Discovery’s own aerospace channel. By now Discovery was a corporate giant. Our chance of competing with them was nil. But my partner Phil had developed a talent for litigation, and...
successfully enjoined against Discovery on the basis that the name of their channel was too similar to ours. We held them off for a year, losing money hand over fist, until they conceded and bought us out.

Ironically the programs I made in the ten years I spent working in America are little known in Australia. To all appearances they’re American productions. Recently some of them have been uploaded to YouTube, so two decades later they’re available here, free on your computer.

When I came home I joined the writing team of Posie Graeme-Evans’s McLeod’s daughters for a while. I found it wasn’t what I wanted to do, so I left, to re-immers in Tasmania and have a crack at a long-standing ambition to write local fiction. In 2001 we sold our lovely old inner-city house and moved to the bush, south-west of Margate. The writing process worked well, but getting published was hard. Since I was pushing sixty and time was short I decided to become a publisher. We set up Red Hill Books. Our first book was Patsy Crawford’s historical novel God bless little sister, about the 1912 Queenstown mining disaster. Then came my three novels, Paint, Threatened species and Strings, and a book of short stories by Patsy, Blood of a distant island.

My novels were well reviewed, nationally and locally, but I realised quickly that small publisher sales via bookshops had limited potential to recoup costs. Internet sales were slow to gain momentum. So we bought a Salamanca Market stall, and for nearly six years I sold Red Hill’s books, and Montpellier Press’s list, which included Maria’s lovely novel Yes Father, to the Salamanca crowds. It was a nice way for a writer to relate directly to readers, but I found the combination of writing and selling exhausting and incompatible. We sold the stall in 2010, and I could sleep in on Saturdays.

In the meantime interstate movie producers optioned my novels Paint and Strings, and in both cases I was contracted to adapt them for the screen. The global financial crisis struck, and efforts to finance the movies fell at the last hurdle. But you never know.

In 2010 I started a delightful collaboration with my friend, composer Don Kay, writing text for him to set to music. Our first work was Aspects of the vine, six songs about Tasmanian wine. Then came Bird songs, a cycle inspired by the birds of the hills behind Margate.

In my bottom drawer I had a treatment for a television documentary about the Bushranger Michael Howe and the young Aboriginal woman Black Mary. I wrote it soon after returning from the US, but in spite of the power of the story, couldn’t get it into production. I told Don I had the subject for a full-scale three act opera, if he was game to take it on. He read it and agreed. That was early 2011. I wrote the libretto and Don, approaching eighty, started the huge task of composition. We premiered The Bushranger’s Lover in concert in November 2014, with the Yorta Yorta soprano Deborah Cheetham AO singing Black Mary, and Michael Lampard as Michael Howe. Timothy Sexton, Artistic Director of the State Opera of South Australia, has included it in his development program for future production. Graeme Murphy, an enthusiastic supporter of the project from day one, has committed to direct it. Recently Don and I completed Four Reflective Songs, for baritone and piano, and we’re currently in the middle of a new work about post-colonial guilt.

That then, is my Tasmanian life to date. It’s not over yet. I’m writing a fourth novel, and intend to keep putting one foot in front of the other and enjoying the unpredictable way the view changes with every new step.
Cecil Malthus: an academic Anzac, linking Tasmania and New Zealand

MICHAEL ROI

This paper was presented to a meeting of the Tasmanian Historical Research Association on 8 September 2015

Cecil Malthus was born on 26 April 1890 at Timaru, a sizeable town on the central east coast of New Zealand's southern island. His parents both had been young adult immigrants, he from Devon and kin to the famous thinker, she from northern Ireland and working-class. Cecil was the youngest of many children. Most of his life was spent in his natal region, but 1914–17 passed in overseas military service, 1920–22 in postgraduate study in France, and 1923–33 teaching at the University of Tasmania. The man's chief fame is as the author of two books: Anzac: a retrospect and Armentières and the Somme, published respectively in 1965 and 2002, either side of his death in July 1976. Contributing and adding to these accounts were wartime letters from Cecil to Hazel Watters, his future wife, and these have become available on the internet. They reveal that the books presented a more consistent, even occasionally sanitised, narrative than did the letters – but such variation is small, and altogether understandable. This paper concentrates on periods Malthus spent outside New Zealand – his soldiering before and at Gallipoli, and his Tasmanian sojourn.

Life for the Malthus family in Timaru was spartan. Cecil had little affection for his father, much for his mother and brothers. He won scholarships that carried him through the exemplary Timaru Boys High School and then to the University of New Zealand's Canterbury College, Christchurch. French language and culture were the student's chief pursuits, but English, Latin, and German all had their place. Cecil did not enthuse about his alma mater, yet there enjoyed 'good friendship and good fellowship' while his academic performance always stayed high. He lived at 'College House', which – true to its Christchurch locale – was actively Anglican; early letters to Hazel suggest some shared religious commitment, but for him at least this soon withered. Sport always meant more, Cecil's own talent being in long-distance athletics; his slight frame – 66 inches and 132 pounds on enlistment – held power. He took a first class Master of Arts in 1932, then had a year of teacher training. In late 1913 he won Canterbury's nomination as national Rhodes Scholar, but instead of Oxford came posting to Nelson College (a secondary school for boys).

The loyalist, who had done his share of routine military training, enlisted immediately on war's outbreak: 'prospect of seeing service gave us a thrill of pure joy'. Presumably athletic prowess won him selection as a scout in the First Canterbury Battalion. Scouts were base-level intelligence agents – spying out lay of the land, carrying messages, and so on; in this case at least the role had but 'private' rank. In late September the company embarked on the Athenic, with a sojourn at Wellington before departure in a fleet of ten.

Shipboard life became tedious, awful food adding to discontent. Necessity forced Cecil to read such low-brow authors as Rex Beach and Robert W. Chambers, but Arnold Bennett gave counter-balance. Colombo revealed 'the splendour and squalor of the East', the natives proving 'thieves and swindlers' amidst 'teeming life, animation'. Aden presented 'very picturesque' Arabs, while the 'wide-eyed wonder' of callow young Tommies witnessed 'one of the few compensations of this war – its great educational
are well content with our first engagement." Our man had no front-line part. Back in Zeitoun his moods shifted. One letter told of life's relative comforts and evoked an idyllic view of the Nile, seen in company with a cultivated Egyptian, whose disquiet at British rule evoked Cecil's sympathy. He deplored 'the brutally overbearing attitude of some of our men' to every day Egyptians. Yet just a few days later another letter reviled Cairo as 'a hateful town ... full of filth and wickedness; one has only to think of a healthy, happy town in New Zealand to realise how widely different we are from all these “dagos” and niggers'. Had our innocent colonial within these days ventured into grimmest Cairo? Around this time he forsook learning Arabic, purportedly because his textbook differed so much from local 'jabber'.

The next weeks offered further trial as temperatures climbed, winds blew, route marches lengthened. Driven to introspection, Cecil chided himself for having chosen to become a teacher just for material return, ignoring higher claims of 'the most important profession in the world'; again he hoped that the rigours of soldiering would correct such personal flaws. Desperate for relief from boredom he tried his hand at gambling. More boredom! – but that itself gave solace: 'I am very lucky in that way: none of the ordinary vices are in my line'. Rumours spread of future moves, especially action in the Dardanelles. Arrival of reinforcements caused tension as veterans judged the newcomers ill-prepared – although jeers changed to applause for incoming Maoris. An impetus to orderly behaviour was warning that miscreants would suffer punishment by staying in camp when the virtuous went off to battle. Yet on the evening of 2 April (Good Friday) New Zealanders joined Australians in a notorious attack on underworld Cairo. Through previous hours Cecil had enjoyed 'one of those unsocial days which are so much to my taste', first at the Zoological/Botanical Gardens, then around bazaars and bookshops. Returned to camp he found himself listed among a 'picket' intended to control the rioters, but that duty was evaded. 'I didn’t want to fire on our men, yet I certainly had no sympathy with them.'

This upheaval coincided with quickening preparations for action, and further meditation:

Whenever things become too slow, we get a rumour to brighten up our hopes. Not that we are so very keen on getting to the front. I know we are supposed to pretend that we are, but now that our first enthusiasm is over, I think most of us are quite willing to keep our skins whole. But we would give anything to get out of this [place].
On 9 April Cecil’s tone shifted again. ‘I don’t think I ever experienced such health and energy as during the past six months ... we have had a good time here ... If we were not so excited, I believe, we would almost feel some regret at our departure.’ Anzac tells that its further remark, ‘our rifles are rather out of date’, provoked official reprimand, inhibiting Cecil’s reportage in the following tumultuous months.

Letters to Hazel were anyway sparse for the early Gallipoli period. However, Anzac drew from a memoir Cecil wrote in the following December–January and other sources, private and official. A preliminary note argued that his account’s value lay in it being representative of the average man’s Gallipoli experience; it avoided extremes in popular war literatures such as John Masefield’s romanticism, Leon Wolff’s pessimism, E.-M. Remarque’s Grotesqueries. ‘I have tried to write about the war as it really was.’ Whether deliberately or not, that phrasing echoed dicta of nineteenth-century giants of the historian’s craft, von Ranke and Acton.

In latter-day terms Cecil appears as a writer of history ‘from below’, presenting past events in terms of lived experiences rather than as part of some overarching pattern or purpose. Readers might well recognise Cecil’s success in this aim, while aware that it is often in silences that his books suggest mankind’s capacity to survive abysmal horror. Anzac’s title page quoted William Faulkner: ‘The past is never dead. It’s not even past’. Further texts came inter alia from Joseph Conrad, Dylan Thomas, Callimachus, and Thucydides.

Cecil and his fellows arrived from Alexandria at the Greek island of Lemnos on 15 April, and in the next days he joined other scouts in being briefed on Gallipoli’s terrain as well as having more general instruction. News that Australians were to land first caused the Kiwis ‘mixed feelings in which relief was the main ingredient’. As the ship crossed on the fate-ful night there prevailed ‘cheering and skylarking ... great excitement and expectancy’, fused with ‘corporate ... confidence’, perhaps tinged with ‘nervousness’, certainly free from ‘false heroics’. The troops had expected to disembark at noon, but did not do so until after 4 p.m., in part a consequence of the landing being made a mile north of the intended target. Cecil followed the consensus that this mistake led to confusion that doomed the campaign, but with a particular twist. He affirmed that the actual point of landing was not heavily defended by the Turks; had there been more vigorous action later on the 25th triumph might have come – but the invaders’ confusion denied that possibility.

The days ahead were arduous but without carnage. Cecil the scout joined in various reconnaissance patrols, without mishap and doubtless showing courage, initiative, and strength. Morale among his fellow New Zealanders stayed high, the result – he thought (in terms akin to those C.E.W. Bean and others have applied to Australian dig-gers) – of their being accustomed to ‘really rough country, to outdoor life and “getting around”’. Yet there was offering no such easy victory as had been forecast. When troops were ordered to embark on 5 May, rumour said first that the invasion was being abandoned, then that a rest-camp was the target. In fact it was Cape Helles, at the Gallipoli peninsula’s far south-west, Allied command having decided that hope lay in attack from this quarter.

On 8 May the New Zealanders engaged in consequent action. As a scout (although still but a private) Cecil led the charge in his sector. That role, he remembered, ‘not only gave me a thrill of self-importance but probably saved my life, for we had covered fifty yards or more before the hail of fire began’. The athlete, as well as the scout, thus spoke. Troops following in his wake suffered heavy casualties and the manoeuvre failed. Malthus described some consequent horrors, in a mundane way. By 20 May his group was back at Anzac Cove, in the aftermath of a Turkish attack there; both sides suffered, the Turks more heavily. The following days were comparatively halcyon: ‘There was generally something in our prospect – a scene of beauty, an instance of outstanding bravery or generosity, a quirk of the endless human comedy, or just the general unfailling good fellowship – which helped to ease our apprehensions and lighten the burden of hardship.

Cecil spent June and earlier July at Quinn’s Post, engaging all the while in fierce battle with the Turks, while dysentery spread further havoc. Yet those everyday virtues still prevailed. Thereby Quinn’s came to hold a unique resonance for Cecil, prompting the verdict: ‘War is a tragedy, of course, that we must always hope to avoid, but like most tragedies it under-lines all that is finest in the human spirit’. He quoted Sir Ian Hamilton, the British general in charge at Gallipoli to similar effect. That was among several sympathetic references to Hamilton in Anzac. Cecil accepted that the General lacked resolute self-confidence but insisted that decision-makers in London had failed to give him the armed support necessary for success.
From this time derived a more substantial letter to Hazel than any precursor through many past weeks. It mingled introspection with a tinge of conceit. While caring nought for rank or promotion, he thought that his education might have gained him a staff position better suited to serve the Allied cause. His impetuosity in enlisting had foreclosed any such outcome. ‘I may have made a mistake when I joined the ranks, but anyhow it was not a mistake to be ashamed of.’

As he wrote this on 27 June, Cecil was succumbing to the pervasive dysentery, and a fortnight later was removed to a grim hospital back in Lemnos. His fellows included both Australian and British troops. Whereas earlier such contacts had inclined him to favour Tommies over Diggers, now an opposite pattern was forming. ‘The Australians … conformed to our own code of honour among thieves, no stealing among ourselves, only from army stores or from officers.’

Early in August Cecil returned to Gallipoli, part of reinforcements for an Allied onslaught based on Suvla Bay. He did not rejoin his own company until the 8th, immediately after it had suffered grim losses, part of a general story of the attack’s failure. Anzac rebutted a 1936 book that criticised the New Zealanders’ part in this episode: Cecil insisted that the analyst ignored the role of a hidden Turkish outpost which had slaughtered the Kiwis. ‘I have carefully and repeatedly questioned survivors’, the patriot wrote fifty years later, stressing too that some New Zealand troops in fact reached their target, gaining sight of the Dardanelle Narrows. Elsewhere, however, the Turks sustained their barrage, forcing Allied retreat. By month’s end Cecil, now with rank of lance-corporal, was briefly in charge of the company, the two still-serving officers being absent, and no more senior NCO fit for duty. His reminiscence of this time achieved prose of rare power:

Patrol! In my schoolboy reading it was a gay group of horsemen riding through the night, to pistol shots and galloping hooves. But here on Gallipoli it was a dark, unnerving, monotonous strain. As you crept slowly, fearfully, down that winding trench (it was fairly deep and wide), you had always the thought in mind that sudden death or worse might be just round the next bend. You saw movement when there was no movement, shapes and shadows that were not what you thought, and they vanished and re-appeared while you waited tensely, and watched and imagined.

Cecil yet found resource to write to Hazel, telling that ever sustaining him was hope of the war’s end and of their reunion. Soon scarlet fever sent him back to Lemnos and that comfortless ‘hospital’.

There followed tedious weeks. Playing cards (especially ‘500’) and fantasising about repasts of New Zealand delicacies helped spend the time. Cecil’s tent mates included both Englishmen and ‘colonials’, and he became further convinced of the latter’s superiority. Late in October, now a ‘temporary’ corporal, he rejoined his Company, currently recuperating at Mudros. His very survival of the past terrible months won esteem. Here recreations included rugby and community singing – ‘A long, long, trail’; ‘Broken doll’; ‘The Blue Ridge Mountains’; ‘When this bleeding war is over’; ‘The girl I marry’; ‘We’re here because …’; ‘Ragtime band’; ‘Bells of Hell’; ‘Tipperary’; ‘Pack up your troubles’.

On 8 November came return to Gallipoli. Cecil was busy with patrol work, and also in building tunnels that were to hide pre-evacuation movement. Extreme cold now added its burden. By mid-December the plan to evacuate was known. ‘We couldn’t deny the common sense of it, yet it was a bitter blow to our pride, and we were leaving some good friends behind in very lonely graves.’ The campaign would have triumphed, lamented Cecil, had its launch achieved such skill and foresight as did the evacuation.

Immediately after withdrawal, Cecil again fell ill. This was no great burden: life went well, first at an Alexandria hospital, and then in convalescence under good Australian care. Backlog mail came in shoals, newspapers feeding the patient’s ‘absurd interest’ in cricket and football scores. Reading included a life of Disraeli, Gibbon’s Decline and fall, Flaubert, Gautier and Daudet. Still aware of weakness in his grasp of the oral language, Cecil the more enjoyed conversation with an educated Frenchman. He spoke too with ‘Egyptian and Greek students … and some jolly nice nurse-girls’. This was not the first hint of the man enjoying female company, but it seems certain that rampant desire was among the ‘ordinary vices’ he escaped. A photo had returned Hazel to Cecil’s dreams but still he confessed to ‘have no faith in words as the expression of feelings’ and so failure to convey his
love. He did offer comfort as Hazel wrestled with problems of religion and social justice. 'It is no crime to be unorthodox ... don't expect to solve any of these problems; they have no solution ... they are worth thinking about, but not to the extent of letting them disturb your peace of mind.' Concern less Hazel become over-stressed led him to discourage her from becoming a teacher; when she nevertheless did, he counselled that she keep her energy for the classroom rather than spend profitless hours on correcting exercises.

In mid-February Cecil returned to active duty, soon receiving a sergeant’s third stripe and engaged in training novice scouts. Time was coming for further action. Cecil claimed that to be welcome enough, although by now Egypt had become ‘good friend ... to me’. Of course New Zealand always meant far, far more. He recalled a sojourn with Hazel:

Those few happy days at Karitane epitomise for me all the happiness I have left behind. It is of them that I think when I am homesick and longing for green trees and shade and good New Zealand food and all the rest of it. Sometimes I think of the Opihi and trout fishing and ‘batching’, sometimes of Peel Forest and rata blossom, but Karitane is prime favourite. Those magnificent breakers, the tawny lion of Matanika, the evening sunlight over the hills.

This passage is quoted in the final pages of Cecil’s book on Anzac.

Soon came embarkation for France, and then four months in trenches at Armentières, leavened by friendship with locals, to the improving of his oral French. Cecil learned that German treatment of these people in the war’s early days had altogether differed from the atrocities alleged by Allied propaganda. Declaring that this ‘pack of exaggerations’ had impelled his enlistment, he affirmed to have ‘lost all my illusions about the righteousness of either side’. In fact he had joined before those propaganda allegations appeared. Further twisting the tail, Cecil excluded the just-quoted letter from his Armentières book, and its preface upheld the First War as a check on German tyranny. These ambiguities carry their own message: few of us enjoy confessing to wasted life, and after the Nazis any check on Germany might seem virtuous.

Armentières had its horrors but worse came with the Somme offensive, beginning in July. On 25 September Cecil stepped on a bomb, injuring his right foot, left hand and jaw. Hospital life resumed, now in England, and three toes were amputated. Thereby Cecil’s active service ended, he not pretending regret, but instead remarking ‘the business of killing has always been terribly distressful to me, and serious as my injury is I am thankful to be out of it with a clear conscience – and my life’. Many photographs had passed between himself and Hazel, but only one appears in his books; probably taken early in 1917, it suggests a man suffering pain, even anguish. During these months Cecil received benevolent support from relatives and their friends, most of these people being from the leisured classes; while grateful, he never became anglophile.

Returned home, Cecil and Hazel married in December 1918. He resumed teaching but in 1920 became the first recipient of a Canterbury College scholarship for study in France. Late that year the couple – now with a first babe – embarked for the University of Grenoble. There they spent two years, Cecil achieving well while becoming parent to a second son.

Scarcely had the couple returned to New Zealand than the University of Tasmania advertised for a teacher of modern languages. French and German had been taught at the University since its early days, first by H.B. Ritz and then I.M. Raamsdonk. Troopship memory of Hobart and appreciation of Australian soldiers surely guided Cecil’s decision to seek the post. His appointment became effective from March 1923. Among University staff was Canterbury graduate Douglas Copland, while Principal of the Teachers’ College was J.A. Johnson, once headmaster at Timaru High. Three other University staff had war service – historian Charles King, economist J.B. Brigden, and Registrar L.R. Thomas, who had been at Gallipoli. Perhaps
such associations helped the Malthuses settle into their new life. (Copland soon departed, but in 1926 New Zealand ex-serviceman A.B. Taylor became Professor of English.)

Precisely nine months after its Tasmanian landfall the family increased by another son, a daughter adding in 1925 and another son in 1930. This burgeoning must have strained resources: the famous Malthus’s central tenet was that human fertility begat poverty. In May 1926 Cecil addressed a relevant letter to the university authorities. Pay as a senior lecturer did not allow even purchase of books; there should be a sliding scale of salary increase, closing the gap between professors and lecturers; his teaching load was heavy, and he had had to abandon his doctoral thesis. The letter had no immediate impact. Withal, in 1928 Cecil launched an Honours school in French. Among his advanced students was Jean Batt, herself later to join the University’s Department of Modern Languages. Michael Roe remembers Miss Batt deprecating that her instruction had proceeded in English; she was to publish an impressive guide to French pronunciation and diction; Malthus receiving no acknowledgment. Another outstanding student was Elinor Hurst, destined to be a significant figure in the University’s life – both in her own right and as spouse of Professor Edwin Pitman, a commanding figure through his many years (1926-62) as Professor of Mathematics.

There survive a few other hints of the Malthuses’ Hobart life. Both Cecil and Hazel secured status as associate graduates of the university by virtue of their New Zealand degrees; this might hint at engagement in university politics, as they so qualified to vote for the University Council. Play varied work as in May 1929 Cecil won the hundred yards staff handicap at the University Sports, its handicapper perhaps heeding his injury too much and/or athleticism too little. Unlike most other academics’ children, the Malthuses’ attended government schools. In August 1931 Cecil wrote a forceful letter to the Mercury opposing the government’s plan to introduce high school fees. Speaking for and of New Zealand, it claimed ‘that hardly one man could be found, even among the supporters of the few private schools, who would deny that the institution of free, compulsory secondary education has proved the greatest blessing to the State in general that democracy has brought’. This was a cost that the whole community should bear; Tasmania suffered from private schools having undue influence. Forty (and more) years on, a key figure in Tasmania’s ‘Defence of Government Schools’ campaign was George Wilson, likewise an academic from Canterbury.

Government proceeded with high school fees, but otherwise these latter years offered gains for Cecil. He won promotion to associate-professor level, and served as Dean of Arts. That research project achieved new life, and in mid-1933 the University of New Zealand honoured him as Doctor of Letters, for a thesis that explored Shakespeare’s influence on the French dramatist Alfred Musset. This was indeed an achievement, although when the work was published in 1988 (through the initiative of an erstwhile student of Cecil’s) one persuasive-if-patronising review demeaned the study as outdated even when written. Its learning sometimes seems laborious.

Withal, his doctorate surely helped to end Cecil’s Tasmanian span. The award coincided with Canterbury’s chair of modern languages becoming vacant, and he filled that post. A letter offered to Tasmania’s University Council ‘my hearty thanks for its unfailing kindness … I shall have many regrets at leaving its service’. Subsequently writing from New Zealand, Cecil said that while his students were better than their Hobart counterparts, otherwise the balance shifted: ‘I did not appreciate in Tasmania what an incentive was given to one’s work by having a say in all the conditions governing it’. Such cheer is sparse in our university’s annals of that time. However, one doubts if Cecil ever regretted his move, and he stayed at the University of Canterbury until retirement in 1955. His name nowhere appears in the history of that institution, highly detailed though it is. Life’s apotheosis came with Anzac and Armentières.
Two 1838 armed incursions into Upper Canada resulting in transportation to Van Diemen’s Land

John C. Carter

Between December 1837 and December 1838, at least thirteen armed incursions from the United States into Upper Canada occurred (see Appendix A for a complete list). More than a thousand participants were arrested for treason and piratical invasion. Ultimately 92 were charged, convicted and then sentenced to be transported as political prisoners to Van Diemen’s Land. This article describes the last two actions of the 1838 Upper Canadian Rebellion/Patriot War, which resulted in 77 English-speaking prisoners being captured and sent to Van Diemen’s Land. Using primary evidence often from participants in or observers of these two battles, numerous quotations from sources not readily available in Tasmania will chronologically describe events associated with these two incursions.

The Battle of the Windmill

After the first rebellion by disaffected Canadians was defeated in 1837, many rebels fled to the United States and formed the Hunter Patriots association to plan a second rebellion. In November 1838 a group of Patriots planned to attack Fort Wellington, a British military fortification in the town of Prescott situated on the north bank of the St Lawrence River. Commanded by John Birge, on 12 November about 250 Patriots left Sackets Harbor in New York State, sailed to Prescott and eventually landed at Windmill Hill, two miles east of Prescott. They occupied the windmill; an initial British attack failed; but after several days of standoff, on 16 November the British...
with various success for about an hour when the firing was further back from the river and finally ceased with the exception of a few discharges from a stone wind mill near the water into which it is believed a party of the Patriots have thrown themselves. It is evident that the Patriots have been beaten, but whether the garrison have retreated into the country or been taken is not yet known. The party yet remains in the wind mill, but there is no escape from the British.1

It did not take long for news of the Battle of the Windmill to be circulated widely in the popular press. On 17 November, an unnamed loyalist observer provided graphic details of the battle, and concluded that the action 'soon ended in the complete destruction of the pirates, who have left above 60 dead bodies on the ground'. 2 A description of the raid written by a United States officer aboard the American armed steamer *Telegraph* was printed on 29 November. This witness was impressed with the readiness of the Upper Canadian militia to resist an attack upon the province, and gave evidence of the efforts made by the United States government to enforce its neutrality laws. At the end of the battle the officer noted that:

> We shortly returned to port, and beheld the whole town of Prescott [Upper Canada] brightly ILLUMINATED. What a commentary on patriotism, that these people should illuminate their houses, because their deliverers had been slaughtered! Need we more than this to convince us that the people of Canada are not disaffected?3

The (Kingston) *Chronicle & Gazette* provided details of the military court martial and trial of Patriot prisoners held at Kingston's Fort Henry. It also included an extract of a letter from Sackets Harbor, New York, and questioned both ‘the late Prescott affair’ and the common sense of that incursion, concluding by observing:

> Will not this sad lesson open the eyes of our people, and induce them to respect the laws of their own country, instead of periling their lives and honor on such promises of 150 acres of Canada land and 24 dollars bounty? ... Not a Canadian joined them, but on the contrary fought them bravely and whipped them soundly.4

In a letter to his father in Scotland, Lieutenant Andrew Agnew of the 93rd Highland Regiment provided a different military perspective. After months of tedious garrison duty at Fort Wellington in Prescott, Agnew expressed a strong desire to engage the Patriot forces. As an actual
participant fighting on the government side, Agnew provided a fascinating day-by-day account of the action. He spoke highly of his military superiors and the militia, and offered numerical statistics of the casualties:

Total killed were 2 officers and 13 men. About 40 wounded. Of the rebels the numbers are uncertain as they threw their dead into the river the morning of the armistice. 15 bodies were left on the field, many must have been burned and several died afterwards of wounds. We had about 150 prisoners. 5

Lieutenant Colonel Ogle Robert Gowan, leader of the Orange Lodge in Upper Canada, was also directly involved in the battle, and had portions of his account printed in *Mackenzie's Gazette*. His observations provide yet another version of events from the perspective of the militia, and portray its important role during the fighting which took place on 13 November 1838.6

Another rich source of information reflecting the loyalist position is found in the journal of First Lieutenant Charles Allen Parker of the Royal Marines. As a nineteenth-century military officer, Parker was trained to be an astute observer and an accurate communicator. What he recorded in his diary reflects these attributes. Parker had command of 65 men. On engagement with the enemy forces, they faced sustained rifle fire from Patriot snipers holed up in the stone buildings at the windmill. During the battle,

Parker was wounded in the arm and narrowly avoided being killed when another bullet passed through the hair on the side of his head. Parker postulated that the rebels targeted him because he was an officer, and wrote: ‘I felt at this time that I had been marked, my dress distinguishing me: the three men nearest me were struck about the same moment’. From his company, five men died and 22 received wounds during the initial battle. On leaving the field after victory, Parker recorded that 13 soldiers had been killed and 62 wounded. He surmised that the troops under his command had killed or seriously wounded at least 30 of the Patriot force. No love was lost for his adversaries. When orders for a court martial were given for the trial of prisoners to commence, Parker concluded:

How gratifying to the devotedly loyal inhabitants of this province, to see their enemies defeated, – totally defeated from east to west, from one extremity to the other of their province. Loyal Canadians!

If those whose hearts ought to teem with gratitude, look coldly on your deeds an approving conscience will be your reward.

His positive feelings for the loyalty of most Upper Canadian citizens and for the defeat of the Patriots were steadfast.7

Private T. Rose, a soldier with the 34th Regiment, wrote a letter to his wife in England on December 12, 1838. He noted that: ‘The rebels shot four of the 83 regiment, an officer, a lieut. of militia and two marines at the last attack they made by Kingston, but ours got 150 of them in a mill and shot and made prisoners of all of them’.8

Not to be outdone, newspapers supporting the Patriot cause also soon had first-hand accounts published telling their version of the events. It was reported that ‘the field is covered with dead and wounded soldiers of the government, while so far as was known, but thirteen of the rebels had fallen ... So far “the Patriot” forces have sustained themselves against fearful odds, and with signal success’.9 From November 24 until the end of 1838, *Mackenzie's Gazette*, published in New York City, printed numerous articles, reports and excerpts from American newspapers. In a letter to the editor, an anonymous observer reported that on 13 November, Patriot forces numbering 128 ‘stood their ground, facing between 600 and 800 British regulars and volunteers,’ eventually driving ‘the British back into the fort with a loss of over 100 dead on the field, and three times that number wounded’. It also published a journal of events written by Canadian-born Patriots James Philips and Alexander Wright, both of whom were participants in the battle. They were killed in action on November 13 and 16 respectively.10

In addition, a British account of the Prescott hostilities was reprinted...
from an original article. Private correspondence from Ogdensburg on 26 November supplied additional primary information from an American perspective in the following week's edition of the Gazette, and Patriot General John Ward Birge, commander of the 'late unfortunate attempt to assist the Canadians', sent his personal reflections about the battle in a letter to the editor, William Lyon Mackenzie.

The events, consequences and aftermath of the Battle of the Windmill were detailed in a narrative written by Patriot Captain E. Wingate Davis. He concluded by noting that:

On the following day [November 16, 1838] an unconditional surrender of the force was made. The prisoners were conveyed to Kingston [Upper Canada] and there tried upon the charge of Brigandage. All of the officers and nearly all of the rank-and-file were found guilty. The former were all hanged and the latter, with the exception of a few pardoned, sent to Van Dieman's Land for long periods.

Davis claimed that he was one of only a few Patriots to escape from the battle, and he reflected upon his experiences later in his life.

The Gentleman’s Magazine was one of the first British journals to report on the Battle of the Windmill. In the January 1839 edition, the following account was published:

Accordingly, on the night of the 11th ... 800 republican pirates embarked in two schooners at Ogdensburgh [New York], fully armed, and provided with six or eight pieces of artillery, to attack the town of Prescott [Upper Canada], on the opposite side of the river. They failed in the attempt to disembark at Prescott; but by the aid of two United States' steamers, effected a landing a mile or two below the town, where they established themselves in a windmill and some stone buildings, and repelled the first attempt to dislodge them, killing and wounding forty-five of their assailants, among whom were five officers; but on the 15th, Col. [Henry] Dundas brought a reinforcement of regular troops, with three pieces of artillery, against the invaders. From the water they were fired upon by Captain [Williams] Sandom, who had two gun-boats and, after enduring the attack for about an hour, they hung out their flag of truce and surrendered at discretion.

After hostilities had officially subsided, William Lyon Mackenzie continued to publish related stories, including an account of the ‘Attempt to Save Von Shultze [sic] & the Brave Boys in the Wind-Mill’, featuring a narrative by Ogdensburg’s postmaster Preston King and his ‘Heroic Conduct’. Even more amazing was the publishing of Sebastian John (Meyer) Myer’s short ‘Narrative of the Expedition to Prescott and Wind Mill Point’. Myer was a 21-year-old native of Germany who had been living in Syracuse, New York, prior to joining up with the Patriot forces, and supposedly acted as a cook. He was captured, found guilty, sentenced to death, recommended for mercy and eventually set free. He moved to Rochester, New York, where he wrote about the experiences associated with his involvement at the Battle of the Windmill. He sent these remembrances to Mackenzie, and they were published almost two years to the date of the actual incursion.

Myer, with William Gates, Daniel Heustis and Stephen Wright, were the only known Patriot participants captured at the Battle of the Windmill to have had their recollections and memoirs published. It is conceivable that Mackenzie assisted Myer in composing the piece. If so, the timing of its publication was not surprising. Mackenzie must have hoped that by printing Myer’s article that he could shore up declining numbers of paid subscriptions and the resulting flagging fortunes of his newspaper.
Mackenzie’s efforts were unsuccessful, as the 14 November issue became the penultimate issue of the Gazette.

Sebastian Myer suggested that it was not yet time for him to comment on the conduct of the English government regarding what he called the ‘brave and innocent patriots’, and to address the transporting of his colleagues and others to the penal colony of Van Diemen’s Land. He concluded his narrative by asking a question in poetical form:

Shall Canada fall as Poland did,
And shall the heavenly spark be hid,
Which fired the Patriot host –

Shall Queen Victoria’s vaunted claim,
And bloody flag, deep died in shame,
Still move around our coast?
Say, shall she boast that in her might,
She trampled on that holy right,
Which your forefathers won;
And shall their sons with dastard mien,
Stand trembling near the bloody scene,
And not to conquest run? 16

This was not the first verse to be published about the Battle of the Windmill. Gavin Russell, a Sergeant in the 2nd Regiment Grenville Militia, wrote a twenty-page epic poem regarding his thoughts on and sentiments about the events. It was published in Montreal in 1839. Soon after the battle, a traditional song began to circulate which acknowledged the ‘success’ of the British regular troops and the Canadian volunteers and militia who had ‘triumphed’ over the primarily American invading forces.

In a strange quirk of fate, the site of the battle became a favoured destination for travellers. Englishman Thomas Sibbald passed by aboard a narrow propeller canal boat on 18 September 1842. He recorded:

During the early part of the night we passed Prescott, the roofless buildings, visible by moonlight, tell of a party of rebels or brigands under Van Schultz [sic], a Pole, who crossed the St. Lawrence on the night of the 14th November, 1838, and took possession of a strong stone windmill, a little below the town, the provisional militia had kept them in check, until troops and guns could be sent from Brockville. On the morning of the 15th a simultaneous attack was made by land and water, and the result was the capture of the mill, though the loss was very great on the side of the assailants, considering that their foes fought with halters around their necks. Many of the brigands were killed, those who survived were taken prisoners, among them, Van Schultz, who with five of his officers was executed at Kingston. 17

Captain Sir James E. Alexander of the 14th Regiment of Foot with his wife, Lady Alexander, actually visited the site where the battle took place, on a journey in 1842. Alexander noted that: ‘Here the American “Sympathizers” had made a bold attempt to establish a footing in Canada’. He claimed that 400 Patriots had embarked from Sackets Harbor, New York, to engage British troops commanded by Colonel Plomer Young and armed steamers under the direction of Captain Williams Sandom. Captain Alexander recorded that eighteen British soldiers were killed. He also viewed a stone slab near the ruins of the windmill which bore the following inscription:

‘Patriots Stop And Shed A Tear! In Memory of the Brave Patriots Who Fell In Defence Of Liberty At Windmill Point, In The Year 1838. Where Liberty Dwells, There Is My Country. Woe To Britain!’ 18

Personal remembrances later published about what Ralph Jones, captain of the Canadian steamer William IV, reportedly witnessed, and what...
contemporary chronicler and correspondent A.M. St. Germain purportedly saw, were questioned for their accuracy. Numerous articles in mainland Australian and Van Diemen’s Land newspapers were published in April and May 1839. While newsworthy, they would provide little solace for the sixty participants at the Battle of the Windmill who had been sentenced for their participation and were preparing for transportation to Van Diemen’s Land as political prisoners.

The defeat at Prescott ended Patriot operations along the St Lawrence River. Disastrous as was this defeat, it did not deter other rebel forces stationed along the Detroit River from launching an attack on Windsor on 4 December 1838.

**Events in the Western District**

In the winter and spring of 1838, a series of armed attacks occurred in the Western District of Upper Canada along the Detroit River, and on Pelee Island in Lake Erie, and also in the summer of 1838 along the St Clair River. Throughout 1838, residents of the Western District (today’s Essex, Kent and Lambton counties) experienced eight attempts by the Patriot Army to ‘liberate’ Upper Canada from British rule, overthrow the Canadian government and establish a republican style of government.

After the St Clair Raids (four incursions into Upper Canada from the State of Michigan) in late June 1838, no violations of the United States Neutrality Act took place in the Western District of Upper Canada for nearly six months. However, tensions continued to build in this quarter. Robert Marsh, a Patriot who had been involved at the Battle of Pelee Island on 3 March, returned to Detroit in the summer of 1838. He described the prevailing mood:

> Great preparations were being made all over the country for renewing the war. As many of our citizens were confined, and executions taking place in different parts of Canada ... and taunts and threats by tories were daily occurrences, it was concluded best by many from Canada as well as thousands on this side to make one more trial.

British traveller T.R. Preston recorded his thoughts about what was to come: ‘Under the plausible pretext of regeneration of Canada, it was apparent that an indiscriminate plunder of Canadians was contemplated.’ Scottish writer Patrick Matthew also reflected on the situation, in the fall of 1838:

> The late disturbances have tended much to aggravate the misery; emigration and the foreign supply of dollars has ceased, property has been destroyed, the price of foreign supplies increased, the security of property has been lessened, industry has been checked, and even though the disturbances have been put down for the present, an anticipation of future mischief continues to prevail.

A portent of what was yet to come.

**The Battle of Windsor**

While mid-October rumours of a planned attack on Fort Malden (Amherstburg) proved to be false, accurate reports of Patriot forces training near Fort Gratiot (now Port Huron, Michigan) resulted in the Essex militia being called out.

All the Western and London Districts are in a bustle; 500 Militia are called out at Chatham; 350 are at Port Sarnia. The Militia here [Sandwich] and at Amherstburg are ordered to be in readiness at a
minutes warning. The Lake Shore Militia are ordered out, and the whole of the troops at Amherstburg have been working day and night and all last Saturday getting the fortifications ready.21

Diligent patrols by the Detroit-based Brady Guards thwarted Patriot attempts to hijack steamers on 30 November and 1 December. A letter sent to American General Hugh Brady by local Upper Canadian magistrate Colonel John Prince on 1 December noted the urgent situation:

I have ascertained from unquestionable authority that upwards of 1000 men left Buffalo a few days back in Steamers, and that they were to be reinforced all along the Shore of Lake Erie until they mustered about 5000 men; and that their determination is to make a descent upon Malden [Amherstburg] or some part of the frontier tonight. I have also this very afternoon been informed by one professing to be (but not being in reality) a “Patriot,” that there is a camp no less than 400 of these Scoundrels in the woods about 2 miles back of Springwells [Michigan]; and that their fixed determination is to attack us here [Amherstburg] or at Windsor this night.22

Ensign Alexander Cunningham Robertson of the 34th Regiment of Foot confirmed this threat in his diary entry of 4 December 1838: ‘For more than a month we have been kept in a state of constant readiness by the demonstration of a body of about 500 Brigands who were distributed along the Michigan frontier and threatened to invade our territory’.23 Robertson and the loyalist forces would not have to wait much longer to clash with the enemy.

With word received at Sandwich (now Windsor) that an invasion was imminent, defending forces were put on alert. The attack did not materialise as drifting ice apparently frustrated this attempt. The following evening, Patriot General Lucius Verus Bierce and his followers marched through the streets of Detroit, and took possession of the steamer Champlain. The rebel party crossed into Canadian waters early on the morning of 4 December, landing opposite the lower end of Belle Island. The invasion force, of some Canadian insurgents but mostly American confederates, was estimated to number between 150 and 180 men.

The Patriot invaders had expected that their numbers would be augmented by 500 additional sympathisers. This support did not come to fruition. Patriot Samuel Snow recorded his abject disappointment: ‘Not a Canadian met us on our arrival save a few who joined us in Michigan, and some of these turned traitor soon after’.24

The rebel forces came upon a guardhouse occupied by members of the Essex militia. After a ‘short but spirited resistance’ by the Canadian defenders, the position was captured and the building was burnt. Nearby at Van Allen’s wharf, the Canadian steamer Thames was torched. A company of Patriots commanded by General William Putnam advanced down Sandwich Street and encamped in an orchard behind the Francois Baby house. By 6 a.m. Windsor was in the hands of the invading rebels. An alarm was raised and the Essex militia responded. At 6.30 a.m. this force engaged the Patriots. A ‘skirmishing fight’ ensued.

Surprisingly and unexplainably, Patriot General Bierce did not attempt to assist his compatriots, nor could he be persuaded to advance to the aid of General Putnam’s besieged detachment. Rebel reinforcements tried to cross the Detroit River to join the fray. They were challenged by American federal troops patrolling aboard the steamer Erie, and were turned back.

Enthusiasm for the invasion into Upper Canada was evidenced in Detroit. Thousands of residents assembled along the river front to show vocally their support for the Patriot forces. Patriot Robert Marsh recorded the spectacle that he witnessed across the river from Sandwich: ‘There were thousands to be seen at day-light, on the tops of buildings swinging their hats and cheering us on our morning’s success.’ Without any additional armed support, General Putnam was compelled to order his forces to withdraw. Upper Canadian Patriot Elijah C. Woodman provided an on-the-spot rebel perspective of the defeat:

After a sharp fight we drove them back towards Sandwich but they were reinforced by the 32nd Regiment of Regulars under command of Col. [John] Maitland. This combined force was too much for us and we were repulsed and driven back to the river.25

Henry Grant, editor of the Sandwich Western Herald and a member of the militia involved in the action, described the scene that he witnessed:
The straggling volunteers of Sandwich, of whom we had the honor to constitute a part, came up in time to send a few leaden messengers after the fast-footed pirates, who fled with a velocity unexampled in the annals of locomotion. 26

Private T. Rose of the 34th Regiment provided further on-the-spot observations: ‘How the rebels did run when they saw us come. The poor devils dropped like cocks – when we gave them steel they ran into the woods where most of them were taken prisoner’. 27

The Patriots were caught in a murderous cross-fire, and 26 men including General Putnam were killed. Pandemonium reigned supreme as the rebels attempted to escape.

On 6 December, American Brigadier General Hugh Brady wrote from Detroit to his superior General Rogers Jones, providing his own personal account of the Battle of Windsor:

about 240 of these misguided men, effected a landing upon the Canada Shore nearly opposite this City, about 4 o’clock on Tuesday morning, surprised a small guard burnt the building occupied as barracks, & a Steam Boat lying at the wharf. After a slight action, between them and a few Militia hastily assembled, the Patriots gave way, leaving 17 killed, with the loss of but four on the part of the Loyalists. On arrival of a reinforcement of regular troops from [Fort] Malden, the Patriots broke & took to the woods, with the exception of some forty who escaped in canoes to Hog Island [Michigan].

By 8 a.m. the Patriots had been routed. Colonel John Prince sent the militia back to Sandwich to counter another rumoured attack. Initially 25 Patriots were taken captive. Prince ordered that five were to be summarily executed on the spot. Other escapees were arrested by American troops patrolling the Detroit River. The remainder of the invading force was tracked down by Indians and British regulars, and those captured were incarcerated in the Sandwich gaol. On 7 December 1838, Lieutenant Henry Rudyard, Staff Adjutant for the Western District and a close friend of Colonel John Prince, wrote of the Battle of Windsor:

an affair had happened there, a landing having been made by the Brigands at Windsor and after burning a house occupied by the Volunteers as a Barrack & the Steamer Thames, met by the Militia and completely routed a number having been killed & taken prisoners. 28

Lieutenant Charles Parker also recorded the specifics of these events in his diary:

The rebels were met by Colonel Prince who utterly defeated them killing 25 of them and taking several prisoners, the British loss in this affair was very trifling, the defeated Brigands fled to the woods, where they perished miserably from the Severity of the Season, Numbers being found by the troops sent out after them frozen to death around fires. Fit retribution for Such lawless spirits. 29

Loyalist soldier Private T. Rose, who was engaged with the 34th Regiment in the fray, concluded:

We and the militia shot a great many of them, they were lying about the streets like dead dogs – There are a great many more prisoners wounded which we left at Windsor. The Indians and a company of ours are in the woods after the remainder. 30

Eventually 44 prisoners were rounded up and sent to London, Upper Canada for trial by court martial.

Colonel John Prince’s diary provided brief but chilling details of the Battle of Windsor:

Awoke at 6 a.m. by an alarm gun at Sandwich. Rose & saw a fire at Windsor. Proceeded there with the Militia & found it in possession of Brigands and Pirates. We attacked them & killed 27 and took 20 Prisoners. I ordered the first 5 taken to be shot. 31

An entry in Alexander Robertson’s diary commented upon seeing a dead man lying on the street in Sandwich, and made a direct criticism about Prince’s actions:

Enquired who he was – Was told it was our prisoner shot like a dog by order of Colonel Prince. 4 or 5 people had already been served the same way by him [Prince] and there is a great difference of opinion as to the morality of this proceeding. Right or wrong, I think the voluntary assumption of the officer of executioner did not say much for the task of the gallant lawyer. 32
While the controversy over Prince’s summary executions was yet to be formally judged, and captured rebels faced trials, imprisonment and then transportation to Van Diemen’s Land, the Patriot Army had for all intents and purposes been roundly defeated and dispersed. The Battle of Windsor was the final incursion of the 1838 Upper Canadian Rebellion. The curtain had fallen on the ‘last grand act’ of the Patriot War. In the aftermath, seventeen men captured at the Battle of Windsor and one captured at the St Clair Raids would be found guilty for their transgressions (see Appendix B for a list of names). The Upper Canadian Lieutenant-Governor, Sir George Arthur, would eventually send them with one-way tickets to Van Diemen’s Land. There these Patriot exiles would serve out their sentences as political prisoners along with others captured at the St Clair Raids, the Short Hills incursion and the Battle of the Windmill.

One year after this incursion and battle, the *Sandwich Western Herald* assessed the state of affairs. The editor, Henry Grant, wrote that: ‘We heartily trust that a continuation of the peace at present so happily existing along our borders will make “our folk” forget that anything so dreadful as the “Battle of Windsor” ever happened at all!’

In correspondence with General Winfield Scott, Hugh Brady provided an American perspective:

> As far as I can learn, and I have made every enquiry, there is not the least preparation making by the Patriots on our side of the line, indeed, the frontier has not been so tranquil for the past two years, as at present, and a communication that I received a few days since from Lieut Col Airy [sic], Commanding at Malden, shows that he entertains the same opinion.

Colchester Postmaster and Justice of the Peace, John G. Buchanan, expressed similar sentiments in his diary: ‘The Rebels [sic] returned again in the fall of 38 & gave some trouble in Windsor when they were routed and some after the Battle were shot down by Col. Prince’s orders and were not troubled any more’.

**Conclusion**

The successful repulsion and defeat of invading Patriot armies at the Battle of the Windmill and at the Battle of Windsor thankfully brought this border war to a timely close. While constituting the end of one chapter in this intriguing story, it would begin another episode which would directly link the history of Ontario with that of Tasmania. With these events, the twinned heritage of Canada and Australia would be forever connected.

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**Appendix A**

**1838 Upper Canadian Rebellion/Patriot War: A Chronology of Events and Incursions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Incursion/Event</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13 December 1837</td>
<td>Niagara River – Navy Island</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to 14 January 1838</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8–9 January 1838</td>
<td>Detroit River – Sugar Island, Bois Blanc Island, schooner <em>Anne</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 February 1838</td>
<td>St Lawrence River – Hickory Island</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23–25 February 1838</td>
<td>Detroit River – Fighting Island</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 February</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to 3 March 1838</td>
<td>Lake Erie – invasion of and Battle of Pelee Island</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29–30 May 1838</td>
<td>St Lawrence River – steamboat <em>Sir Robert Peel</em> attacked and burned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 June to 3 July 1838</td>
<td>Niagara River – Short Hills Incursion (13 prisoners transported)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26–28 June 26 1838</td>
<td>St Clair River – 4 incursions constituting the St Clair Raids (1 prisoner transported)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12–16 November 1838</td>
<td>St Lawrence River – Battle of the Windmill (60 prisoners transported)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 December</td>
<td>Detroit River – Battle of Windsor (17 prisoners transported)</td>
<td></td>
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**Appendix B**

**Prisoners captured at the Battle of Windsor, tried and convicted of piratical invasion and treason, then transported to Van Diemen’s Land as political prisoners**

The majority of these men ended up first working at probation stations, and then on tickets of leave at large privately owned estates in the Van Diemen’s Land midlands. Subsequently, their ultimate pardons were granted and they were released from captivity:

Aitcheson, James Milne; Barnum, Henry V.; Fero, James De Witt; Guttridge, John Seymour; Morin (Murray), Michael; Marsh, Robert; Nottage, William; Snow, Samuel; Stevens, Elizur; Sweet, Alvin B.; Sheldon, Chauncey; Sprague (Spragge), John; Stewart, Riley Monson; Simmonds, John Henry; Tyrrell, John B.; Williams, John C.; Woodman, Elijah C. and Williams, James Peter.

Horace Cooley was captured at the St Clair Raids and charged with burglary. He was also transported to Van Diemen’s Land with 77 other prisoners captured at the battles of the Windmill and Windsor.
ENDNOTES

1 Hiram Denio, ‘Another Letter Anent the Patriot Rebellion of the Battle of the Windmill’, St Lawrence County Historical Association Quarterly, April 1960.
2 Extra edition of (Kingston) Upper Canada Herald, 17 November 1838.
3 Army and Navy Chronicle, 29 November 1838.
4 (Kingston) Chronicle & Gazette, 5 December 1838.
5 Robert J. Andrews & Rosalyn Parker Art (eds), Mackenzie's Gazette, 30 November 1838.
6 Mackenzie's Gazette, 5 December 1838.
7 Mackenzie's Gazette, 20 December 1838.
8 ‘Extract of a Letter from a soldier to his wife, on Dec. 12, 1838’, Leeds Intelligencer, 2 July 1839.
9 Ogensburg Times, 13 November 1838; Belfast [Maine] Waldo Patriot, 30 November 1838.
10 Mackenzie’s Gazette, November-December 1838 passim, especially December.
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12 Mackenzie’s Gazette, 1, 22 December 1838.
13 Gardner B. Chapin, ‘The Hunter Lodge’ Movement of 1838, Tales of the St. Lawrence, Reuse’s Point, New York, 1875, pp. 335–82.
14 Mackenzie's Gazette, 24 October 1840.
15 Mackenzie’s Gazette, 14 November 1840.
19 Ogensburg Daily Journal, 5 August 1888; St. Lawrence Republican & Ogensburg Weekly Journal, 26 December 1888.
20 Robert Marsh, Seven Years of My Life, or Narrative of a Patriot Exile, Buffalo, 1847; T.R. Preston, Three Years’ Residence in Canada, London, 1849, vol. 1; Patrick Matthew, Emigration Fields, Edinburgh, 1839.
21 Mackenzie’s Gazette, 17 November 1838.

The Battle of the Windmill, from a sketch in the Syracuse Herald, 26 November 1839

24 Samuel Snow, An Exile’s Return or Narrative of Samuel Snow, Cleveland, 1846.
26 Sandwich Western Herald, 11 December 1838.
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30 Leeds Intelligence, 2 July 1839.
31 John Prince Diary, Windsor’s Community Museum, Windsor, Ontario.
32 Robertson, Diary, Toronto Reference Library.
33 Sandwich Western Herald, 4 December 1839.
34 Francis Paul Prucha, Reports of General Brady on the Patriot War, Canadian Historical Review, March 1990, vol. 31, no. 1.
35 John Buchanan Diary, Harrow Early Immigrant Research Society (HEIRS), Harrow, Ontario.

Exhibition

Ellen Nora (Nellie) Payne’s woodcarving, Westbury

The SESQUICENTENARY EXHIBITION of Ellen Nora Payne’s woodcarving held at Westbury from 9 October to 2 November 2015 was the result of eighteen months of planning and research by a committee of six persons, with Pam Swain as co-ordinator. In early 2014, a group of Westbury residents recognised that the year 2015 would be an important and significant year for Westbury. It is the sesquicentenary of the birth of Ellen Nora (Nellie) Payne and as it is also the First World War centenary year, it was an appropriate time to research and to recognise Nellie’s significant contribution to Tasmanian communities. A large number of carved wooden honour boards, recognising the contribution of Tasmanian armed forces personnel, are displayed at many churches, halls and schools throughout the state. The exhibition was housed at four separate venues: the Westbury Town Hall, Fitzpatrick’s Inn, St Andrew’s Church, plus the Westbury cemetery where Nellie’s ashes and those of other family members, including her husband, are buried.

Ellen Nora Payne (née Field), born in 1865 and raised at the family property ‘Westfield’ near Westbury, was the youngest daughter and the twelfth of fourteen children born to Thomas and Elizabeth Field. She was always known by the name of ‘Nellie’. Thomas was a prominent farmer in the area and served as a member of the Tasmanian Parliament. In January 1887, Nellie married Charles Alexander Payne, an English medical practitioner. They lived in Hobart until 1891 and then moved to Melbourne.

Fine carving on the pulpit in St Andrew's (Julie Kapeller)
It was during this time in Melbourne that Nellie began her lessons in woodcarving. During 1899, while on a visit to England, Dr Payne decided to remain in England to pursue his medical career. In 1900, they were based in Kent, where Nellie established a studio and Charles set up a small psychiatric hospital. During these years Nellie attended classes and graduated from Goldsmiths College, the School of Art at the University of London. She also attended courses in painting, clay modelling, embroidery, leatherwork and copperwork. Nellie and Charles returned to Tasmania in 1906 and Nellie began her woodcarving career: a career that lasted for over 45 years.

St Andrew's Anglican Church, on Lonsdale Promenade in Westbury, is home to a large collection of Nellie’s woodcarvings. This was the Field family church and houses many fine examples of carvings in a variety of woods, primarily blackwood and oak. The carved pulpit, dedicated to her parents, was fashioned and carved in England, shipped to Tasmania in individual pieces, then assembled here. In addition to the pulpit, the reredos behind the altar and the intricately carved rood screen dedicated to Nellie’s seven sisters, there are many other examples permanently housed at St Andrew’s Church. On the walls are commemorative plaques and honour boards to respect former parishioners. The display housed at the church for the exhibition also featured Nellie’s prayer book, a variety of contemporary photographs and significant other ecclesiastical carvings. A visit to St Andrew’s is an opportunity to view the many special examples of Nellie’s work and to realise the scope and variety displayed in these items.

At the Westbury Town Hall the largest collection of Nellie’s work in the exhibition was housed, showcasing the extent of work produced. These items were displayed in a time-line showing the progression of style, skill and variety. Fitzpatrick’s Inn displayed more items, in one room specially dedicated to the exhibition. It is not possible to adequately describe the extent and variety of the works displayed at the exhibition. Many dower boxes made for friends were carved with initials of that person; this feature was incorporated into a décor that mainly featured native flora and fauna. The many honour boards, sourced mainly from public buildings throughout the state, have particular relevance to this First World War centenary year and all are individual designs. The names and initials of men and women who enlisted from their local community, are meticulously carved onto these boards and show a variety of the intricate decorative carving that is the hallmark of Nellie’s work.

Over two hundred items were documented by the committee and in excess of seventy items were lent for the exhibition. Items from the mainland, the United Kingdom and Switzerland were professionally photographed and these photographs were printed and mounted for display. To provide other examples for the exhibition required travel throughout the state to photograph the many items in held private collections, schools, halls, churches and museums.

The THRA excursion began with a casual dinner at Fitzpatrick’s Inn, where Pam Swain ably outlined the history of the exhibition and explained what we were to look for. On Saturday, members explored the four venues. Anne Thwaites & Ken Wright, who organised the programme for THRA members over this weekend, arranged a ‘Taste of the Meander Valley’ dinner at Fitzpatrick’s Inn for Saturday evening, with historian and author Nic Haygarth as guest speaker. Nic spoke about William Field, his four sons, and their high country exploits and showed family photographs illustrating
the people, the land and much of the area associated with William Field’s family over many years.

On Sunday the THRA group visited two properties where some members of the Field family had lived over the years. The current owners gave a brief history of each property and the Field family association with it. Maureen Bennett spoke about the branch of the Field family and their properties and ventures that are documented in her recently published book, *Whitefoord Hills*. All members of the THRA group agreed that we were very fortunate to have been welcomed into these two private homes, to hear the interesting family stories and to absorb even more about the Field family exploits over many years. In addition to hearing the history of both homes, morning tea and lunch in the garden were enjoyed at the individual properties. The meticulous planning and attention to detail by Anne and Ken ensured this second day of the excursion was both informative and enjoyable.

The members of ‘Who was Nellie Payne?’ committee who put in all the long hours and hard work to make this exhibition such a great event are:

- Pam Swain  local business owner and co-ordinator
- Jack Starr-Thomas  local historian
- Steven French  photographer
- Sean Manners  community artist
- Virginia Greenhill  local historian
- Ellen French  events organiser

This group, all helpers and volunteers must be congratulated on the success of the event.

The committee was a skills-based group of people with the necessary talent to make the exhibition happen as planned. It was structured to fit under the Westbury District Historical Society to enable a funding application to the Tasmanian Community Fund. This application was successful and other funding was received from Meander Valley Council and other businesses in the Westbury district, plus private donations. Volunteers were available at each location and all visitors were impressed by the knowledge and assistance provided. This was a truly momentous exhibition and all who purchased the printed booklet with photographs of the items shown, now have a special publication recording Nellie’s remarkable achievements.

In 2015, Ellen Nora Payne was inducted to the Tasmanian Honour Roll of Women for ‘Service to the Arts’.

GWEN HARDSTAFF

 Honour board in St Andrew’s Church (Leone Scrivener)

Jim Marwood is convinced that ‘the story of Pat Collins and the story of his Bistro are an important part of the social history of our town’, Hobart. He blends the two stories into an intriguing and informative account of life, ‘art, food and fantasy in the 1960s’ in ‘Hobart’s brief Bohemia’.

A possible shortcoming of this work as a reference could be the lack of endnotes and only a very short bibliography. Marwood ‘began this book armed with no more than a few personal memories’ but, fortunately, he found ‘many people who agreed to share their own memories of those times’. With little written evidence, he says, ‘some parts of the story are no more than conjecture’ but he accepts responsibility for any mistakes, declaring he is ‘unwilling to spoil a good story’. Also, ‘Pat was his own mythmaker’ and through the book, situations arise where accounts and memories disagree. But as he says on page 15, ‘there is no such thing as how it was – only how we think it was’.

The book is divided into two main parts: up to the time Collins comes to Hobart and his time in Hobart and afterwards. The story of Arthur Leonard Collins, known as Pat, begins with his birth in 1914 within the sound of Bow Bells. In good flowing style, Marwood moves through Collins’ wartime infancy, his boyhood well away from the East End and his army service, both pre-war and wartime in India. In this part of his life, two particular women are revealed: Odette Keum, a former mistress of H.G. Wells with whom Collins had an affair, and Liesel Ehrenhaus, a beautiful and vivacious German Jewish woman who, with her family, suffered as a victim of Fascism. She and Collins married in 1941 and their daughter, Jean, was born in 1943. Liesel moved about as a loyal army wife, even to India, from where, after the war finished, she died en route to Australia. Collins arrived in Melbourne, friendless in a strange country, a single parent with a small daughter and an uncertain future.

Susan Moore was Collins’ second wife and the mother of his son, Simon. Collins hoped the new family life might include Jean but she ‘grew up wild, without respect for her father’ and ‘remained sullen and unhelpful, resenting her step-mother and ignoring her new little brother’. Collins, meanwhile, opened his coffee shop, Brummels, with its tiny art gallery, in Toorak Road Melbourne, and spread the words ‘espresso’ and ‘cappuccino’, new and exciting additions to the Australian vocabulary.

Part 2 of the book continues Collins’ life story but widens to take in a picture of the social and cultural life of Hobart with particular focus on the Bistro (set up in the basement bar of the Ship Hotel in Collins Street) and Collins’ relations with that society, his friends and his enemies. It tells of the struggle to establish the Bistro despite the licensing laws and the restaurant’s part in ‘Hobart’s brief Bohemia’. This reviewer and his friends who often dined there early in the evening and never at lunch time, well recall Pat sitting at the bar as one entered, his warm greeting, the generous provision of green olives and salted peanuts on the bar, the conversation, the excellent food and wine, and often, the irritating circumstance of having Pat, uninvited, draw up a chair and join the table and usually monopolise the conversation.

The story goes on to tell of the increasing drug culture, the demonstrations against the war in Vietnam, the bush fires of 1967 and the stirrings against the Lake Pedder and Gordon River schemes, the antipathy of the police towards Collins, the exposure, court case and scandal and the subsequent decline of the Bistro. The reader learns of the effects of all this on the personal, business and social life of Pat Collins until his death in Melbourne in June 1988. Simon scattered his father’s ashes on the Organ Pipes on Mount Wellington.

To each her own taste but this work is enriched for older readers because many of them would have lived through and reacted to the events described. They can judge Pat for themselves.

David Dilger
**Steve Harris, Solomon’s noose: the true story of Her Majesty’s hangman of Hobart, Melbourne, 2015, select bibliography and sources, 336 pp., paperback, RRP $29.95, ISBN 9781922129741**

TODAY ALMOST ANYONE can write Tasmanian history. All one needs is a computer and the internet with access to Trove and Google. A massive amount of facts and details are all there as written by early journalists, reporters and a multitude of writers who have submitted their own views and concepts to a wide variety of websites, blogs and online databases such as Wikipedia. Thus it is with Steve Harris and Solomon’s Noose. Entering Solomon Blay into Trove brings forth well over 200 references. Google literally exhibits thousands, if you include executions and hangmen.

Harris notes that to the maximum extent the information in his book is from newspapers, archives, documents, memoirs and correspondence. There are no footnotes or references as he explains the information is readily accessible. However, any of the thoughts of Solomon Blay are loosely based on his limited correspondence, but most are mainly from Harris’ own interpretations from observations of other hangmen. Solomon’s private life, especially his marriage to his beloved Mary, is accurately based on a well-researched talk found on the Female Convicts Research Centre seminar website.

Solomon’s Noose, as a first book, is a well-written concise record of some fifty years of local history by Tasmanian-born Harris who has had an impressive career as an award-winning journalist, publisher and editor-in-chief of The Age and Herald and Weekly Times.

There are minor imperfections which may not be noticed by the average reader. It did happen in nineteenth-century newspapers, as it still does today, that details, names and events are incorrectly reported. Early in 1842 Solomon Blay and John Phillips were reported as being charged with breaking into the house of William Nicholas in Warwick Street, whereas Solomon and John Cripps, not Phillips, had broken into the house of William Nicholas in Hill Street, West Hobart. Without accurately checking original records and merely relying on newspaper reports, such erroneous details will unfortunately be repeated and incorrectly referenced in other publications.

One ‘fatal’ error Harris does make is when relating the story of the 1845 executions of Thomas Gomm, Isaac Lockwood, William Taylor and Eliza Benwell. He accurately describes the mid-September trial and hanging of the three men, then goes on to detail the lengthy trial, six days later, of Eliza Benwell who was charged with aiding and abetting the men in the murder of Jane Saunders. Eliza is found guilty and sentenced to be hanged fourteen days after the men. But Harris now goes on to describe how Solomon has to ready himself to face an inevitably large crowd drawn to the hanging of four people. Would Benwell collapse on the scaffold? Does a woman die from hanging the same as men? What if he couldn’t get them to die at the same time? Harris finally has Solomon gritting his teeth, leading the ‘wretched woman’ up the steps and placing her ‘under the fatal beam’ alongside the three men – who had been executed two weeks earlier.

There are a few other minor factual errors in Solomon’s Noose which should in no way detract the average reader from being indisputably captivated and possibly sometimes shocked by Steve Harris’ first-rate ability to compile a moving and often poignant description of crime, life and death in colonial Tasmania.

BRIAN RIEUSET


THE MARITIME MUSEUM of Tasmania is to be congratulated for seeing this important volume into print. Ted Mitchener, the author, died in 2014 before the manuscript was ready for the printers and the task of bringing the project to completion was taken over by editors Peter Boyer and Graeme Broxam, with the enthusiastic
support of the then President of the Maritime Museum, Colin Denny. The end result is both handsome in its presentation and of considerable importance as a reference work relating to the history and development of the southern Antarctic region.

While the initial reasons for the book’s compilation stemmed from a love of ships under sail, the volume covers all visits by vessels under sail or by engine, from 1699 to 1937. All reasons for the ships’ visits are included – for scientific exploration or for commercial whaling and sealing ventures. All nations which sent vessels to the region are included.

As virtually all contacts with Antarctica in the years under review were made by ships (it can be noted, however, that visits by aircraft are not ignored), details of ships and their visits add enormously to the history of the area. A typical entry is given under the ship’s name and the dates visited, and then provides (as appropriate and as available) the names of master and the expedition leader, details of the vessel, its motive power and its eventual fate, reproductions of its plan, photographs of the ship, a sectional map of the area visited, the reason for the voyage and a summary of the work undertaken during the visit. The whole text is supported by detailed notes and references, bibliography and indexes. And, it needs to be added, the final volume benefits from the professional design of its layout and the art and materials used in its final presentation.

Thus it can be seen that Ice in the Rigging records most important facts on the progressive exploration of the southern ice regions, and contains all kinds of information likely to be of value to researchers and to the general reader.

Dan Sprod


Alison Alexander provides an engaging and very readable account of the evolution of South Hobart over two centuries, highlighted by numerous quirky anecdotes. This history is structured around four sections of roughly fifty-year intervals within which a more thematic approach is taken, with chapters on various subjects such as Schools and Churches, the First World War, Community Development, Industries and Business. Some chapters provide both an overview and detailed history, such as those dealing with the Female Factory, Cascade Brewery, the World Wars and the 1967 bushfires, while other chapters take more the form of a census of activity or place. This is particularly true of the period 1968–2014 where some of the material may have been more appropriately placed in an appendix.

This is a beautifully designed and produced book that is extremely well illustrated, a virtue that more than compensates for its substantial weight. For those without an intimate knowledge of South Hobart, additional maps locating the many mills, hotels and other referenced sites in the suburb would have been an advantage, as would a more general map of the South Hobart of this book that includes Strickland Avenue and those more distant sites frequently mentioned such as the Turnip Fields further up the Rivulet.

Beneath the Mountain documents the history of South Hobart in rich detail and touches upon the suburb’s wider importance which extends well beyond the physical confines of the valley of the Hobart Rivulet.

Although South Hobart sits beneath Mount Wellington, it is the Hobart Rivulet draining most of the north-eastern face of this mountain that has played the central role in shaping the history of this Hobart suburb and its community. The largest and most reliable source of freshwater in the lower Derwent Valley, its generally strong flow and steep gradient drove the development of Tasmania’s first industrial precinct in what is now South Hobart. Nowhere else in colonial Tasmania or indeed mainland Australia
during the early nineteenth century was there such an intensive use of water for power and industrial production processes.

Its industrial history is just one element of South Hobart’s past that makes clear that this is not just ‘another Hobart suburb’. Besides being the site of Tasmania’s first industrial precinct, South Hobart was the site of the Cascades Female Factory. In its later life this complex was used for a variety of public health initiatives including those not considered appropriate for Hobart’s principal public hospital. Similar reasons also drove the establishment of what is now St John’s Hospital and the Infectious Diseases Hospital at Vaucluse in this suburb. Unusually South Hobart also saw the development of splendid mansions, workers’ cottages and the houses of the rural poor in very close association, largely because of the local topography. Because of its importance in so many ways to the city and the state, South Hobart has been the subject of studies both general and specialist. The author has brought much of this material together in an extremely accessible way. Although cited references rely very substantially on newspaper accounts, particularly in the first three sections of the book, some specialist studies notably relating to industry and transport have not been cited. However, the insights gained from the author’s many interviews with those who have lived or worked in South Hobart are significant, both for today’s reader and in the future. Further enhancing the general usefulness of the book is a comprehensive index.

Beneath the Mountain clearly establishes a new benchmark for suburban histories. The South Hobart Progress Association is to be congratulated for commissioning this work and establishes a precedent to be emulated in other Tasmanian suburbs. This is a work that more than justifies its place on any Tasmanian bookshelf.

Chris Tassell

Tasmanian titles

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Alison Alexander, Beneath the Mountain: a history of South Hobart, TL.Q 994.661 ALE

Behind the masks: Gwen Harwood remembered by her friends, TL 820A HAR

Roger Cecil Bell, Recollections of an Indian official: 1928–1949, TL 954.0358092 BEL

Maureen Bennett, Whitefoord Hills: the story of the property granted to Captain Malcolm Laing Smith, TL.Q 994.631 BEN

Saroo Brierley, The long way home, TL 920.00920946 BRI

Barry H. Brimfield, Food, foraging & cooking in Palaeo–Tasmanian Aboriginal culture, TL.Q 994.60049915 BRC

Nigel Burch, Ephemeral Lisle: the town that disappeared, TL.Q 994.614 BUR

Children’s Book Council of Australia, Tasmanian Branch, A celebration of Nan Chauncy, TL.P XX(1169262.2)

Simon Cubit and Nic Haygarth, Mountain men: stories from the Tasmanian high country, TL.R 919.463 CUB

Phil Dennis, Then & Now: Scottsdale, Volume 1, TL.Q 919.4684 DEN

Tom Dunbabin, Tom J. Dunbabin: an archaeologist at war, TL.R 940.5336 DUN

Peter Freeman, Domain House: the University of Tasmania returns to the Queens Domain, TL.Q 727.309946 FRE

Friends of Soldiers Memorial Avenue Inc., The Soldiers Memorial Avenue, Queens Domain, Hobart, TL.P 719.32099466 FRI

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Thomas Gunn, From reel to disc: a history of the Launceston Film Society, 1958–2014, TL 791.43060994611 GUN

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