

# LA TROBEANA



Journal of the C. J. La Trobe Society Inc.

Vol.9, No. 3, November 2010

ISSN 1447-4026

*La Trobeana*  
is kindly sponsored by  
Mr Peter Lovell

LOVELL CHEN  
ARCHITECTS & HERITAGE CONSULTANTS

LOVELL CHEN PTY LTD, 35 LITTLE BOURKE STREET, MELBOURNE 3000, AUSTRALIA  
TEL +61 (0)3 9667 0800 FAX +61 (0)3 9662 1037 ABN 20 005 803 494

## **La Trobeana**

**Journal of the C J La Trobe Society Inc.**  
**Vol.9, No. 3, November 2010**

**Honorary Editor:** Loreen Chambers

**ISSN 1447-4026**

### **Editorial Committee**

Mrs Loreen Chambers  
Dr Dianne Reilly  
Ms Robyn Riddett

For contributions and subscription enquiries contact:

**The Honorary Secretary: Dr Dianne Reilly**  
**The La Trobe Society**  
**PO Box 65**  
**Port Melbourne, Vic 3207**  
**Phone: 9646 2112**  
**Email: [dmreilly@optusnet.com.au](mailto:dmreilly@optusnet.com.au)**

### FRONT COVER

Thomas Woolner, 1825 – 1892, sculptor  
Charles Joseph La Trobe  
1853, diam, 24.0cm. Bronze portrait medallion showing the left profile of Charles Joseph La Trobe. Signature and date incised in bronze l.l.: T. Woolner. Sc. 1853:/M La Trobe, Charles Joseph, 1801 – 1875. Accessioned 1894  
La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.

[www.latrobesociety.org.au](http://www.latrobesociety.org.au)

# CONTENTS

---

## Introduction

## Articles

Bev Roberts	<i>A Black Apron View of History: Anne Drysdale &amp; Caroline Newcomb, Victoria's 'lady squatters'</i>	2
Marguerite Hancock	<i>The Life of Sophie La Trobe</i>	17
Caroline Clemente	<i>The Seeding of Melbourne's Cultural Capital</i>	22
Richard Heathcote	<i>Charles Joseph La Trobe and the English Country House</i>	35
Daryl Ross	<i>Letters from Victorian Pioneers: Book Review</i>	40

<b>Illustrations</b>	24 & 25
----------------------	---------

## Reports and Notices

Public Record Office Victoria and the La Trobe Society partners	43
Friends of La Trobe's Cottage	44
Forthcoming Events	46
Contributions welcome	49

# Introduction

This issue of *La Trobeana* is firmly grounded in the many-faceted and fruitful lives of men and women of the past, in their homes and their occupations, both public and private, as well as their leisure activities, particularly cultural ones. Men's lives have dominated much of the stories of our colonial past, and Daryl Ross has drawn our attention to the fifty-seven male pioneers of the Port Phillip District who responded to Charles La Trobe's commendable request that their legacies be recorded. Richard Heathcote has added to our understanding of Charles La Trobe and the houses he lived in after he returned to England, particularly the beautiful National Trust medieval manor house, Ightham Mote, in Kent where he gave elegiac expression to his artistic impulse, as his sight slowly faded.

Caroline Clemente has illuminated, quite brilliantly, the 'dawn of Melbourne's cultural life' which emerged in La Trobe's time, and under his patronage. Such gifted men as Redmond Barry and Hugh Eardley Childers, and families, such as the Howitts, as well as men of sparkling artistic talent, such as George Alexander Gilbert and Thomas Woolner are described and set in the context of Melbourne's colonial history, as it fluctuated between boom and depression.

Women's lives in early colonial society have been increasingly revealed by historians and writers who have discovered a wealth of diaries, journals, letters, novels and poetry, as well as paintings and sketches. For example, in 1984, Lucy Frost's *No Place for a Nervous Lady* examined the writings of women whose voices had not till then been included in our histories of an heroic pioneer past. Bev Roberts has now added significantly to our knowledge and understanding of two lady squatters in the Geelong area, Anne Drysdale and Caroline Newcomb, through

her editing of the diary of Anne Drysdale. Her essay is not, as she says, an account of the stereotypical 'battler' pioneer woman, 'long-suffering', 'unobtrusive', 'selfless' and 'noble', but of two energetic, joyful, activist and engaging women. Bev Roberts's research is bound to overthrow our assumptions about some colonial women, Georgiana McCrae notwithstanding.

On the other hand, Marguerite Hancock's account of Sophie La Trobe's life does provide a counterpoint to that of Bev Roberts's study, and reminds us of the struggle some women had to endure in coming to terms with a pioneering life. Sophie La Trobe's experience was unique because of her husband's role, and her isolation was compounded by her illnesses and her preference for a group of well-bred families with similar values. But she, too, contributed her part to that cultured layer of civilization identified by Caroline Clemente.

With all this in mind, Brenda Niall, in her forthcoming lecture at the La Trobe Society Christmas Cocktail Party on the friendship between Georgiana McCrae and Sophie and Charles La Trobe, will provide a fitting conclusion to this final issue for 2010.

**Loreen Chambers**

Editor

# A Black Apron View of History? Anne Drysdale & Caroline Newcomb, Victoria's 'lady squatters'

By Bev Roberts

*It was our great pleasure to welcome Bev Roberts to the Annual C J La Trobe Society/RHSV AGL Shaw Lecture podium on 13 April 2010 where she gave this most interesting account of these two exceptional women. It followed the publication of her book, Miss D and Miss N, an extraordinary partnership. The Diary of Anne Drysdale.<sup>1</sup> Her research has been acknowledged as a most skilful editing and commentary of the diary that Anne Drysdale kept from 1839 to 1853.*

*Bev Roberts studied and taught history at the University of Melbourne, and then became a freelance writer, editor and teacher of writing. Her publications range from reviews and articles to three collections of poetry and commissioned books on historical themes including Raheen, a house and its people, Treasures of the State Library of Victoria and A Cultural History of the Barwon River.*

I am honoured indeed by the invitation to speak to you on an occasion that bears the illustrious names of Charles Joseph La Trobe and Alan Shaw.

Tonight, in talking about Anne Drysdale and Caroline Newcomb, the redoubtable early Victorian squatters, I am entering Shaw's territory. And I begin with a quote from his *History of the Port Phillip District*, though I shall give it an emphasis that he would probably not have intended:

... there can be no doubt that if there were many unsung heroes among the squatter 'pioneers of civilisation' that Gipps spoke of, there were plenty of heroines that he did not notice among the women of all social groups, who went to live in the country in the 1840s.

Because Miss D and Miss N lived in the Geelong region, I am adding here another, albeit dated, comment from the historian of Geelong, Walter Brownhill, that mirrors Shaw's words:

Women, who played a wonderful part in the pioneering days, braving hardships without complaint, giving of their best for the advancement of their adopted land, were singularly unobtrusive. Rarely were they given, and never did they seek, publicity for their noble work.

Shaw's comment was made around forty years after Brownhill's, so it seems the view of women pioneers as unnoticed, unobtrusive, unsung heroines still had some currency in the mid-90s – and still has today. I want to suggest that it is not the case that the women were not noticed: it would have been hard for Gipps to miss them given the gender ratio of the time. Or that they were unobtrusive, which I found a very odd word in this context. Rather that the women, and what they did, were not perceived as of real significance or value, then and now. And that the reality of their lives has been obscured behind the stereotype of long-suffering, selfless, noble heroines. It is as if they could be reverently placed on a modest pedestal and then forgotten.



I think the stereotype is largely derived from the iconic images of early settlers, the original 'battlers': the faded photograph of a family posed awkwardly outside a rough slab hut, whiskery husband leaning on an axe, careworn wife with arms either holding an infant or folded over a long black apron, a line of children squinting at the camera.

There were many such women, and their lives were unquestionably sad, deprived, lonely, dangerous, boring. But they were more likely to have been from one social group: they were the wives of working-class subsistence farmers. Life would generally have been quite different for the wives of the middling level of squatters and farmers.

They had often made sacrifices. Many if not most had come to the colonies, or gone to live in the bush, with varying degrees of reluctance because that was what their husbands wanted. That was where the money was to be made. Many if not most found themselves on farms miles from towns or on more remote properties, living in primitive conditions, forced to undertake the kinds of physical labours previously assigned to servants.

But for many women, especially those from the middle or middling classes, there were compensations. They were not just hapless victims. And they found a new sense of freedom, away from convention and conformity. One woman wrote after her experience in Port Phillip of

an excitement which prevents anything like low spirits, and, joined to the fine climate, tend to keep up a tone of health which few in civilised life ever enjoy.

And she went on to make a very interesting comment about the differences between town and country life:

The ladies in Melbourne seemed to consider me a kind of curiosity, from living so far up the country, and all seemed to have a great dread of leading such a life, and were surprised when I said I liked it.

Another woman wrote in a letter to her family in England:

... with all its troubles this is a better country than yours, no fear of famine ... if you were all here on this snug little farm you would think it holiday time ... you could live in the open air if you choose but the sun is rather hot.

In the first years of settlement, women may have been few and far between, but through the 1840s the numbers of women increased. And for those who 'went to live in the country' as wives of squatters and farmers, I think that given the reality of life on an early sheep station or farm, most were probably in a partnership role rather than one of passive, unnoticed dependence. It was the usual division of labour: men managing outdoors, women managing indoors, but the division became slightly blurred with many women having to take on work such as caring for the chooks, running the dairy and perhaps the vegetable garden and occasionally assisting with the men's work.

But the focus of our history, and our mythology, has been on the men. And not so much on the so-called 'noble pioneers of civilisation', as on the younger, wilder, unmarried squatters, leading primitive lives on the frontier. As described by the historian Margaret Kiddle, these were the

money-making bachelors ... half-savage, half-mad ... half-dressed, half-not, unshaven, unshorn, shoes never cleaned [eating] tea and damper.

Or, in the milder view of a contemporary woman

The young men who once figured [at home] in quadrille parties, are [in Australia] seen driving carts and drays, or milking cows ...

They were more interesting than the respectable married squatters, and certainly more interesting than colonial women who were, in rather different ways, experiencing a liberating new life, away from the conventions of home; and were participating in the opening up and development of the land, but in ways that were not seen as exciting.

We really only know about their experiences because while those women living in the country in Victoria in the 1840s may in some ways have been unobtrusive, they were not silent. In fact they could be described as the recorders and communicators of their time, writing reams of letters to maintain contact with family and friends back home, recording the everyday details of their lives in the new country in their diaries and journals, and in a few cases, writing book-length accounts.

Of course many colonial men also wrote. Shaw refers to

diaries and books in which they could set down their achievements, and pass over their shortcomings, to impress both contemporaries and historians.

And speaking particularly of the *Letters from Pioneers*, he goes on to say that

even allowing for authorial self-interest, one cannot read the accounts of their activities ... without appreciating their enterprise and determination ...

It is unlikely that colonial women wrote to impress anyone, so their accounts were not really the stuff of legend. And rather than enterprise and determination, those accounts reflect different qualities: forbearance, resourcefulness, courage, adaptability, humour. But it's the women's writing that fleshes out the bare bones of historical narrative, the statistics and dates, the official reports and correspondence, the infrastructure of the past.

It is largely from the women's words, the women's view that we can begin to know what life was actually like for those who lived in colonial Victoria/Australia. But it seems that these records are as 'unobtrusive' as their creators: their existence is known but they have not been considered of much value or significance.

Shaw does quote a few brief extracts from Anne Drysdale's diary in the Port Phillip History, but more as a slightly quirky aside. She and Caroline Newcomb were historical anomalies or curiosities: female squatters. As he goes on to say:

Squatting itself was a male occupation so naturally female squatters were rare. Though wives, widows or daughters were later to show often enough that they could run a station as well as husband or father, they were not often doing so before 1850; however, even then the female licence holder was not unknown.

Into this male world stepped, or rather strode, Miss Drysdale and Miss Newcomb.

Anne Drysdale, a single woman from Fifeshire, described by a contemporary as

a lady of a highly respectable family and of superior intelligence

made the decision at the age of 47 to leave Scotland, undertake the long voyage to Australia, and become a sheep farmer. She set off in September 1839, with a couple of servants in the ship's steerage, and arrived at Port Phillip in March 1840. A month later she was off again, this time to Geelong where she had acquired a 10,000-acre sheep run, 'Boronggoop' on the banks of the Barwon river, and a flock of sheep, kindly organised for her by Dr Alexander Thomson from his own large holdings.

Thomson, a member of the Port Phillip Association, had arrived from Van Diemen's Land in May 1836 with his wife Barbara and daughter Jane, and was one of the first squatters in the Geelong region. He built a house by the Barwon and named it 'Kardinia'. Anne Drysdale had met the Thomsons in Melbourne shortly after her arrival, and as well as being set up with land and sheep, was invited to stay at Kardinia while her own house was being built. It was there that she met Caroline Newcomb.

Little is known about Caroline's origins though her father seems to have been in the British consular service in Spain, and she was clearly well educated. In 1833, at the age of 21, she sailed from England to Van Diemen's Land where she probably worked as a governess. In April 1836 she travelled to Port Phillip with John Batman's family, as temporary governess to the Batmans' daughters. In 1837 she moved to Geelong to live with the Thomsons, with whom she had become friends in Tasmania, and became governess to Jane.



1970. Gelatine Silver photograph. John T Collins Collection, La Trobe Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria, H95.200/395

During the year before her house was completed, Anne invited Caroline to join her as a partner in her new venture on her property, and Caroline accepted. For the next decade, trading as Drysdale & Newcomb, the two women actively engaged in a thriving pastoral and farming business, at first at Boronggoop and later at Coriyule on the Bellarine Peninsula.

Despite a twenty-year age difference, Anne and Caroline worked very well and lived very happily together. According to one contemporary,

though diverse in temperament, they beautifully dovetailed into each other. What one lacked the other supplied; they were linked in the closest affection.

More prosaically, Anne had the capital, the social connections, the confidence of her class, and farming experience. Caroline seems to have had little if any money of her own, but contributed her considerable energy and skills towards the running of the property.

While Anne had the managerial role, Caroline was often more practically involved in farming operations, ranging from riding in search of lost sheep to assisting with calving, from salting pigs killed on the property to working at their Clydesdale stud, to planting and pruning in gardens, orchards and vineyards. An accomplished horsewoman, she spent a good deal of time in the saddle, though rarely riding for pleasure.

In their first five or six years together, at Boronggoop, the women were very much part of Geelong's social scene, exchanging calls with the 'respectable' families, providing hospitality to visitors and travellers, active in the affairs of both Wesleyan and Presbyterian churches.



The unconventional pair seemed to have been accepted without question by the local community, though a later writer had a different view:

The novelty of two lady squatters attracted considerable attention, and whilst it drew many to them whose acquaintance ultimately grew into a lasting friendship, it was not unattended at times by inconvenience. Many persons on visiting Geelong out of mere curiosity to see the lady settlers, obtruded themselves upon them at most inconvenient times.

After the women moved in mid-1849 to the impressive new house built for them at Coriyule, near the present-day town of Drysdale, the number of visitors declined, probably because of the distance from Geelong and the dire state of the roads. And they were dire: when the women were driving to take up residence at Coriyule :

they had to cross a very marshy piece of ground, and heavy rains having fallen, the water was lying deep in their course, so deep that though in a high-wheeled gig the water in places reached nearly the body of it. Miss Newcomb had the reins. On reaching the deepest point Miss Drysdale, who was seeking as much as possible to conceal her anxiety, at last quietly said, 'I think we shall swim soon.

At Coriyule the pastoral business was scaled down, and Drysdale & Newcomb concentrated on farming, growing vegetables and fruit for sale, and raising Clydesdale horses. It was becoming difficult to find and keep workers, for the house as well as the farm and once the goldrush began, the labour problem became acute. Caroline was often forced to take on the work of cook, washerwoman, gardener and occasional farm labourer, with her days punctuated by desperate rides to Port Henry to meet emigrant ships in search of workmen. Life for the two women was no longer, as Anne had described it in 1846,

surrounded with comforts & ... all things richly to enjoy.

After suffering two strokes, Anne died at Coriyule in May 1853, three months before her 61st birthday, and was buried on the property. Caroline, quite bereft, remained at Coriyule, which she had inherited, for several years and then, to universal astonishment, in 1861 married a Methodist minister, James Davy Dodgson, twelve years her junior and spent the remaining years of her life in various parts of Victoria where her husband was posted. She died at the Methodist manse in Brunswick in 1873 and after a funeral in Geelong attended by a large crowd, was buried at Coriyule beside Anne.

Anne Drysdale and Caroline Newcomb were definitely not unobtrusive. Nor were they the genteel, almost saintly women they are generally described as: influenced, perhaps, by a stained glass window that depicts them as two attractive young women in snowy pinafores and mob caps, one leaning tenderly over a ram and the other doing something dainty with a hoe. In the only known physical description of them: Anne was 'a very stout lady' and Caroline 'an extraordinary creature, very ugly, very gruff, very active'.

Striding about in riding habit rather than snowy pinafore, Caroline would have been more likely to have her hand in the business end of a calving cow than to be toying with a hoe. Caroline was an activist. She was a committed Methodist but never content to be a mere member of the flock. Perhaps one of the attractions of Methodism was the opportunity it gave for the active participation of women. Caroline was at various times a class leader, the highest office that could be held by a woman, choir leader, organist, distributor of tracts, fund-raiser and benefactor, provider of hospitality to visiting ministers, and always leader of prayers and other services held at home.

She was perhaps the first woman involved in local politics or local government in Victoria. She was a founding member of the Geelong Ladies' Benevolent Association, for which it is said she would have preferred the title 'Women's' rather than 'Ladies', and of the Indented Head Road Board, set up to deal with those appalling roads on the Bellarine Peninsula. She was also a member of the Indented Head Farmers' Association. She was considered to be 'a useful and energetic representative of the ratepayers', and her energetic, perhaps feisty, political style is evident in the account of her intervention at a meeting to discuss the introduction of road tolls, where, from a spring cart, she

made a speech ... of such an impressive and ... denunciatory character, that she completely carried her audience with her and her opponent had to beat an ignominious retreat.

Miss Newcomb was definitely not unobtrusive.

As for Anne, back in her native Scotland she was far from living the life of a genteel spinster, doing the tea-party round with family and friends in the elegant drawing rooms of Edinburgh. It was reported that:

Having a considerable patrimony ... and being of an active disposition and fond of rural pursuits, she had rented a large farm in Scotland, of which she superintended the management in person ...

That was in the 1830s, when a female farm manager in Scotland must have been as rare as a female squatter was in Port Phillip in the 1840s. She had spent much of her life on family farms, especially the Kilrie property of her favourite brother John. But having her own farm was clearly of great significance for her. In a letter to John in 1833 she insisted:

Be sure to bring strong shoes, that you may walk all over my farm, also dressed shoes for the house, as there is a new Turkey carpet, which may not be approached with dirty feet.

Anne's farming experience meant that her intention to become a sheep farmer in Port Phillip was as serious as the intentions of her countrymen who were rushing to take up the free land to make their fortunes in Australia Felix. Perhaps more serious, she was certainly better qualified than many other would-be squatters who had doubtless been taken in by airy assurances such as:

The routine management on a sheep establishment is not difficult, and, with ordinary application, attainable by any man of common sense. It is quite erroneous to suppose that a regular apprenticeship to stock-farming is necessary to success.

That sort of advice might well have been responsible for the rather alarming comment made by the wife of a less than successful farmer in an 1844 letter to her family back home:

A great many persons here [in Port Phillip] have become insane and it is said to be in consequence of the reverses and great shock their expectations have received.

Anne Drysdale was entitled to be taken as seriously as any other Port Phillip squatter and not regarded as a foolish middle-aged spinster. At the outset she was certainly not taken seriously, as contemporary correspondence between Scotland and Australia reveals. William Russell, for example, wrote from Port Phillip in late 1839:

I do not see how she [Miss Drysdale] is very likely to get on at P. Phillip as a settler; she should have invested her money and enjoyed herself at home ...

though, he added,

if she expected to get a man there, perhaps she may succeed in that point.

On 'that point', I have noted elsewhere that Anne Drysdale was not the slightest bit interested in becoming a squatter's wife. She intended to be a squatter. She knew what she was doing, she knew what she wanted, she knew how to get what she wanted and she got it.

It is interesting to compare her experience with that of Eliza Walsh in NSW who, just twenty years earlier, had written to Governor Macquarie requesting a grant of land to add to the small farm she had bought. Macquarie refused on the grounds of

it being contrary to the regulations to give grants of land to ladies.

Miss Walsh challenged his decision, declaring:

it does not appear altogether a just measure to exclude ladies from making use of their money for the benefit of the colony in consequence of their sex, nor can it be deemed a real objection that a lady could not be able to conduct a farm as well as a gentleman.

Macquarie admitted there were no regulations but that he considered it 'very injurious to give grants of land to single women' who were obviously incapable of cultivating land. It took another three years, and

an appeal to the Colonial Secretary, before Eliza Walsh received her land. By then she had married, and the land was adjacent to that held by her husband.

After the initial novelty of the female squatters had worn off in Geelong, Anne Drysdale was taken seriously as a pastoralist and farmer definitely 'able to conduct a farm as well as a gentleman.' Perhaps any perceived eccentricity was offset by her association with John Armstrong whom she had taken on as overseer shortly after setting up at Boronggoop. Armstrong, from a family that had been engaged in sheep farming in Scotland for generations, was later recognised as 'the most perfect sheep master in Victoria'. If he took her seriously and remained in her employ for three or four years, she must have been worthy of respect as a farmer.

And it became evident that she was an innovative and entrepreneurial farmer. It is thought that the cereal crops she planted at Boronggoop were probably the first in the region. A few years later she imported what the *Geelong Advertiser* reported as another first, 'a force pump, constructed to order' to improve the efficiency of sheep-washing by 'spout washing'. She was also a very businesslike farmer as this letter to one of her customers reveals:

Since you were here we have sent to let the persons know we would not any longer adhere to the promise we had made them not to sell hay under £5 per ton. If therefore you will still give us £4, we shall be happy to supply all you require; but it would be necessary that we should know the day before it is wanted.

Followed by a postscript:

Since writing the above Miss Newcomb has seen one of the parties to whom we made the promise about the hay: he is still anxious that we

should continue the same price; but as you will require a larger quantity than any other, you shall have it at £4 if you have not yet made any other arrangement.

Miss Drysdale was certainly not unobtrusive.

Apart from the prominence of her name on the Bellarine Peninsula, Anne Drysdale's enduring legacy is the diary that records her life in Victoria. This was begun the day after she boarded the ship in September 1839, and maintained until some weeks before her death in May 1853, though Caroline kept it up during those weeks and for a further year. It is unfortunate that one volume of the diary, the third of four, has disappeared, in what some say are mysterious circumstances.

Like everything else about Miss D, her diary is far from conventional. This I think adds to its value as one of the major records of life in colonial Victoria and of the Geelong area in particular. It is an odd hybrid of personal and practical, of the domestic, the social and the agricultural.

The diary began as a personal journal, though unlike many other emigrants, male and female, Anne was not one for confiding thoughts and feelings, reflecting on the old life, anticipating the new. She did begin in that way:

I yesterday at 3 o'clock came on board the 'Indus' at anchor in Leith roads & have bid a long farewell to all those friends who have shown me so much kindness & affection. I do feel very sad & solitary, but I sincerely desire to trust in the Lord & feel assured he will never leave me nor forsake me.

That said, she moved briskly on.

Weighed anchor & set sail with a fine westerly breeze & smooth sea.

She was off. After a month at sea she declared:

I do not by any means regret my determination to take this voyage. On the contrary I am more pleased than I expected.

Her account of the long sea voyage gives no real picture of shipboard life, although she does usefully describe a typical day. She is more concerned with the weather, especially the storms; the stars; the birds; the natural environment at ports of call; the processes of sailing and navigation. As for people, she is most interested in describing the drunkenness of passengers and crew, which she records in lurid detail.

When she reached Australia she wasted little time on describing the landscape; her interests and observations, as well as forthright style, are evident in the account of her quick visit to Adelaide on the way to Port Phillip:

Yesterday I went to see the far famed town of Adelaide. After breakfast I went on shore with the Capt, found a cart there & the driver agreed to take us to town 7 miles for £1. I went with the Capt to the house of a Mr Rowland, he was not at home but Mrs R, a very pleasant ladylike Englishwoman, was very kind, gave us an excellent dinner of roast mutton, potatoes, cabbage & batter pudding... All kinds of provisions are very high but the appearance of the country far surpassed what I had expected... It is quite wonderful the progress already made in the town. Workpeople of all kinds get immense wages & all seem pleased.

Here we see some of her preoccupations that make the diary such a valuable record: prices, social class, food and the cost of labour.

Arrived at last in Melbourne, which she found 'so much superior to Adelaide', she notes her first meal:

The landlady went out & brought us some mutton chops, very fine meat at 5d per lb, 4lb loaf 2/3 & potatoes.

And later reports, with blithe optimism:

The price of labour here is very high but butcher meat, tea & sugar are cheap, therefore for the necessities of life, it is only bread which is expensive & that and all other vegetables I expect to produce in abundance in the bush.

Before departing for 'the bush', Anne was introduced to Melbourne society and was pleased and reassured that

A number of most gentleman & ladylike people have come to call upon me.

Returning the calls, she found:

Everywhere we went each member of the family were well bred & agreeable. Handsome houses & elegant drawing rooms & all so pleased & enthusiastic about the beauties & pleasures of this country...

At the handsome house of Rev. James Clow and his wife where she was staying, Anne met Alexander and Barbara Thomson, a fortuitous meeting indeed. As Anne noted

Dr Thomson, on hearing of my anxiety about getting a station most kindly offered to give me one of his own 3 miles from his own house & invites me to pay them a visit.

Among the gentleman and ladylike callers Anne had received were 'Mr Latrobe the governor & his Lady.' 'He is', she remarked:

... an excellent & pious man, he does all the good to the Colony which is in his power, but that is very limited.

Shortly after she moved to Geelong, Anne was to make use of Mr Latrobe's 'limited power'. Almost inevitably she was involved in an altercation with the infamous Captain Foster Fyans, commissioner of crown lands, who tried, she said, to force Alexander Thomson to

remove his sheep from the station given to me as it was to be reserved for the town her'.

Anne wrote to LaTrobe 'to beg him to interfere:

When I saw you in Melbourne you had the goodness to say you would give me your assistance when I required it. I have now to request you will do so by giving me a letter of introduction to Capt Fyans with a request that he will allow me to occupy Dr Thomson's station on the north side of the Barwin about 4 miles from Coria, until it is required for government or town purposes.

I beg to be respectfully remembered to Mrs Latrobe & remain dear sir yours sincerely and with much respect. A Drysdale

Shortly after she reported:



I received a kind letter from Mr Latrobe enclosing one for Capt Fyans, who called upon me the same day.

The Latrobes remained friends, calling on the ladies of Boronggoop whenever they were in Geelong, and receiving their calls on the ladies' occasional visits to Melbourne. Anne continued to regard Mr Latrobe as protector as well as friend, appealing to him once again a few years later to intervene in the sale of land in which she was interested.

Anne arrived in Geelong at the end of April, and stayed with the Thomsons for a year, during which she made few entries in the diary. But she did express 'much pleasure' in the countryside and in her new property, which she viewed with a practical, farmer's eye:

I walked yesterday thro' what is called a marsh, which is a plain extending for miles, but perfectly dry, fine rich soil, all ready for the plough.

At last, on Monday August 9th 1841, she wrote:

Miss Newcomb, Jane & I took up our residence at Boronggoop.

Jane Thomson was to stay during the week to continue her education. The Drysdale and Newcomb enterprise had small beginnings. In its first month Anne suggested the official schedule she had to fill in would 'amuse the commissioners' with its information:

1400 sheep, the majority of those have lambs by their side but being not weaned are not mentioned, 10 head of cattle, 5 mares. For this small number of stock the names of labourers amounted to 12 including the six children of Armstrong. 10,000 acres occupied & 1 acre in cultivation.

For the first year the diary reflects the excitement of establishing the sheep-run, planting gardens and crops, acquiring horses and other animals and discovering the differences between Scottish and Australian farming. Some discoveries were obviously momentous judging by the proliferation of exclamation marks:

The potatoes are put into the ground every 3rd turn of the plough! No previous working! No dung! ...

The first year's entries are also abuzz with the people, the activities, the patterns and rhythms of the new daily life. The constant stream of local callers, picnic parties, groups on excursions to 'the Heads', and frequent visitors from Melbourne and from the squatting runs around the western district.

Two of the most frequent visitors were Anne and Caroline's good friends, known only as Miss Morris and Miss McLeod, who often came to stay. As single women they obviously found the life of the lady squatters congenial and joined in whatever activities Caroline was engaged in, riding about the property or the nearby country looking for lost cattle or horses, or working in the garden, picking fruit, helping in the kitchen.

Then gradually, after the novelty had worn off and the pastoral run was established, the diary became more practical, a daily record of farming and household activities, more a squatter's daybook than Anne's private diary. As in this typical entry:

... this day stormy, wind W[est]. Armstrong went to [the out station] to brand lambs & worked at a belt for the mill. Robert made alterations on mill. Jack drew water, began to plough up potatoes & shifted yards. Hyland dug potatoes ... The first baking of our own flour, very good. 2 shearers came & are hired at 14/-.

Anne was inclined to make annual summaries. In August 1844 she wrote:

We have now spent three years at Boronggoop ... We certainly have not made any money but we keep out of debt & have much cause for gratitude to the Almighty who has furnished us with all things needful & enables us to be useful to many of our fellow creatures. We live very happily & have no wish except to have a piece of land & a stone cottage. Drysdale & Newcomb.

The missing volume of the diary covered the period from late 1847 to mid-1851, the time when that wish for land and a stone cottage was realised with the purchase of the Coriyule estate and the building of the Gothic Revival style house, designed by Charles Laing.

The final volume, which begins in mid-1851, is particularly interesting for its detailed description of the economic and social impact of the discovery of gold in Victoria which, in Anne's words:

has raised wages very much & made the men so independent & saucy that one is afraid to speak to them.

In spite of the hardships caused by the labour problems, particularly for Caroline who had to take on so much of the work herself, Anne seems to have retained her Scottish pragmatism, writing to her brother at the end of 1851:

You cannot imagine a more complete revolution than this discovery of gold has made, but, by another year there may be abundance of labour. There will also, probably be such quantities of goods sent out that we may get anything at half price.

I will make just a few general observations on themes in the diary. We are fortunate that Anne was clearly fond of her food as many entries in the diary give rare details of meals. At Boronggoop, for example, she reported on 'a very nice dinner' given to some visitors:

boiled mutton with parsley sauce, roast mutton & a superior arrowroot pudding.

On another occasion:

We had for dinner lamb & asparagus, very good fare for squatters.

And scattered through the diary are references to variations on the standard theme of lamb and mutton: such as bush turkey, wild ducks, pigs, fish, and

a couple of quail caught by the cat who is a complete Puss in Boots.

The cat was not the only opportunist when it came to food. There is a report of John Armstrong's canny wife, the Boronggoop cook, feeding the workmen with a sheep that had drowned in the river at sheep-washing time.

The records of gardening throughout the diary make it of some interest to garden historians. Both Anne and Caroline were keen gardeners, though Anne was probably keener on plants that could be eaten or sold! Within three days of moving into Boronggoop Anne noted 'we have got a number of garden & flower seeds put in the ground.' And in a couple of days '8 peach, plum & cherry trees' were planted. The resulting garden must have been quite striking and surprisingly formal: on his visit in 1846 John Dunmore Lang wrote of

gravelled walks dividing the different parterres – the only instance of the kind I had seen in the country and strongly reminding me of home.

Most of the flowers and shrubs were 'from home', but Anne makes an interesting reference to bringing back 'roots of flowers from the Bush' to plant in her garden. Another aspect of gardening referred to in the diary is that traditional element of women's culture, the exchange of plants and seeds between friends. This was probably of more significance at a time before the widespread existence of plant nurseries, when seedlings, bulbs and cuttings were often the only way of acquiring some species.

At Boronggoop, Anne carefully noted vegetable and crop plantings. Several years later, Caroline, busy creating and tending the garden at Coriyule, just as carefully noted what she planted, sometimes what might seem to us a rather odd mix, such as this planting in the west shrubbery:

double red oleander, sedum, budleya, cactus and snapdragons.

The effect, however, must have been impressive because the Coriyule gardens were open to the public during the early 1850s.

I want to touch on just one more aspect of Anne's diary: her attitudes towards the aboriginal inhabitants. There are relatively few entries on this subject, and they seem somewhat ambivalent. But considered chronologically it is as though they reflect a change in perspective, shifting from the distance to the foreground. Her first brief comment is fairly commonplace:

There has been a number of murders by the blacks of late & government certainly ought to do something for the protection of the white population.

Then they came closer when, while she was still staying at Kardinia, the Thomson's home:

A tribe of natives, all men, came marching past the house about 60 in number, they walked in regular order each carrying his spear & a cockatoos feather in his head. The women & children followed & made their miam miams close to the house. They are quite tame & seldom do any mischief here ... they walk with a proud erect step & look rather graceful. The women when oldish are very ugly & miserable looking but a white man or woman when bad or drunk is much more ugly than either.

After moving to Boronggoop she observed rather tartly:

There has been very few natives here since we came & these only passing. This is well as we can do them no good & they are troublesome & eat a great deal.

Though interestingly, around this time she also referred to a meal of fish given to them by 'the natives, who get great quantities in the river beside us'.

And one day, a native was brought into her home by Rev. Tuckfield who came to tea 'with a black boy': 'Mr Tuckfield', she declared,

is one of the Wesleyan clergymen who are employed by Government & the Wesleyan Society to try & improve the natives. He now understands their language well & is much interested about them, but has little hope of doing them any good, their wandering habits are so inveterate.

And finally, in late 1843, Anne and Caroline took into their house two part-aboriginal girls from King Island who had been brought to Port Phillip after their English father drowned at sea. Kitty and MaryAnn Scott, who had arrived as

little oddities, dressed in pelisses of wallaby skin and caps and shoes of the same stuff

remained with the women for several years, and by 1847 they 'were becoming useful servants'.

I just want to comment here on an interesting discovery I made a few weeks ago: an item in the Tasmanian Archives, *Journal recording details of life on King Island by John Scot who lived there and had children with Mary, an aboriginal woman, copied by Anne Drysdale who cared for Scot's children*. The children had obviously brought their father's diary from King Island and Anne had made a complete copy of it, with frequent annotations. I can only speculate on her reasons for doing this, but in the process she would certainly have learned a great deal about Aboriginal life.

It seems that over the last decade Australian history has become decked in drapery, the black armbands, the white blindfolds. And I am adding to it by defining the black apron view, the longstanding, general view of pioneer women as victims, or heroines, either tragic or noble, 'braving hardships without complaint', exemplified by that iconic woman, standing in her black apron outside her rough hut. Shaw's *History of the Port Phillip District* paints an unrelievedly grim picture of the lives of women living 'up country':... domestic chores in primitive huts ... child-bearing and rearing ... assisting with mustering or sick animals, looking after poultry, dairy, vegetable and flower gardens ... threatened by drunken station hands, marauding aborigines ... and he concludes by describing them as heroines.

Many genteel women did find themselves in a rough and ready world on remote properties, in makeshift houses or huts, doing things they had never have dreamed of doing back home: things usually done by servants, or only done by men. Out of necessity they rolled up their sleeves to help push bogged wagons out of mud, or assisted in the building of huts, or learned how to fire a gun. And many of them were pleased and proud to discover surprising strengths and skills in themselves.

One woman, coming from what has been neatly summarised as 'a life of gentility that stressed dependence and idleness', wrote proudly to her family in 1841:

I have become a first rate dairy woman and can cure meat, make butter, cheese, fatten calves or pigs ... and ... I have all the baking, washing and in fact everything to do and ... I am now within a month of my confinement...<sup>2</sup>

As Katherine Kirkland declared, recounting her experiences in Port Phillip in the early 1840s, 'All is not hardship and vexation'. It was, she said, possible to actually enjoy a new and very different kind of life where

there is no eye of fashionable neighbour to look pityingly or quizzingly on the mean details of the mud-house and the life which passes within it.

It was surely the quality of that life that made the mud-house something more than a miserable place of drudgery and privation.

Anne Drysdale, who had spent some time at Craufurdland Castle in Ayrshire before she came to Australia, was delighted with her little timber cottage with its bagged whitewashed walls and Indian matting-

covered floors. She and Caroline proudly received calls or extended visits from people such as Sir John and Lady Franklin, the LaTrobles, John Dunmore Lang and Bishop Broughton, without any sense of social embarrassment. Though in 1848 a recently-arrived visitor from Scotland was appalled by 'the badness of the hut', the smallness of the rooms and the hardness of the beds. For both Anne and Caroline, the years spent in that hut were the happiest of their lives. Things were never the same in the big stone house at Coriyule.

There has been a tendency, perhaps a need, to create heroes from our early settlers, to speak, in the kind of language usually reserved for Anzac Day, of their noble sacrifice for our country. In the most recent example, during the teacup storm over the proposed new national history curriculum, a conservative politician's criticisms included the lack of emphasis on 'the sacrifice of our forebears to build a nation.'

In the case of the squatters, male and female, it is hard to find the heroic or to see what sacrifices might have been made by those who rushed to Port Phillip to take advantage of all that 'free land', exchanging long winters, perennial bronchitis, and genteel poverty for fresh air, good weather, and prospects of financial improvement. The colonial period in Victoria presented countless, sometimes horrendous, challenges to settlers, but it didn't create the conditions for heroism, either sung or unsung. Except, perhaps, in the case of those women who spent miserable years, because of their husband's faults and failings, as pastoralists or farmers.

And we might consider the *Geelong Advertiser's* report in 1841 with the heading, 'FEMALE HEROISM', somewhat modified by the sub-head, 'Daring presence of mind in a lady', about the squatter's wife who

went ... on horseback, on a visit to a neighbouring station, accompanied by an aborigine. When returning homeward, the black said he was tired; and insisted on the lady dismounting forsooth! In reply to this demand, she pulled a small pistol from her breast, and ordered him to walk before her, threatening to shoot him if he ran away. In this manner she drove him towards the station, and then dismissed him with the whip across his shoulders.

There is, of course, a limit to the generalisations that can be made from the experiences of Anne Drysdale and Caroline Newcomb as they were in so many ways exceptional. But there is certainly nothing heroic, or noble or grim, in their experiences. They may have been extraordinary women but it is the sheer ordinariness of their lives that comes across from Anne's diary. And the ordinariness of the lives of the others who appear in that record, busily and purposefully going about their business, with the awareness of being part of a new society in a vast new country.

That is the problem. History is not interested in the ordinary, the everyday. It is about the extraordinary, the remarkable; the agents of change rather than stability. And that, of course, means it is about the public rather than the private world. History is written as though there was no ordinary, daily, domestic, family, working life. So it has difficulty dealing with the women whose existence must be acknowledged, but whose roles in the historical narrative are hard to discern or define.

I, for one, do not want the next generation of students to be introduced to the black apron view of Australian history: to find pioneer women characterised as unnoticed, unobtrusive heroines and martyrs. I think the black apron view should be countered with a more positive and realistic view of the early settlement period as a time that created opportunities for quite radical changes in many women's lives.



As a transformative time for both men and women who found the social conventions and restrictions of home had little meaning in the vastly different conditions a new country, especially out in the bush.

A time when single women like Anne Drysdale and Caroline Newcomb, and Miss Morris and Miss McLeod, could maintain their independence and lead active, fulfilling lives, living as they pleased. And when married women could discover, through the demands and challenges of family life in the bush, new dimensions of themselves and unrealised strengths and abilities. Not just making the best of it but finding unexpected pleasure in their sometimes wild surroundings and their often makeshift homes.

And a time when, it might even be suggested, that contentious phenomenon of 'mateship' actually began, on squatting runs and farms, in the supportive friendships and relationships between women and men, and between women, as well as between men.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Bev Roberts. *Miss D & Miss N, An Extraordinary Partnership, The Diary of Anne Drysdale*. Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing with the State Library of Victoria, 2009.
- <sup>2</sup> Penelope Selby, 5 July 1941. Family letters. In Lucy Frost. *No Place for a Nervous Lady: Voices from the Australian Bush*. Fitzroy, Melbourne: McPhee Gribble Publishers Pty Ltd., 1984.

# The Life of Sophie La Trobe

Dear Mamma has left many many friends who are very sorry that she is gone & who feel the value which her example as a good Christian wife and mother has been in the community.

**By Dr Marguerite Hancock**

*Marguerite Hancock has a PhD from Monash University and currently works for the Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens. From 1985-93 she was secretary to the wives of three Victorian governors. She is also a member of the La Trobe Society.*

*This article is adapted from a talk given for The La Trobe Society at the Lyceum Club in 2005 and also draws on Dr Hancock's delightful book Colonial Consorts: The Wives of Victoria's Governors 1839-1900 which was published in 2001.*

*(ed.: While it is now out of print, it is readily available on the internet on sites such as [www.AbeBooks.com](http://www.AbeBooks.com))*

I think it would be safe to say that all the members of the La Trobe Society feel great affection and admiration for Charles Joseph La Trobe. Thanks to the work of scholars such as Dr Davis McCaughey and our own Dr Dianne Reilly, we know a great deal about his professional and personal life. Yet his wife, Sophie, who accompanied him to the Port Phillip District in 1839, is not nearly so well known, and I suspect that is just as she would have wished it to be.

She was born Sophia de Montmollin in 1810, a member of a prominent and distinguished Swiss patrician family. The Montmollins had been leading citizens of Neuchâtel, a picturesque little town on the French border of Switzerland, since the seventeenth century. Maurice de Tribolet, the former Archiviste

Cantonal of Neuchâtel, described them to me as 'big fish in a little pond'.

Sophie's father, Frédéric-Auguste de Montmollin, was a member of the Council of State, the ruling body, a position that the head of the family had held for the past four generations. Her mother, born Rose-Augustine de Meuron, belonged to another patrician family. Dr de Tribolet, who is himself a member of the *noblesse*, although his father wisely introduced some new blood by marrying a Swede, stressed to me that the patrician families of Neuchâtel are very intermarried. La Trobe described Neuchâtel with his characteristic humour,



Fig. 1 Johann Friedrich Dietler, 1787-1854 *Sophie de Montmollin La Trobe*, 1809-1854 [1834]. Watercolour. Archives de l'Etat, Neuchâtel

one of his most endearing qualities, as a place where cousins 'swarm like herrings in every corner of the country'.

Sophie's immediate family was enormous: she was one of sixteen children. Service to the state is one of the high ideals traditionally drummed into aristocratic children, and Sophie La Trobe would have endured many of the trials of her colonial life with this upbringing in mind.

Her small wooden house in Melbourne, which grew from the tiny prefabricated cottage the La Trobes brought with them, could not have been in greater contrast with the Montmollin family's house in Neuchâtel. La Maison Montmollin is an imposing townhouse of four storeys, built on the market square in 1686. The façade, bearing the family arms, was a strong statement of their prestige. Inside were wood-panelled rooms with parquet floors and frescoed ceilings, heated by beautiful, tiled stoves. It was a luxurious, well-ordered life, 'a servant-motored existence', as Julian Fellowes, who wrote the screenplay for *Gosford Park*, has described that distant style of living. There were certainly servants in Melbourne: the La Trobe household included a butler, housekeeper, nurse and gardener, but the conditions were vastly different.

Society too, would have been very strange. In Neuchâtel, the extended family would have made up Sophie's world almost entirely. Everyone would have been known to her, their histories, their family connections. When she first arrived in the four-year-old immigrant society of Melbourne, everyone was a stranger, and the social networks were just being established.

It was through a family connection that she had first met Charles Joseph La Trobe. He had come to live in Neuchâtel in 1824, when he was twenty-three, as tutor to Albert de Pourtalès, son of the Comte de

Pourtalès and one of Sophie's many cousins. At that time she was only fourteen, and it was eleven years before they married. We know almost nothing about their courtship, but La Trobe was away for quite a lot of this time, either travelling with Albert, including an extensive tour of North America and Mexico, or by himself on the mountaineering expeditions he made in the Alps during his summer holidays.

In his role as tutor, the Montmollin family would not have considered him a very suitable catch, but he set about writing a series of books about his travels which were published in London, giving him a more acceptable field of activity, if not a reliable source of income. Once the family had consented, the couple was married in the British Legation at Berne on 16 September 1835. In a private memoranda written before their marriage, La Trobe made it clear that Sophie had neither wealth nor beauty, but something else left unsaid, which we may assume to have been a fine character and a loving heart. Two charming portraits of her as a young woman are known to us, but they must have been flattering, because a colonist who met her soon after she arrived in Melbourne wrote that she was 'not pretty'. Nor would she have had a large dowry: sixteen children had strained the family fortune. Nevertheless, from the La Trobes' letters, it is clear that they married for love: Sophie was refined, gentle, sincerely religious, affectionate and devoted.

After they married they lived in La Maison Montmollin, where a daughter, Agnes, was born eighteen months later. By this time, La Trobe had begun the new career that would eventually take him and his family to Australia. When Agnes was born, he was on his way to the West Indies, sent by the British Government to inspect and report on the schools provided for the newly-emancipated slaves. His reports were so well received that, combined with some useful political patronage, they led to his appointment as Superintendent of the Port Phillip District of New South Wales. Sophie La Trobe was not an adventurous soul and must have found the prospect an alarming one.

The news certainly caused a stir in Neuchâtel: Hubert de Castella, whose sister was Sophie's best friend, remembered being told as a boy

how Mrs La Trobe would be six months on the big sea, how she was to take with her a wooden house in her ship – to live in it in a country peopled with savages.

The Comte de Pourtalès was able to reassure her: he had been at school in Switzerland with the sons of John and Elizabeth Macarthur and could paint a more inviting picture of the Antipodes.

The La Trobes certainly brought their house with them, and we are all familiar with it in its current form in the Domain between the Shrine and the National Herbarium. It was originally erected about a mile east of the small township of Melbourne, north of the Yarra and north-west of the present Melbourne Cricket Ground. This was done within a fortnight of their arrival at the end of September 1839. La Trobe was clearly anxious to get his wife and daughter comfortably settled as soon as possible, and he later decided to buy the land at public auction, gaining the temporary displeasure of his superior Sir George Gipps, the Governor of New South Wales, to avoid disrupting them again. Cynics would say that he made a good bargain: he bought the land very cheaply and was later able to live on the proceeds, but that is another story.

Sophie La Trobe was certainly a woman whose home was the centre of her affections. She does not seem to have despised her modest little house which was enlarged repeatedly over the years and she and her husband created an atmosphere of refinement that was appreciated by like-minded colonists. The La Trobes called their house *Jolimont* after the country house near Nauchâtel where they had spent their honeymoon.

Two years after they arrived in Melbourne they received the great blessing of a Swiss housekeeper, Charlotte Pellet, who had been a nurse in the Montmollin family. She kept everything to the highest Swiss standards, and she and her little daughter were much loved by the La Trobe family.

The La Trobes lived modestly at Jolimont, not attempting to entertain on a vice-regal scale. Here the size of Jolimont worked to their advantage by preventing lavish hospitality, which they could not afford and had no desire to provide. On the infrequent occasions when they entertained officially, on a relatively grand scale, the Government Offices in Williams Street were used, but these events began only after La Trobe had been appointed Lieutenant-Governor in 1851. At first La Trobe received a salary less than a third of that paid to the contemporary Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land, who also had a house provided. La Trobe decided, no doubt with Sophie's complete approval, that they could not afford to entertain the world and his wife, and he stuck to this in the face of increasing dissatisfaction. However, nine years into his term, a public meeting was called at which he was accused of not upholding the dignity of his office, and a petition for his recall was sent to London, but the Colonial Office ignored it.

The La Trobes certainly made a circle of friends and entertained privately. Convention would prevent later governors and their wives from dining in private homes, but the La Trobes were free to accept invitations and did manage to 'get a choice of society' about them, which consisted largely of clergymen, professional men with squatting interests and their wives. As far as it is possible to tell, Sophie La Trobe's circle of friends included refined women such as Phoebe Howitt, the wife of her doctor, and Anne Greene; one belonging to a well-known Quaker family, the other to the Irish Ascendancy. Another friend was Georgiana McCrae, whose journal gives such a vivid account of life in early Melbourne. Intelligent, talented, and highly cultured, she was probably too forceful a personality to form a

close friendship with Sophie La Trobe, but she had the merit of speaking French fluently and was undoubtedly an entertaining companion.

On a seasonal note, the La Trobes appear to have introduced the Christmas tree to Melbourne, which was the centrepiece of their children's parties. This seems to have been one legacy of Sophie La Trobe's nationality; another was the attraction of Swiss vigneronns to Port Phillip. There is so much to say about this subject, and not the space to do so, but we owe in part the presence of a distinguished network of Swiss families who helped to establish winemaking in Victoria to the fact that Sophie La Trobe came to live here.

Three more children were born in Melbourne: two daughters, Nelly and Cecile, and a son, Charley. The La Trobes were loving parents, but they placed great emphasis on obedience and good conduct, which was usual at the time. Sophie's letters to their eldest daughter, Agnes, are affectionate but can sound very

stern; brought up a Calvinist, she may have been a little dour in contrast with her husband. At the beginning of an affectionate joint letter, Sophie wrote:

We thank God with all our hearts to have preserved you amidst so many dangers - & I was glad to hear ... that you had been very well & very cheerful, - & a good obedient girl. - If you could only know dearest child how happy we are when we learn that you have been a good & docile child. I hope you will endeavour to be so always so that good Aunt Rose and Gdmaman may always be pleased with you, and report well of you ...

It had been necessary to write to Agnes because she was sent back to Neuchâtel just after her eighth birthday to be brought up and educated by her grandmother and widowed aunt Rose, Sophie's youngest sister. It was nearly a year before the La Trobes knew that Agnes had arrived safely. This separation was thought to be in Agnes's best interests, but it continued much longer than anyone imagined, and caused Sophie much heartache. Agnes's portrait, painted in Neuchâtel, hung over her desk at Jolimont.

The main impression we have of Sophie La Trobe is that she was never in very good health. She was prone to headaches and was suffering from a severe one on the famous occasion when Georgiana McCrae agreed to be her substitute at the opening of Prince's Bridge. La Trobe made a joke about her delicate state in a letter to his friend, the publisher John Murray, remarking that standing with the head downwards 'as you know we are obliged to do here' in the Southern Hemisphere did not suit the female constitution. In March 1848 Sophie had a carriage accident, which may also have caused a miscarriage. In September she told her children's former governess that she had

been very ill for nearly 4 months most of which time I was confined to my bed, into the house



Fig. 2 Johann Friedrich Dietler, 1787-1854  
*Sophie de Montmollin La Trobe and her mother* [1834].  
Watercolour..Archives de l'Etat, Neuchâtel.



on the sofa. I have been, thank God, much better for some time but I have not as yet recovered my normal health and do not know whether I shall ever recover it.

She was also inclined to worry and was never entirely at ease during her husband's frequent absences on horseback expeditions, ninety-four by his own reckoning, that he so enjoyed. He urged her to join him when it was possible to ride in a carriage, but she seldom agreed. She had none of his curiosity about Port Phillip, and when she did cross Bass Strait, said that she preferred the scenery in Van Diemen's Land.

Unlike her contemporary Lady Franklin, Sophie La Trobe had no interest in exploring the bush and, despite her husband's encouragement, seldom accompanied him. 'There is no difficulty in getting here in a carriage', he wrote from the Grampians, 'so you have only someday to make up your mind chérie'. His entreaties fell on deaf ears, and she continued to wait and worry at home. La Trobe would later describe his departures as having brought forth 'expressions of regret anxiety & prayers for his safety' and his returns 'the most afft proofs of thankfulness to God & joy & contentment' from his wife. After he had arrived home safely from a sixteen-day trip to the Western District, Mrs La Trobe told Agnes:

I can assure you I was very glad & very thankful when I had him here again for I had got very anxious about him.

During another trip, La Trobe wrote:

I hope you kept your intention & called upon the Fyans & upon the Jeffreys at the Southern Cross ... I trust that you will not coop yourself up like a prisoner all the time I am away but will move about when you can

He was inclined to jolly her along and was pleased when she came with him on a visit to Yering, the Yarra Valley cattle station that her nephew Adolphe de Meuron had taken up in partnership with Hubert de Castella's brother Paul. 'I think that the shake has done your mamma good', he told Agnes, 'for she was previously suffering from face-ache'.

1851 was a momentous year for the La Trobe family. La Trobe was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of the new colony of Victoria, as the Port Phillip District became known after separation from New South Wales, and gold was discovered immediately afterwards. This caused chaos, made La Trobe's job a nightmare and gave his wife much anxiety on his behalf. She started calling Victoria 'this wretched gold country'. La Trobe submitted his resignation in December 1852, but it was almost eighteen months before he was free to leave the Colony. Against her better judgement, he persuaded Sophie to take the children to Neuchâtel without him. This she did, already gravely ill, although her husband had high hopes that the voyage and reunion with family and friends would restore her completely. Imagine his shock when he opened a London newspaper a week before he was finally to leave the Colony himself, and read his wife's death notice. She had died in Neuchâtel just before her forty-fourth birthday.

Sophie La Trobe, our first Governor's wife, had spent a quiet, modest, mostly private family life in Victoria. Yet her husband saw the example she set 'as a good Christian wife and mother' as having been of the greatest value to the community. La Trobe was a man of the highest ideals who was concerned from the outset to create a fine and civilised society, one of the main reasons we admire him so much. He had appreciated his wife's fine character above wealth or beauty, and was convinced that her evident goodness had made her an excellent Governor's wife.

# The Seeding of Melbourne's Cultural Capital

By Caroline Clemente

*Caroline Clemente was born and educated in Melbourne. A graduate of the Courtauld Institute of Art, London, she has tutored in the Fine Arts Department at Melbourne University followed by ten years as Curator of Prints and Drawings at the National Gallery of Victoria. She is author of Australian Watercolours in the National Gallery of Victoria, 1802-1926, and the "Catalogue of Plates" for Brenda Niall's biography of Georgiana McCrae. She holds an M.A. from the School of Art History of Melbourne University and as a Creative Fellow of the State Library of Victoria, undertook research on the role of the Howitts and their circle in the social and cultural formation of colonial Melbourne. She continues to work as a freelance art historian and curator.*

There is abundant evidence to show that the dawn of Melbourne's cultural life broke during the decade-and-a-half of Superintendent Charles La Trobe's watch. Such evidence survives in prolific private letters, journals and diaries of La Trobe and his contemporaries, of the pre-gold rush era. Many of the writers were prominent settlers, often personal friends in the tiny circles of a colony where almost everyone was acquainted. In the earliest years, this closeness had an almost visceral quality and is, in my view, a key factor in the development of Melbourne's distinctive character. Its emerging culture was, in fact, so firmly embedded by the time the gold rushes hit town in 1851, that it not only survived the initial impact but thrived on the aftershocks.

La Trobe's arrival in 1839 coincided with increasing numbers of free settlers coming to the Port Phillip Settlement. They landed with more than mere tents, fold-up houses and plants to stock their gardens. They

brought their education, their libraries and their culture which they proceeded to transplant in the untilled soil of a raw, frontier settlement. The principle draw card for most of these people was the promise of fortunes to be made by farming the boundlessly rich pastures of 'Australia felix', promoted in Major Mitchell's bestselling book of 1838. Another important point in Melbourne's favour was that it had been founded, reluctantly, in a rearguard attempt to impose order on the waves of pastoralists invading the Port Phillip District in search of grazing land. The fact that it had never been a penal colony immediately placed it in a different category from Sydney and Hobart. For this reason, the Colonial Office must have deemed that a civil service appointment rather than a military one was appropriate. The choice of La Trobe, a man of exceptional calibre, of strong humanist principles and religious beliefs, deeply cultured and urbane, was a critical factor in the shaping of Melbourne. Extensive travels in Europe and the New World, experience in government reporting on colonial issues in the West Indies combined with unusual equanimity of temperament and steadfastness of purpose, equipped him for the extraordinary trials to face him at the Port Phillip District. However contemporaries and posterity have judged his achievement, there can be no doubt of his unwavering foresight and fundamental role along with Justice Redmond Barry and later, the Auditor-General Hugh Eardley Childers, in laying the blueprint for a civilized, cultivated community based on Christian principles in this farthest outpost of empire.<sup>1</sup>

During most of La Trobe's term of office, between 1839 to 1854, activity in the fields of music, art, literature and horticulture had largely been the result of private endeavours. But in the last two years of his administration with considerable powers of patronage

at his command, wealth from the gold rush enabled the newly formed Executive Government of Victoria to establish those foundation stones of Melbourne's public culture, the University and the Public Library with the intention to add a Museum and a Picture Gallery in due course. Their creation, supported by La Trobe, by now Lieutenant-Governor of the colony, was spearheaded by the far-sighted energy of men who were his friends and colleagues, chief among them Barry and Childers. But their aims could never have been achieved without a supportive groundswell of influential and informed members of society, tightly enmeshed in the intricate web of Melbourne's business and professional connections as well as its social circles. In 1840, La Trobe famously declared the arts and sciences to be yet unborn. By 1854, Melbourne's public culture was alive and thriving. This article focuses on those fourteen short years of that cultural gestation.

The colonial era, lasting over four decades from 1835 to the end of the 1870s, can be divided into roughly four stages. The initial pioneer period of 1835 to 1845, was succeeded by a later pioneer period from 1846 to 1851. This was suddenly terminated by the separation of Victoria from New South Wales in 1851, immediately followed by the gold rush, the acute effects of which were felt until the end of the 1850s. The fourth and final decades were the settled colonial decades of the 1860s and 1870s. During the first heroic years between 1835 to 1845, the struggle for survival dominated the accounts of Melbourne's earliest residents. In 1837, Governor Sir Richard Bourke changed its aptly ludicrous first name, Bearbrass, to honour the British prime minister, Lord Melbourne. The primitive settlement in no way reflected this elegant new title and Thomas Strode, printer of the first newspaper, the Port Phillip Gazette, was so dismayed by his first sight of the 'stumpy, muddy, struggling, miserable township' in 1838 that he almost left it on the spot.<sup>2</sup> However, change was afoot and at the end of 1839, Neil Black, future founder of a Western District squatting empire and one of the shrewdest operators of his generation in the whole of the District, was greatly struck by the contrast with Sydney and South Australia:

Melbourne is in my estimation infinitely superior to any other part of the Colony that I have seen...It has a character and features of its own as different from the other settlements as one Nation is to another.

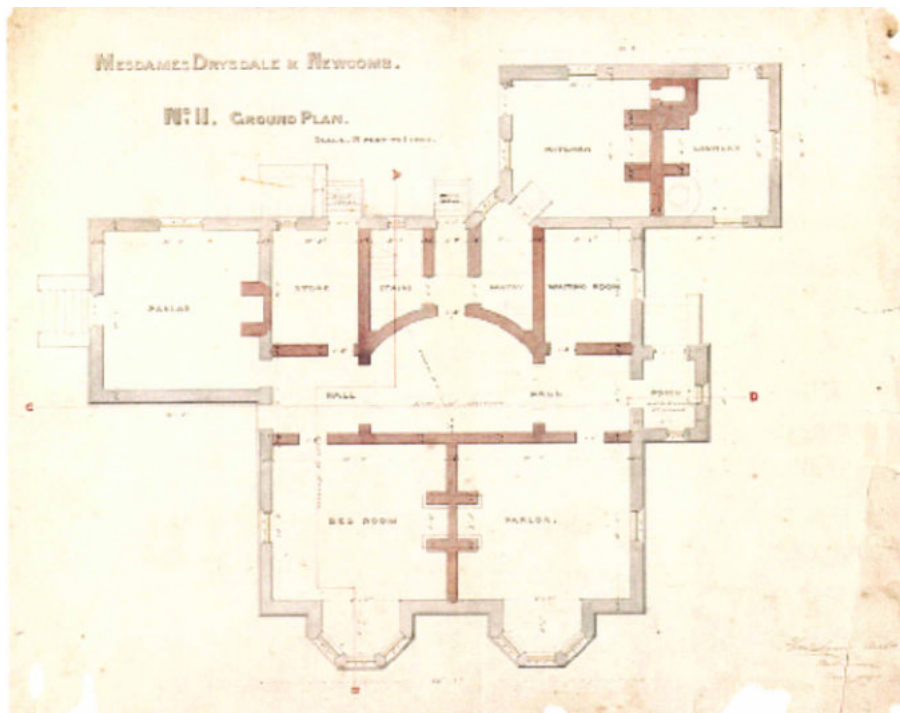
An astute and canny Scot, Black aired his views on the cause:

"Melbourne is altogether a Scotch settlement and the people are as far as I can judge altogether Scotch in their habits and manners. A good many families have come and are coming with the intention to settle for life. This is a matter of infinite importance to a new settlement and helps greatly to promote its best interests".<sup>3</sup>

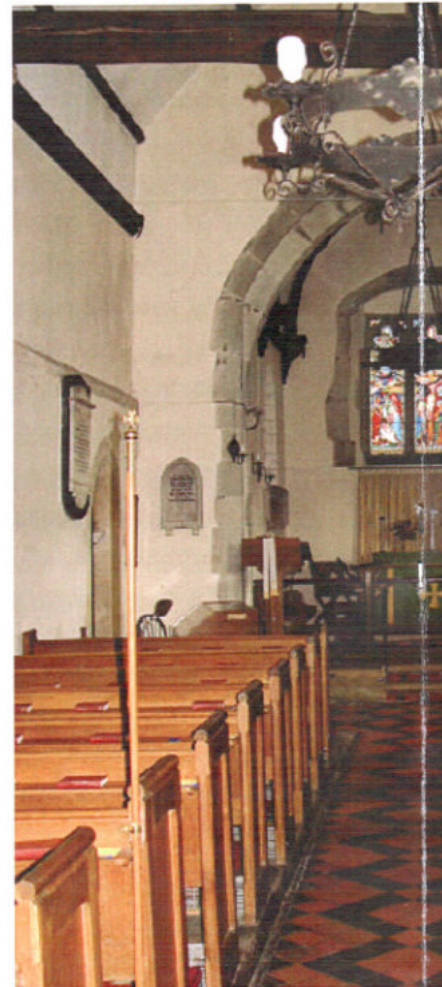
Among the families who instantly raised the tone of Port Phillip society in 1839 was, of course, the urbane and cultured Superintendent Charles La Trobe who arrived with his refined patrician wife, Sophie, from French speaking Switzerland and their small daughter. The previous year, the appearance of Major Mitchell's book with its enticing message of pastoral fortunes waiting to be made in 'Australia felix' had a huge impact.<sup>4</sup> Its appeal for to many underfunded younger sons from educated backgrounds and members of the overcrowded professions in the home countries was irresistible and undoubtedly helped to make migration to the Port Phillip District fashionable. This is vividly illustrated by a letter of introduction from Sir Henry Bunbury, on behalf of his son, Captain Richard Hamner Bunbury, forwarded by Governor Gipps to Superintendent La Trobe. Almost spluttering with frustration, Sir Henry wrote:

He has been seized with this epidemical rage for colonization, and I find it to my sorrow, impossible to divert him from his scheme of settling in Australia. It vexes me particularly because he had the fairest prospects in his profession, with the





Charles Laing, architect. *Plans of Cothule*, ground plan, 1848, Architectural drawing. From *Miss D and Miss N* by Bev Roberts, Melbourne, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2009.



Steve Bulman. *St Michael the Archangel, Liffington Church*. Trobe worshipped here and is buried in the grounds.

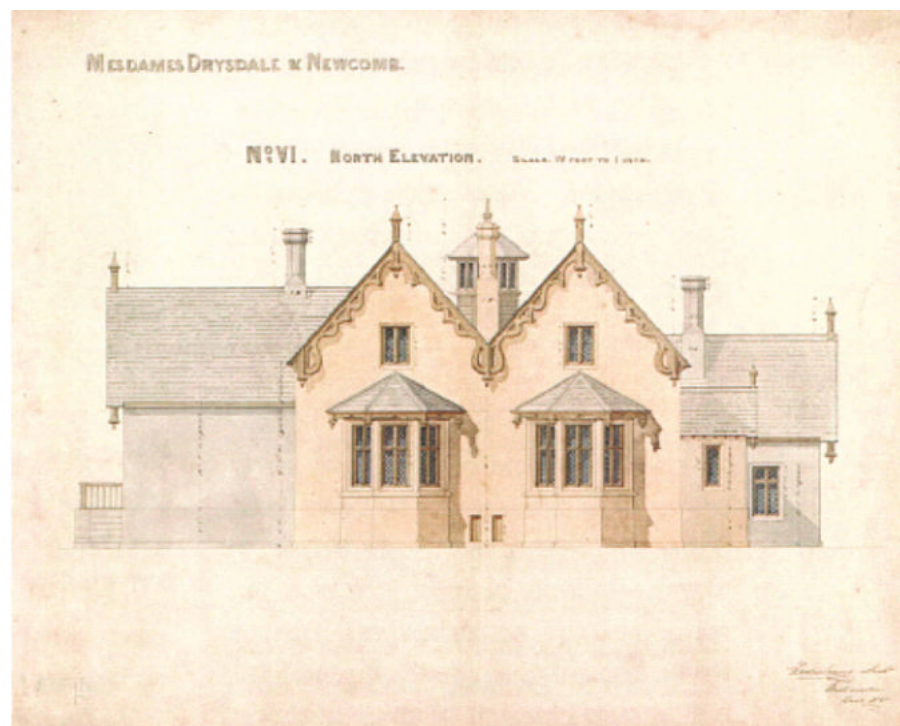


Charles Norton, artist, 1826-1872. *Trompe l'Oeil Randal*, c1844-65. Watercolour. La Trobe Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria, H88.21/71.



*Mourning Brooch made from the hair of Miss Anne Drysdale*. Gold and Hair. La Trobe Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria, H3488.





Charles Laing, architect. *Plans of Corryule*, north elevation, 1848, Architectural drawing from *Miss O and Miss N* by Bev Roberts, Melbourne, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2009.

Church, East Sussex 2009, Photograph, Charles La



Sarah Susanna Bunbury, artist. *Brunswick Street - Newtown [now Fitzroy] from the front of our house June 1841*, Watercolour on buff paper, La Trobe Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria, H6162.



Robert Russell, artist, 1808-1900, *Melbourne from the Falls*, 1837. Watercolour. Trobe Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria, H24486.

claims arising from having lost his arm in battle, and which would perhaps be more effectual, being a great favourite of Lord Holland's. But he has taken it into his head that he is to have a dozen children, and that he is to make a great fortune for these possible children by sheep farming.<sup>5</sup>

Thanks to Major Mitchell's propaganda, the illegitimate daughter of a Scottish duke, Georgiana McCrae, embarked for Port Phillip with her four young children, as did the Bunbury family and their Sconce relatives, all of whom arrived on the same ship in February, 1841. Similarly influenced by Mitchell's book, another extended family party headed by the Quaker doctor, Godfrey Howitt, and destined like the McCraes, to become close friends of the La Trobe family, had reached Melbourne the previous year. Even the Howitts, more realistic and practical than most, had built "air castles" based on the roseate promises in Mitchell's book. They had entertained themselves on the long voyage by picturing themselves as antipodean squires of verdant estates stocked with sleek flocks, their runs placed companionably side by side along the course of flowing rivers. Inevitably these dreams were dispelled almost the moment they landed.<sup>6</sup>

In the colony's first decade, the struggle to survive and adapt occupied most of the new comers' time and energy. The famous land sale at Port Phillip came off on 10<sup>th</sup> June, 1840, at which the Howitts and Superintendent La Trobe purchased land on which to set up their portable wooden houses. After enduring five anxious, unsettled months, the La Trobes' residence, Jolimont, reflected its cultured inhabitants. This was observed early in 1841 by an upper class Irish solicitor, Charles Griffith, who on arrival did the rounds of acquaintances from home. Among them were future notables of the Bar including Redmond Barry, William Stawell, later Chief Justice, and other members, most of whom happened to come from Ireland. Shortly afterwards, he was invited to Jolimont: "Dined with La Trobe", noted that discerning young man,

very neat house in the cottage style everything having the appearance of being settled by the hand of taste. Mrs La Trobe very pleasing – a Swiss lady – La Trobe, pleasing, lively and entertaining, has seen much of the world and details well what he has seen. Three admirable portrait paintings in the drawing room done by a Swiss artist – watercolours but with the depth very nearly of oil and without any of that finican effect which highly finished watercolour drawings are so apt to have. Also a good collection of prints.

Richard Howitt was referring to the La Trobes and their circle in the dedication of his book, *Impressions of Australia Felix* in 1845, in which he addressed his brother, Godfrey:

Great was the change from the old land to the new for both of us; Society such as you resigned received you – the refined, the intelligent.

A mere 10 years from the very birth of settlement, this was a serious endorsement of the quality of those first settlers.<sup>7</sup>

Although founded in 1839, a mere four years after the beginning of Melbourne, the Mechanics Institute with its library and occasional lectures, was virtually the sole repository of civic culture for at least five years. Inevitably reading, music, sketching, painting and gardening were the principle forms of private recreation for the early colonists. Books were prized and scarce in the first years and anticipating this, numbers of settlers brought their own libraries from home. Sally Bunbury wrote to her mother-in-law in 1842:

Your welcome box of books came about 3 weeks ago...When they arrived I was in the midst of some books lent me by Mr La Trobe...Our library is rather a large one for this colony. I don't know anybody here who has so many books.





Fig. 1 George Alexander Gilbert, artist, 1815-? *View of Jolimont, Melbourne, Port Phillip 1843-44*. pastel on paper. La Trobe Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria H5278.

The Howitts' library also came with them and like the rest of their circle, Godfrey Howitt's wife, Phebe, and her closest friend in the settlement, Georgiana McCrae frequently exchanged books from their personal collections. Georgiana's son, George McCrae, fondly recalled that as a child, he was introduced to the delights of fairy literature by Mrs Howitt, more often than not written or translated by her sister-in-law, the renowned English author, Mary Howitt.<sup>8</sup>

A private book club got up during those years, features in the diaries of Eliza and Robert Pohlman. They provide amongst other things, a fascinatingly detailed account of the conduct of private daily life in Melbourne and the social ramifications of the tiny community. Pohlman was a London born barrister, admitted to the Port Phillip Bar along with its earliest members, Croke, Brewster, Barry and Cunningham in April, 1841. Cautious, prim and touchy on matters of precedence, Pohlman seems to have meekly existed under the firm hand of his older wife who was, if possible, even more sanctimonious and humourless. His diaries, however, give an invaluable insider's view of the workings of the bar and the judiciary where he clearly felt overshadowed by the talent and polish of the coterie of Irish barristers. Barry, in particular, found him a bore and scarcely bothered to conceal it but despite their differences, Pohlman and Barry shared a love of books. Together with other leading figures such as La Trobe, Howitt and Cunningham, they formed Melbourne's first book group. Pohlman's diaries show that he and his

wife were avid readers, often entertaining themselves and close friends, particularly the future speaker of the Legislative Council, Dr (later Sir) James Palmer and his wife Isabella, by reading aloud to each other in the evenings after dinner. They got through a prodigious number of books and the range of subject matter was surprisingly catholic: religion, philosophy, history, travel and novels such as Dickens' *Bleak House*, *David Copperfield* and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, an amusing slip. Pohlman's diary reveals that the book club was afflicted by ever fresh village-pump politics and arguments over such burning issues as to whether or not to admit more than the original 50 members.<sup>9</sup>

As recreation, music rivalled reading in that first period but public performances were mainly sporadic amateur charity concerts. Apart from a couple of unsuccessful attempts to establish philharmonic societies in the pre-gold rush era, music making was chiefly private. Charles Griffith describes a dinner party at the home of the Darkes:

lots of musick – Quality bad, made up for by the quantity – not but that some of the party had considerable knowledge and taste for musick. But imagine a piano forte accompanied by three cornetts à piston and two flutes playing the first part, and all this taking place in a very small room and you will have some idea of the delights of this concert.

Up to this point, we have no idea of the Howitts' musical interests, if any. But many of their friends were more than proficient performers. It was one of many accomplishments that La Trobe shared with Barry who sang with a high bass, according to Georgiana McCrae. A recent study of her annotated music books reveals that her musical knowledge was of a very high order indeed and it emerges that she greatly enjoyed accompanying and singing duets with Lizzie Sconce who had a fine, trained voice, and a repertoire of Italian opera.<sup>10</sup>

There is little evidence of the presence of professionally trained artists in the early colony. One exception was George Alexander Gilbert, a drawing master and honorary secretary of the Mechanics' Institute from 1844 onwards. Characteristically, La Trobe fostered his talent privately by acquiring two charming pastel views of his house and garden, Jolimont, of c.1844, now in the State Library's La Trobe Pictures Collection. In the same collection, the Settlement's earliest appearance is recorded in sketches and watercolours by Robert Russell, architect, first town surveyor, and enthusiastic amateur artist. The State Library's topographical views of Melbourne in its infancy is further enriched by a suite of naïve views by one of its first inhabitants, the eccentric, cultured gentleman and Sandridge hotelier, Captain Liardet. And, of course, from 1841, there was the professionally trained Georgiana McCrae whose artistic career was stifled by her husband and his McCrae relatives. However, she managed to exercise her art in those years by portraying friends such as Sally Bunbury's brother, Robert Sconce, her own children and those of the Bunbury, La Trobe and later, the Howitt families. A particularly fine example in the State Library's collection is her portrait of Octavius Browne of 1841, a family friend and a notable early Melbourne settler, businessman and a future founder of the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce.

On a strictly amateur basis, most ladies and less often, highly accomplished gentlemen such as Charles La Trobe, were taught to sketch and paint. It was an exceedingly useful skill before the development of photography, since drawing was the only means of recording the likeness of loved ones and conveying the appearance of exotic, distant lands to relatives at home. Richard Hanmer Bunbury wrote approvingly, if somewhat patronizingly, of his wife, Sally, in 1841:

the children and household matters and making the bread and writing letters pretty nearly occupy all her time but like a good girl she has been drawing a little for the last few days and is making a very pretty coloured sketch of some

of the neighbouring cottages from our verandah [in Brunswick Street, Newtown, now Richmond]; she sketches from nature now with much greater ease.<sup>11</sup>

During the early 1840s, a rough pattern starts to emerge indicating that settlers were beginning both figuratively and literally to cultivate their gardens, a popular recreation at all social levels in the colony. La Trobe shared a passion for botany with Godfrey Howitt who was a recognized authority in England, and many of their circle either imported or caught its twin passion, horticulture. Produce gardens were a necessity, but ornamental gardens, planted with old favourites from home and collections of strange new world plants were a great focus of interest. La Trobe, as always, was generous with specimens from his garden. And the exchange of seeds and cuttings by noted gardeners such as the Howitts, the McCraes, Barry, the Bunburys, the Pohlmanns and the St Johns, is frequently recorded in the journals and letters of the period. We hear very little about the daily life of the Howitts in the early colony except for passing references in Richard Howitt's *Impressions of Australia Felix*:

My brother [Godfrey] divides his time pretty equally betwixt his patients, riding amongst them (like Death in the Revelations on a white horse), visiting and being visited by intelligent people, and amongst his old studies of insects and flowers; not neglecting his garden, which returns his attentions with delicious fruits; melons, figs and grapes.

This description conveys a deceptive impression of social stability in the first half of the 1840s which the first great financial crisis of 1841 almost totally undermined. While it was receding by the time Howitt's book appeared in 1845, life in the colony became for most, if not the Godfrey Howitts, exceedingly precarious. The income from his successful urban medical practice

clearly insulated Howitt's family from its effects. But many an early settler, including his brother, Richard, failed and similar misfortunes of many of their peers and social circle are eloquently portrayed in Paul de Serville's classic *Port Phillip Gentlemen*.<sup>12</sup>

"Ruin, utter ruin is staring me in the face", Bunbury's agonised cry in a letter to his father must have been echoed over and again throughout the infant colony by the end of 1841. However, loans from his family and the timely offer in 1843 of a government post as Harbour Master, prevented the family from sinking under the burden of Bunbury's mostly unprofitable financial "speculations" as his wife despairingly called them. Theirs was not a success story. But the vast collection of Bunbury correspondence, covering the entire La Trobe era and beyond, is a fascinating and moving testimony to the life, struggles and ultimate failure of an educated early settler. An insuperable difficulty for Bunbury and his brother-in-law, Robert Sconce, who took orders and then went over to Rome, was that well intentioned, hopeful and intelligent though they were, unlike Neil Black, they were not cut out for squatting or for business. Those like Godfrey Howitt who did not invest their all in purchasing sheep stations but

had some form of training or a profession to fall back on, were in a far better position. With such means, by 1846, Howitt was quietly accumulating property and rentals both within and outside Melbourne to which he added squatting and farming interests.<sup>13</sup>

The second pioneer period of the Port Phillip District was ushered in around 1845 as the settlement started to recover from the previous dramatic three years of financial stagnation. It was during that period that the next stirring of Melbourne's civic culture may be detected, perhaps unsurprisingly, in the area of gardening and horticulture. According to nineteenth century social theory, parks and gardens were believed to exercise an important beneficial influence on the moral and physical health of citizens of all classes. Consequently, in 1846, La Trobe established the Botanic Gardens, and as chairman, appointed the founding trustees from among old and trusted friends and colleagues, sub-treasurer Lonsdale, Police Magistrate Simpson, David Charteris McArthur, manager of the Australasian Bank and two of the early colony's leading doctors, Hobson and Howitt. They retained that position despite repeated attempts by the Town Council, incorporated since 1842, to turf out the committee and highjack the enterprise. The Victorian Horticultural Society was inaugurated in 1848 and gained much momentum from 1850 onwards under the dual patronage of the Superintendent and the Resident Judge (later Sir) William a'Beckett, future Chief Justice of Victoria, with a high powered committee of Barry and other colonial notables. The success of the first exhibitions of 1850 and 1851 bears witness to the birth of Victoria the garden state!<sup>14</sup>

Around the beginning of the 1850s, a second generation of young colonials was reaching adulthood, and at the age of 15, Godfrey Howitt's daughter, Edith, appears as a part player in the pages of a charming tale of romance between two young family friends. The journal of 21 year old Frederick Race Godfrey opens in 1849, three years after he arrived in the colony to join his brother, Henry, an original pioneer



Fig. 2 Georgiana Huntly McCrae, artist, 1804-1890. *Portrait of Octavius Browne* [1841]. Watercolour and pencil on cream paper. La Trobe Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria, H84.290.

squatter at Boort. At the Spring Street house of Mrs Chambers, sister of Judge a'Beckett, Frederick Godfrey meets the Howitts, mentioning in passing that during his grandfather's time in England, the Howitts had adopted his surname as a family Christian name, to mark the friendship between the two families. Godfrey's courtship of Mrs Chambers' 19 year old daughter, Margaret Lillias, known as Lilly, is played out against a melodic background of private performances of chamber music that run like a refrain through their story. Over the next 5 years, we follow their busy social round of parties, balls, theatre and concerts, picnics and visits to friends, interspersed with engagements and weddings of other friends such as John Pinney Bear with Annetta Williams, to become subjects like the Howitts, of Thomas Woolner's portrait medallions. While amateur music at private parties was universal and considered a social obligation, the young people and their families often attended weekly public and benefit concerts as well. Melbourne's appreciation of classical music was reflected in the formation of the Victorian Philharmonic Society in 1853, to which La Trobe agreed to lend his patronage even though he officially tendered his resignation that year.<sup>15</sup>

Frederick Godfrey and his friends frequently attended the theatre in those pre-gold years, but even more enjoyable was actually participating in theatricals at William a'Becketts' house in his private theatre:

Henry [Godfrey's brother] and I dined at the Judge's and rehearsed all the music required at the theatre. In the evening the plays were performed with great éclat. Lilly Chambers (on harp and piano), Henry and I (singing and violin), were the orchestra. The effect of the little theatre was very good, and all present seemed much pleased - about 50 people there, mostly young.

Just prior to the gold rush Godfrey's diary reflects the pleasant, leisurely tenor of life of the later settled period in the Port Phillip District. In December 1852, four months after his engagement, he writes:

This evening Lilly and I were invited to Dr and Mrs Howitts', to a very pleasant party – singing and music, harp and piano.

This seemingly insignificant sentence turned up a missing piece of the jigsaw puzzle since it was the first positive proof of the existence of music in the Howitt household. As we see in Nettleton's photograph, their residence was an elegant, stuccoed, two-storey house in the classical style with a porticoed entrance on to Collins Street that had replaced their first wooden cottage. The Howitts' architect was the fashionable John Gill, designer of the Collins Street Baptist Church (completed 1845) and houses for the Pohlmanns and James Palmer and his wife. And so as not to leave the Godfrey-Chambers' story in mid-air, they were married on 29 April, 1854. A photograph of the young couple taken at their Boort station about 2 or 3 years later, shows them to have been a strikingly handsome pair.<sup>16</sup>

In 1851, separation from New South Wales and the discovery of gold in Victoria abruptly ended the pre-gold rush period. This was a watershed for Victoria, a cataclysm marked by a sharp falling off of diaries and journals from 1851 onwards. La Trobe's private letters and official correspondence eloquently document the dramatic turn of events that perilously rocked the small colony and changed its existence forever. Nobody escaped its effects, even Dr Godfrey Howitt's family who while they kept their heads and cultivated their garden, were surrounded on all sides by gold feverish friends and family. Gold brought in its train artists and writers to Melbourne, among them Godfrey's older brother, the famous English author, William Howitt and his sons Alfred and Charlton. They were followed by three of their friends, all professional artists: the Pre-Raphaelite sculptor, Thomas Woolner, the brilliant designer, draftsman and Pre-Raphaelite sympathizer, Edward La Trobe Bateman and another sculptor, Bernhard Smith. Bateman was a cousin of the newly created Lieutenant Governor and on meeting La Trobe, Woolner was charmed to find that he owned a

little sculpted figurine of *Red Riding Hood* which he had executed in London in 1848 (how he came by it is still a mystery waiting to be solved). La Trobe further gratified Woolner by telling him that he must not leave the colony before first doing something for the arts. Needless to say, none of these hopeful artists made a fortune but they were supported throughout the turmoil of the gold rush by La Trobe and the Howitts. When prospecting inevitably failed, they assisted the artists Melbourne with accommodation, personal commissions and by introductions to their circle which was also forthcoming with offers of work.<sup>17</sup>

"The Howitts are delightful people who live just like rich people at home", wrote the penniless but politically attuned Woolner to his father in 1852. He had lost no time on arrival in making drawings of La Trobe and Godfrey and Phebe Howitt and their small son Charley. From these studies, plaster relief medallions were produced and lent by their owners to the first exhibition of the newly formed Victoria Fine Arts Society in 1853. That year, portraits of Captain Ward Cole, his wife, Thomas Anne, and their son, Farquhar, and of the newly-weds, John Pinney Bear and his wife, Annetta, show that their friends followed the lead of La Trobe and the Howitts. All in all, Woolner produced about a dozen Melbourne portraits before moving to Sydney in 1854 to try his luck there. With an introduction from his Melbourne friends to Sir Charles Nicholson, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, success equally attended him. He returned to Melbourne with an even larger clutch of plaster likenesses of Sydney notables. These he took back to London for casting into bronze versions on request of patrons and the payment of a fee.<sup>18</sup>

We know little of Woolner's courtship of Dr Howitt's 20 year old daughter, Edith during the course of which he produced a portrait medallion of her and an exquisite little replica in ivory. Although he succeeded in charming both Edith and her mother, the Howitt parents wisely decided that Woolner should return to England to make his name and fortune before he could hope to

aspire to their daughter's hand. Fate intervened and Phoebe Howitt's severely disabling stroke sometime around the end of 1856, put paid to their engagement. Edith Howitt, as a dutiful young woman of her time, had to step into her mother's role and run the household for her father and brothers. However, due to the start he was given by his Melbourne patrons, especially the Howitts and La Trobe, Woolner went on to pursue a highly successful career in London, becoming the foremost sculptor in mid Victorian England.<sup>19</sup>

Woolner's fellow artist, Bateman, was equally supported by his Melbourne connections. In 1853, his cousin, the Lieutenant-Governor, commissioned from him the suite of commemorative views of his beloved house and garden at Jolimont, now preserved in the La Trobe Pictures Collection of the State Library. After La Trobe's departure in May 1854, the Howitts adopted Bateman. Phebe Howitt's brothers, who had emigrated with her family to Melbourne in 1840, followed La Trobe's example by commissioning a similar suite of souvenir views of *Floraville*, their station on the Plenty River. The Godfrey Howitts also encouraged Bateman's ambition to produce volumes of coloured lithographs from his exquisite illustrations of Australian flora, bush homes and scenery and other picturesque exotica that might attract readers in the colony and in England.<sup>20</sup>

The finding of gold in Victoria was an extraordinary financial windfall for the colony, occurring shortly after the proclamation of its independence from New South Wales. The economic bonanza, making possible



Fig. 3 Edward La Trobe Bateman, artist, 1816-1897. *Front view of Jolimont*, 1853. Pencil and Chinese white on brown paper. La Trobe Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria, H98.135/19.



the establishment of Melbourne's civic culture and during the course of the decade, government and council bodies slowly became a source of artistic commissions which previously had been the exclusive domain of private individuals. Inevitably, those with private cultural interests in pre-gold rush Melbourne, continued to pursue them afterwards, often taking up official positions in the newly constituted colony. In the case of the first official Melbourne Exhibition of 1854, its chief commissioner, Barry, chose trusted associates, public minded men like Godfrey Howitt to promote these important endeavours. As private citizens, the Howitts lent examples of Woolner's and Bateman's work in their possession to the exhibition's Fine Arts Court which had been included with the intention of providing encouragement to the colony's resident artists. This officially sanctioned venue was successful both in promoting commissions and providing a forum for the local artistic community. Artists and scientists alike recorded their admiration of Bateman's brilliant pencil drawings and exquisite watercolours of native flora and their interest in purchasing his published work. The Pre-Raphaelite detail of his landscapes made such an impact on another exhibition visitor, the Austrian landscape painter, Eugene von Guerard, which he still recalled the occasion twenty years later.<sup>21</sup>

By the 1870s, the final decade of the colonial era, the earliest generation of settlers were disappearing. Godfrey Howitt died at the end of 1873 followed in 1875 by his old friend, Charles La Trobe, in England. Twenty years after La Trobe's departure from the colony, a young Englishman arrived in Melbourne in November for a 7 week visit. He was 24 year old Edward Moberly, newly ordained son of the headmaster of Winchester, the future Bishop of Salisbury. Moberly came with an introduction to Theyre Weigall of Walmer Cottage, Elsternwick, whose wife's family, the Thomas Turner a'Becketts had been long time associates of La Trobe's and the Howitts. They lived in the neighbouring suburb at Brighton Lodge and the young visitor was warmly welcome at both houses. The journal of his visit, now in the State Library, records his impressions of Melbourne two decades on from the gold rush. He

revels in the clear air and warm summer weather and is pleased by the well stocked gardens of the single storey houses:

The common labourers' cottages here are neat little houses with verandahs such as I should be proud to live in, and in almost every case their own property.

He walks in the Fitzroy Gardens with its large numbers of acclimatized English trees and from the city, he travels easily to and from his friends' houses on the suburban train service. He tours the university and with Mr a'Beckett, attends the Houses of Parliament to see Parliament prorogued –a pompous and rather boring ceremony, he notes - presided over by the governor and the legislative council.<sup>22</sup>

It is Christmas time and Moberley buys books at Robertsons as presents for the Weigall children and attends a Christmas service with all the old familiar carols at All Saints, St Kilda. At the town hall, he hears the Messiah, "a pretty good performance and a fine sight". He is often complimentary about the standard of amateur music at private evening parties. He attends a concert of the Caradini family: "music good", no empty praise from a man who was later to make a second career in England as a musician and noted symphony orchestra conductor. The entire absence of poor people in Melbourne's streets particularly strikes him, the general populace appearing bright, prosperous and well dressed.

The freedom and absence of formality about the society here is charming after being accustomed to the coldness and stiffness [at home]; it makes you feel like a real person and you are able to know a person in a quarter of the time ...

writes this engaging young man. And he visits the Public Library and Picture Gallery which he describes as:



a wonderful institution, absolutely free, and well-filled with bona fide readers, many of them working men.<sup>23</sup>

Edward Moberly's Melbourne of 1874 is undoubtedly seen through the rose coloured spectacles of youthful optimism. He basks in the unaccustomed warmth of a golden, Antipodean summer, doubtlessly relieved to be free after years of study and England's winter gloom. Even so, our sympathetic tourist paints a picture of the city which its creators and architects, La Trobe, Barry, Childers, Stawell, Howitt and all their circle, could feel justifiably proud. It is the portrait of a civilized society with a well grounded culture that they had each in their individual way, so hopefully envisaged and laboured so mightily to achieve.

## Endnotes

- 1 For a comprehensive assessment of La Trobe's development and career, see Dianne Reilly Drury, *La Trobe: The Making of a Governor*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2006; for a biography of Barry, see Ann Galbally, Redmond Barry: An Anglo-Irish Australian, Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1995.
- 2 E. Finn, *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne, 1835 to 1852: Historical Anecdotal and Personal by 'Garryowen'*, Melbourne: Heritage Publications, 1976, vol. 2, p. 825.
- 3 Neil Black, 'Journal, commencing 30th September, 1839', La T. A. MS Coll., SLV; for a detailed study of Port Phillip before 1851, see A.G.L. Shaw, *A History of the Port Phillip District: Victoria before Separation*, Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press at the Miegunyah Press, 1996.
- 4 T.L. Mitchell, *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia*, 2nd ed., London: T. and W. Boone, 1839.
- 5 H.E. Bunbury to Elisse, 22 September 1840, Gipps-La Trobe Correspondence, H7030, La T. A. MS Coll., SLV,

- 6 R. Howitt, *Impressions of Australia Felix, Australia: Historical, Descriptive and Statistic: with an Account of Four Years' Residence in that Colony, etc.*, London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1845, p. vii.
- 7 Charles Griffith, Diary, 1840-1841, MS 9393, SLV, La T. A. MS Coll., SLV; Howitt, "Epistle dedicatory" in *Impressions of Australia Felix...*, p. v.
- 8 Sarah Susanna Bunbury to Lady Bunbury, 23 February, 1842, PA 96/126, La T. A. MS Coll., SLV; George McCrae, 'Rough Notes of Recollections of Port Phillip...' A 1698, MLMS, SLNSW.
- 9 Eliza Pohlman, Diary, 1844, MS 10356; R.W. Pohlman, Diary, 1846 – 1849, MS 11856, La T. A. MS Coll., SLV.
- 10 Charles Griffith, Diary, 1840-1841, MS 9393, La T. A. MS Coll., SLV; Brenda Niall, *Georgiana: A Biography of Georgiana McCrae, Painter, Diarist, Pioneer*, Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press at the Miegunyah Press, 1994, p. 121.
- 11 Richard Hanmer Bunbury to Sir Henry Bunbury, April 27, 1841, MS PA96/126, La T. A. MS Coll., SLV.
- 12 Howitt, *Impressions of Australia Felix...*, p. 323; Paul de Serville, Port Phillip Gentlemen: and Good Society in Melbourne before the Gold Rushes, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1980.
- 13 Richard Hanmer Bunbury to Sir Henry Bunbury, December 18, 1842, MS PA 96/126, La T. A. MS Coll., SLV; Caroline Clemente, 'The Private Face of Patronage: the Howitts, Artistic and Intellectual Philanthropists in early Melbourne Society', M.A. Thesis, University of Melbourne, 2005, pp. 31-33.
- 14 Finn, *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne*, vol. 1, pp. 424-5, 429ff; Galbally, Redmond Barry, p. 84.
- 15 D.L. Drought, (ed.), *Extracts from Old Journals by Frederick Race Godfrey (Pioneer) of Boort Station, Loddon District of Victoria, 1846-1853*, Melbourne, 1926.
- 16 Drought, *Extracts from Old Journals*, pp. 36, 153.

- <sup>17</sup> A. Woolner, (ed.), *Thomas Woolner R.A., Sculptor and Poet: His Life in Letters*, London: Chapman & Hall, 1917, p. 18.
- For the Howitts' role in supporting these artists, see above, Clemente, 'The Private Face of Patronage'.
- <sup>18</sup> Woolner, *Thomas Woolner R.A.*, pp. 18, 60, 61, 64-5; Clemente, 'The Private Face of Patronage', pp. 46-59.
- <sup>19</sup> Benedict Read, *Victorian Sculpture*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982, p. 3; 'Thomas Woolner: PRB, RA', in B. Read and J. Barnes (eds), *Pre-Raphaelite Sculpture: Nature and Imagination in British Sculpture 1848-1914*, London: The Henry Moore Foundation in association with Lund Humphries, 1991. pp. 24-25.
- <sup>20</sup> For a complete account of Bateman's oeuvre, see Anne Neale, 'Illuminating Nature: The Art and Design of Edward La Trobe Bateman', Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Art History, Cinema, Classics and Archaeology, University of Melbourne, 2001; for a study of relations between Bateman and the Howitts, see also Clemente, 'The Private Face of Patronage', pp. 80-8, 96-102, 110-17.
- <sup>21</sup> Galbally, *Redmond Barry*, p. 83ff; S. Ducker (ed.), 1988, *The Contented Botanist: Letters of W.H. Harvey About Australia and the Pacific*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988, p. 159; Neale, 'Illuminating Nature', pp. 109, 148; Clemente, 'The Private Face of Patronage', pp. 72-4.
- <sup>22</sup> E.H.Moberly, 'Journal of a Trip to Australia and back aboard the sailing clipper "Lincolnshire" Aug. 1874 to April 1875', MS 13185, La T. A. MS Coll., SLV.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.

# Charles Joseph La Trobe and the English Country House

By Richard Heathcote

*This is the text of the lecture Richard Heathcote gave at the C J La Trobe Society Annual General Meeting and Dinner on 11 August 2010 which was held at The Lyceum Club. We are delighted that he has given permission to print his most interesting lecture on two intriguing houses that Charles Joseph and Rose La Trobe made their home on Charles Joseph La Trobe's return to England after his time in the Port Phillip region.*

*Richard Heathcote is currently director of Carrick Hill historic house and garden in Adelaide, and previously managed, for a decade, Rippon Lea Estate, the National Trust's flagship property in Melbourne. He presented for ABC TV The New Eden - a six part series tracing the evolution of the Australian garden, and has broadcast and published on heritage buildings and gardens. As a graduate of the prestigious Attingham Summer School for the Study of the English Country House, he has an extensive knowledge of their architecture, collections and social history. He was a founding member of the La Trobe Society and has impersonated C J La Trobe on two occasions but his main claim to fame is the research conducted into La Trobe's Jolimont garden which he contributed to Helen Botham's publication La Trobe's Jolimont: A walk around my garden.*

After fifteen turbulent years in the burgeoning colony of Victoria Charles Joseph La Trobe returned to London from Melbourne having resigned his commission. Before he journeyed back to Europe in May 1854, another vicissitude beset La Trobe when he read in a newspaper of the death of Sophie, his wife, who had returned to Switzerland before him - the family's letters not having reached in advance of the newspaper announcements.

La Trobe was fifty three and somewhat disillusioned with the colonial service who informed him he was not entitled to a pension. Nor did they offer him another post then or in the decade that followed. Reunited with his children and family in Switzerland, life took a turn for the better in October 1855 when La Trobe married his wife's widowed sister Rose Isabelle de Meuron at Neuchatel. The newly-weds returned to England where, in the village of Addington, Kent, the couple's first child, Rose Isabelle, was born in September, 1856. She was affectionately known as 'Daisy'. A second daughter was born in 1859 and was named Isabelle Castellane.

Finding a suitable home for his four grown children from his first marriage, his new wife and baby daughter was to produce a remarkable solution. It seems he wished to remain in Kent as proximity to London was essential for his negotiations over his pension with the Colonial Office and Treasury, and for keeping in touch with contacts and the cultural life of the capital – he was a member of the Athenaeum Club.

Throughout English history the county of Kent has occupied a pivotal position in the geography of the country. Its proximity to the coast opposite France made it vulnerable to invasion. It is interesting to note that La Trobe would have been five years old when the last threat of French invasion of Britain took place. The Battle of Trafalgar was fought in 1805 and Wellington defeated Napoleon decisively at Waterloo in 1815 when La Trobe was fourteen years old. Kent



Fig. 1. Andrew Butler. A view of the south-west & south-east elevations of Ightham Mote looking from the south. Photograph. National Trust.



Fig. 2 Chapel at Ightham Mote. Photograph. National Trust.

provides the shortest routes to London, the country's capital, ensuring it received news and fashions from the continent first. The county town Canterbury was also the base for the Archbishop, primate of the Anglican Church, and where the great cathedral of St Augustine stood.

Quite how La Trobe found Ightham Mote, near Seven Oaks, is not known but a more appropriate place for a man of his sensibilities and cultural receptiveness could not be imagined. John Julius Norwich, architectural historian, describes his first impression of this medieval house dating from Edward III reign (1347-87) thus:

The approach alone is unforgettable: a steep descent, twisting down one of those, leafy Wealden lanes, gives no suggestion of what lies ahead. Then, suddenly, there it is – almost too good to be true, so perfectly preserved, so complete and self-contained in its seclusion as to make you wonder if you have not yourself slipped back into the Middle Ages: the fourteenth century manor house of everyone's dreams, part timber framed, part good vernacular Kentish ragstone,

its walls dropping sheer, on all four sides, into the calm, almost miraculously clear waters of its moat.

The Selby family had held this manorial property since 1598 and La Trobe rented Ightham Mote from Prideaux Selby, the eminent naturalist and painter, for less than a year. He was never to own property in England and always rented his homes. It is not known why it was such a short tenancy but what is clear is that it was a most invigorating and engaging period for La Trobe as he began his nine year campaign to secure a proper pension for his colonial service.

During 1856 and part of 1857, La Trobe produced forty pen and ink drawings and watercolour sketches of how he saw his remarkable medieval home and its surrounding countryside. What is clear from the architectural details he drew was that he studied the building in great depth capturing such things as the *Arms in the tower window looking on the court, 1856*. He also drew a *Birds eye view of the Mote* with rooms identified, such as the great hall. The drawings are dated from January 1856: so it was winter when they settled into the Mote amidst frosty Kentish countryside. La Trobe wasted no time in taking sketching trips further afield to draw other buildings and scenery in the area. There are several striking watercolours parish churches at Ryarsh, Teston and Berling as well as country houses such as Fairlawn. This 'Home' portfolio, as La Trobe labelled it, contains forty sketches twenty four of which were of Ightham Mote.

Never before in all his travelling and sketching had he ever depicted one place so many times. As he built his case for a pension and pressed his agent back in Melbourne to sell further lots of land from his Jolimont estate, there were pleasant ways to pass the time in this place: the joys of the garden, family visits to surrounding places and receiving friends.

Eighty years later, in 1937, architectural writer Avery Tipping wrote a powerful description for the *Country*





Fig. 3 Charles Joseph La Trobe, 1801-1875. *Gatehouse and the Chapel, The Mote, Ightham, Kent, 1856*. Watercolour and pencil on paper. La Trobe Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.

*Life English Homes* series of publications. Ightham Mote is the first house in the Medieval and Early Tudor, 1066-1558 volume and he wrote:

A place so architecturally interesting, so picturesquely beautiful as Ightham Mote, seated charmingly amid its gardens in its nobly timbered and deliciously watered glen, has inevitably riveted the eye of taste upon it, and long ago, yet enduringly, has established it in the front rank of our historic English homes.

The essay detailing the building's history and development is accompanied by eighteen black and white photographs of both the major rooms and facades and features of the moated building which La Trobe had captured in his paintings and sketches. The



Fig. 4 Charles Joseph La Trobe, 1801-1875. *Courtyard, The Mote, Ightham, Kent, 1856*. Watercolour and pencil on paper. La Trobe Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.

ownership had changed from the Selby family to Mr Colyer-Fergusson who had served as the Sheriff of Kent in 1906 and 1924 and was a baronet. Ightham Mote was the perfect home for a country squire, especially as English Edwardian society still laid great store by the status of your home or country seat. Victorian architect Robert Kerr went so far as to write a book entitled *The Gentleman's House* in 1864 giving advice on every aspect of style to assist an English gentlemen in the planning the configuration and size of rooms when building a house.

Today, the National Trust is the custodian of this remarkable building, one of the oldest in the country,



Fig. 5 Unknown Photographer. *Ightham Mote - Courtyard*, c. 1860. Photograph. La Trobe Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.

with its quintessential English quality the *spirit of place* which has existed for so long and remained so pure. Little wonder it had such an appeal for La Trobe's eye and artistry. However; as he left to travel to Switzerland at the end of 1857 fate was to deal him another fierce blow that would take this pleasure away - his eyesight began to deteriorate significantly.

Perhaps the award of the Companion of the Order of Bath which he received in 1858 went some way to encouraging him to believe his contribution to the colonial service would be further acknowledged with a pension. His mood was philosophical as may be gauged by the following comment he made in correspondence to the Colonial Office in 1863:

Ten to one, the only fate which awaits us is that of the hedger's glove; employed as long as circumstances or convenience suits, to protect the hand against the too close contact with the thorny asperities of distant colonial rule, only, when worn out, or the call for such employment may have passed away to be thrown aside to moulder on the bank.

As a man who enjoyed gardening and knew the ways of agricultural life through his extensive travels, it is a poignant image for him to feel discarded as a 'hedger's glove'. It would take a further seven years before the Colonial Governor's (Pensions) Bill was passed bringing about the annual pension he was finally offered in 1865 - a part pension £333.6s.8d (ie. one third of one third of his lowest salary).

By 1865, he was completely blind and he moved his family for what was to be his last home; this time in Sussex. Clapham House was another sturdy manor house made of flint with stone quoins and sporting a great glass conservatory. Situated in Litlington, a village in the Cuckmere valley where it lay equidistant between Eastbourne & Hastings. The villagers thought the La Trobes strange foreigners eating all that green stuff which was how they must have seen the Swiss habit of growing and eating various saladings all year round.



Fig. 6 Unknown Photographer. *Ightham Mote - Gateway*, c. 1860. Photograph La Trobe Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.



Fig. 7 *Clapham House, Litlington, Sussex*, c. 1867. Photograph. Archives de l'Etat, Neuchâtel.

If La Trobe was disappointed by the inadequacy of his pension he does not seem to have recorded it. What we do know about his life here comes from his daughter Agnes La Trobe when writing to her German cousin 31 May 1870 said:

Papa is very well, and in spite of his infirmity, he is able to come and go with pleasure. He cannot even distinguish between day and night, but by touch he walks alone all about the garden and is very independent in the house. He even shaves himself unaided.<sup>1</sup>

On 4 December 1875, aged seventy four, La Trobe died at Clapham House. This last home was so close to the Sussex coast he would have been able to hear the sound of the sea that had carried him so far in his life's journey. He was buried in the grounds of St Michael & All Angels Anglican Church, Litlington and the epitaph on his grave stone is:

Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty: Isaiah  
ch xxxiii v 17

Only the beginning of the verse is used and the remainder reads 'they shall behold the land very far off.' It is without intended irony but leads us to reflect on La Trobe's life and love of travel that had taken him to far flung corners of the globe following which he had ended his days without the use of his eyes that had seen and recorded so much.





Fig. 8 *St Michael the Archangel, Littlington Church, East Sussex*.  
Date unknown. Postcard. From Reg Dosell Collection.

Charles Joseph La Trobe had been born in the Hanoverian era during the reign of George III (the Age of Reason) and died the year before Queen Victoria was made Empress of India (the Industrial Age). He was educated as a Christian gentleman and with these values and faith at work throughout his life he demonstrated great forbearance in the face of adversity and injustice. Creating a vibrant family home was paramount to La Trobe's way of life whether it was in a modest prefabricated cottage in the untamed antipodes or a medieval moated manor house in the home county of Kent. What is striking about both locations is his engagement with the natural world and desire to record what his eye discerned about the qualities of the place. These are particularly English enjoyments of the home.

Just as with his house and garden at Jolimont, we have some sketches that record what interested him at Ightham Mote. Regretfully he was blind by the time he resided at Clapham House in Sussex, another sturdy English manor house suitable for a gentleman. Here he achieved the same enjoyment for discovery that he accomplished earlier in his life when wandering through such places as Switzerland, Mexico or Victoria except it was for a country house and garden that he could not see and only experienced through his other senses.

## Bibliography

*Charles Joseph La Trobe Landscapes and Sketches*. Introduced by Dianne Reilly; notes by Victoria Hammond. Melbourne: State Library of Victoria with Tarcoola Press and the National Trust of Australia (Victoria), 1999.

Tipping, H. Avery. *English Homes Periods I & II – Vol II. Medieval and Early Tudor, 1066-1588*, MA FSA, *Country Life*, 1937.

Norwich. *The Architecture of Southern England*. London: Macmillan, 1985

Reilly Drury, Dianne. *La Trobe The Making of a Governor*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2006.

## Endnote

- <sup>1</sup> Agnes La Trobe to Louise de La Trobe, 31 May 1870, Fonds Petitpierre, Carton 18, Dossier 31(b), Archives de l'Etat, Neuchâtel. Translation by Dianne Reilly Drury.

# Letters from Victorian Pioneers: Book Review

By Daryl Ross

*Letters from Victorian Pioneers*

Edited by Helen Vellacott,

Melbourne: Lloyd O'Neil Pty Ltd, 1983. <sup>1</sup>

*Daryl Ross is one of the two Vice Presidents of The La Trobe Society, the other being Peter Corlett OAM. Daryl Ross, an industrial chemist by training, is a retired business executive and former export consultant with extensive experience in Africa and Asia. He was chair of the Australian Southern African Business Council from 1986 to 1996 and retains an active interest in international affairs.*

*Daryl's great grandfather, Louis Ernest Leuba, one of the many Neuchâtel Swiss vigneronns encouraged by Charles and Sophie La Trobe to settle in Victoria, arrived in Melbourne in March 1854 accompanied by Hubert de Castella and Adolphe de Meuron. His other maternal great grandfather, Henri Frédéric Paris, also from Neuchâtel, settled in Melbourne in 1890. He assisted his cousin Raymond Henderson with family research aspects of his book on the history of the Yarra Valley wine industry From Jolimont to Yering.*

Charles Joseph La Trobe, initially as Superintendent of the Port Philip District of New South Wales from 1839 and subsequently as Lieutenant-Governor of the new colony of Victoria after separation in 1851, left innumerable significant, although often little appreciated legacies, from which we benefit today. Undoubtedly he was a visionary not recognised in his time.

His foresight is only now being truly recognised; however, the last of these legacies that he initiated

only after his resignation in 1853 is barely known even by his most ardent supporters. This man of initiative and vision decided that a first-hand record from the builders of the colony would be necessary to preserve the accuracy of account, an accuracy so often missing in historical records.

Determined to collate this record in retirement, he circulated a request titled 'Settlement of Colony' to the settlers, squatters, speculators and some officials who he considered were responsible for creating the essence of the new Colony of Victoria. He took the 58 letters that he received in reply to the circular, as well as his own personal notes, with him in England. It is this initiative that has given us, along with the official records of his period of government, such a clear and precise understanding of our place in history.

During the 14 ½ years of his stewardship of Victoria, La Trobe travelled often and widely throughout the colony, visiting many of the landholders and small settlements as they were established, as well as exploring lesser known parts. He saw the colony grow from a population of 4950 when he arrived in September 1839 to 236,800 when he left in 1854. Much of this growth resulted from the 1851 gold discoveries, an explosion of immigration that the administration was ill-equipped to manage. Despite administrative and personal setbacks, he remained determined that contemporary records must be retained, and took it upon himself to ensure that this was achieved.

However, circumstances following his return to England made it impossible for La Trobe to complete this work himself. As early as 1862 his eyesight began to fail, and although he had made notes pertinent to the various letters and documents in his possession, by 1865, he was totally blind and realised that he, personally, could not complete the work he so earnestly believed in. He decided that Melbourne was the appropriate home for these manuscripts; so he entrusted them along with his notes and an outline of his proposed history to his long standing agent and attorney in Melbourne, James Graham, with the recommendation that they be held in the Public Library. Graham acknowledged receipt of the documents in May 1872, commenting that he would consult Sir Redmond Barry and David Charteris McArthur, both Trustees of the Public Library, as to the best place for them to be housed and as to how they should be used at the appropriate time.

In 1882, a committee of academics led by McArthur studied the manuscripts and recommended that the La Trobe Papers, as they became known, be given to the care of the Librarian, Dr Thomas Francis Bride, with a view to their publication, with printing to be carried out by the Government Printer. The first published version, edited by Dr Bride, was finally printed in March 1898. The book was republished in 1969, edited by C. E. Sayers for William Heinemann Ltd.

The latest edition, under the title *Letters from Victorian Pioneers* and largely edited by Helen Vellacott, was published in 1983 by Lloyd O'Neil Pty Ltd. Interestingly, it elaborates on the backgrounds of each of the 58 respondents to La Trobe's circular.

In his request to the pioneer settlers, La Trobe had specifically asked for comment on their relationships with the Aboriginal people. The replies are quite varied, with examples from murderous aggression to peaceful co-existence. However, the expectation of cheap labour was rarely achieved, although there are several commendations of Aboriginal people as shepherds,

although more often, instances are quoted, accusing them of sheep stealing and animal cruelty.

La Trobe was particularly interested in Aboriginal culture. A detailed report is included from William Thomas, originally appointed Assistant Protector of Aborigines in the Port Philip District in 1838, and subsequently, Guardian of Aborigines. Thomas spent 22 years associated with the various Victorian tribes, living with them, learning their languages and culture. Even after his retirement in 1860, he was appointed official visitor to all Aboriginal reserves, and advisor to the government on Aboriginal affairs. The early formation of a mounted Aboriginal police troop in the colony also provides a fascinating insight into the black/white relations of the period.

The significance of William Buckley as a mediator and adviser in Aboriginal relations is a startling revelation. He is mentioned in this role by a number of the squatters, including in Joseph Tice Gellibrand's diary of his 1836 visit to Port Phillip before settlement was established. Gellibrand, a practising barrister in Hobart, was a founding member of the Port Phillip Association. On a subsequent trip in 1837, he disappeared without trace while exploring in the Otway Ranges.

What makes this publication unique and fascinating are the personal stories of the Victorian squatters who, in the 1830s and 40s, brought stock by sea from Tasmania or overland from New South Wales to take up huge areas of the natural pasturage in what is now outer urban and rural Victoria. Many were gentlemen farmers resident in Melbourne with other professions. Their motivation was often speculation, employing a manager, settling for a few years, building their flocks and herds, then selling out and moving on to new areas. Risks were great, stock prices were high, as were interest rates on borrowed money. The recession in 1842/45 forced many to sell out at great losses, and stock prices dropped to less than a quarter of previous levels. In one case, a licence changed hands

at less than one tenth of its purchase price. A drought in 1838/39 saw creeks and billabongs dry up, leaving stock miles from water and without feed. Bush fires were an ever-present threat, such as the notorious 'Black Thursday' of 6 February 1851 that burnt out much of the Portland District. Farm labour was expensive, particularly shepherds who were needed to stay with the flocks as properties were unfenced. This was dangerous work, fraught with wild dog [dingo] attacks during lambing, and often sheep stealing by local Aborigines. Many instances of shepherds being murdered are reported. What was later referred to as the 'Benalla massacre' occurred on William Faithfull's property in April 1838, resulting in the death of at least ten farm workers when confronted by over 100 Aboriginal people.

Much changed, of course, with the gold discoveries of 1851; however, La Trobe was principally interested in recording the early development of the country. Commenting on some early gold finds, he famously confided in a personal letter to his friend, Ronald Campbell Gunn, on 2 March 1849: 'The truth is the discovery of a good vein of coal would give me more satisfaction'.

## Endnote

- <sup>1</sup>     Bride, Thomas Francis (ed) (*Letters from Victorian Pioneers: A Series Of Papers on The Early Occupation of The Colony, The Aborigines Etc. To His Excellency Charles Joseph Latrobe Esq, Lieutenant-Governor of The Colony Of Victoria*. Introduction C E Sayers & Helen Vellacott. Melbourne: Lloyd O'Neil Pty Ltd, 1983. ISBN 0 85550 618 0.

# Reports and Notices

## Public Record Office Victoria and the La Trobe Society Partners

The Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) has received advice that the R E Ross Trust will support a project to digitise the inward correspondence to the Superintendent, Port Phillip District, Charles Joseph La Trobe, in the period 1839 to 1851. PROV has approached the La Trobe Society to be a partner in this project which it is hoped will commence by February 2011. James McKinnon, Manager Online Business Development at PROV will be coordinating the project.

There are 150 boxes of correspondence files that cover the gamut of government functions administered by the Superintendent. The records, which are registered in PROV's system as VPRS 19, are a rich and priceless source of evidentiary information about the early years of the fledgling district and about La Trobe's administration.

The project will be broken into several stages. Firstly the records will be sorted and put into good order, ensuring that each correspondence file is intact and separately packaged. Secondly, lists of the records will be created by transcribing information from them and from the correspondence registers. This list will be used both as a detailed inventory of the physical records and to guide the later digitising stage, and to describe the digital images.

The third stage will be photographing or scanning the correspondence files. In this stage additional information about the records and their images will be captured and typed into a computer as the images are created.

When all of the records have been digitised, they will be transferred into PROV's Digital Archive where they will be available freely for anyone to find and use through their Internet connection.

PROV needs volunteers - skilled, or interested to learn new skills, in handling and reading mid-nineteenth century hand-writing, with basic computer and typing skills, or interested to operate digital cameras or scanning equipment. The work will be done at the Victorian Archives Centre, 99 Shiel Street, North Melbourne and stages one and two should start in February 2011. PROV hopes that volunteers would be able to commit up to a day per week.

Please contact Dianne Reilly on 9646 2112, or by email at [dmreilly@optusnet.com.au](mailto:dmreilly@optusnet.com.au) by 13 December 2010 for further information or to express your interest.

## Erratum



In our previous issue (Vol. 9, No. 2, July 2010) the full caption should have read:

*Architectural Model - La Trobe's Cottage, Jolimont, 1839*

*530mm W x 380mm L x 170mm H*

*Reproduced courtesy of Museum Victoria.*

# Friends of La Trobe's Cottage

## Visit to Bishops court

Archbishop and Mrs Freier kindly invited us to visit Bishops court on Saturday 11 September. We were given a warm and hospitable welcome as Archbishop and Mrs Freier took us on a tour of the house and garden. They chatted about their home – its history and heritage, with Mrs Freier emphasising the significance of this estate today in the City of Melbourne. She is embarking on a project to create a scholarly social history of Bishops court, which is likely to include reference to La Trobe's interest in the original land grant, and in the building. The Perrys lived in his 'Upper Jolimont' cottage until their official residence had been built, moving into their new home in December 1852. Mrs Perry described the move to Bishops court in a letter dated 13 January 1853 to her school friend, Elizabeth Lambert, wife of the parson at Ballan:

We have been removing for the last I don't know how long and scarcely know whether we stand on our head or our feet. You cannot think how earnestly I wish ourselves back in our dear old cottage for this is truly forlorn grandeur – a great unfurnished house full of dirty workmen, dust and misery – without doors or windows in the kitchen departments and to crown it all, two sick servants.



Fig. 1 Visit to Bishops court. Mrs Joy Freier addresses the Friends of La Trobe's Cottage at Bishops court, 11 September 2010.

It seems that they had been very happy in their 'dear old cottage', and had probably enjoyed the proximity to La Trobe and his family. La Trobe made his rather imposing sketch of the new building on 21 October 1853.



Fig. 2 Charles Joseph La Trobe, 1801-1875. *Bishops court, viewed from the south east*, 1853. Pencil on paper. La Trobe Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.

## The Governor's Return

Governor and Mrs La Trobe returned to their refurbished Cottage on 3 October, escorted by Captain Lonsdale with the enthusiastic crowd led by J P Fawkner, 171 years to the day since their first official welcome in Melbourne on 3 October 1839. Martin Purslow, National Trust CEO, welcomed them back, pointing out the changes that have been taking place over the past year. It was timely that Mrs Georgiana McCrae was in attendance, as an olive tree, grown from a cutting from a tree originally grown by her at McCrae, was planted by the Governor. Many Friends of La Trobe's Cottage assisted with running this event, which provided a very successful launch to our new season of Sunday openings.



The Cottage is now open every Sunday from 2.00 -4.00 pm for tours.



Fig. 3 The Governor's Return. Governor and Mrs La Trobe return to their refurbished Cottage.

### Funded Works

After many months of negotiation and planning, three interpretative signs have now been installed around the Cottage, one on the path to the front entrance, one before the gate into the courtyard and one by the dining room. The fourth sign will be placed on Birdwood Avenue in a long-awaited boost to publicity for the Cottage that we hope will attract some of the hundreds of people who pass by on a Sunday afternoon. The signs include information about La Trobe and his family and the history of their beloved 'Jolimont'. We are grateful to the National Trust's Katie Symons and Phil Tulk for overseeing this project and to the State Library for the use of letters written by Charles and Sophie La Trobe to their daughter Agnes and of drawings held in their collections.



Fig. 4 Funded Works. Two of the new interpretative signs outside La Trobe's Cottage.

### Australia Day

The Rupertswood Battery and the Victorian Folk Music Club will help us celebrate Australia Day on 26 January 2011. Bring the family - Victorian games will be available for the children.

Cottage open 1.00 – 4.00 pm, flag raising at 2.00 pm and 3.00 pm.

### Roof Appeal

We are most grateful to all the members of the C J La Trobe Society who have made generous donations to the National Trust's La Trobe's Cottage Roof Appeal. The total is gradually rising, but there is still some way to go. We thank you for your support for this project.

Helen Botham  
Chair FOLTC

03 9583 1114  
foltc@latrobesociety.org.au

## TWO FORTHCOMING EVENTS DURING THE CHRISTMAS SEASON

### **La Trobe Society Christmas Cocktails**

**Friday 3 December, 2010**

**6.30 p.m.**

The La Trobe Society Christmas Cocktails will be held at the Alexandra Club on 3 December. La Trobe Society Committee member, Loreen Chambers will be our host at this delightful Christmas celebration which is a highlight of the year. Members and their friends are welcome. Dr Brenda Niall will speak at this function on the friendship between Georgiana McCrae and Charles and Sophie La Trobe.

Dress code for men is jacket and tie.

**Venue: The Alexandra Club,  
81 Collins Street, Melbourne**

**COST: \$65 per person**

Please note this event in your diaries. A booking form will be sent to Members closer to the date.

### **Candlelit Carols at La Trobe's Cottage**

**Tuesday 21 December, 2010.**

**7.00 – 9.00 p.m.**

Celebrate Melbourne's first Christmas Tree with the Trinity College Choir.

The La Trobe Society, the Friends of La Trobe's Cottage and the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) invite you to a special Christmas event at La Trobe's Cottage with the internationally renowned Choir of Trinity College, University of Melbourne, under the direction of Michael Leighton Jones.

Celebrate the introduction by Sophie La Trobe of Melbourne's first Christmas tree in the early 1840s, and see the Cottage illuminated and decorated in the traditional European style.

This will be an opportunity for adults and children alike to experience the spirit of Christmas in a truly delightful way.

No need to book – just come along and pay at the door.

Refreshments with a festive flavour will be served.

### **Venue : La Trobe's Cottage**

**Cnr. Birdwood Avenue & Dallas Brooks Drive,  
Melbourne**

**(Melways: Map 2L, A1)**

**COST: Donation: \$10 individuals; \$20 families.**

## **A Christmas Note: the Moravian Star.**

**By Joan Macdermid**

The Moravian Star is an illuminated Christmas decoration, popular in places in Europe and America where there are Moravian Congregations. There are many forms of Moravian stars, but the most commonly seen and most widely available is the 26 point form.

The very first Moravian Star is known to have originated in the 1830s at a Moravian School in Niesky, Germany. It is thought to have been a geometry lesson or project. Although the star originated in the church's schools it was soon adopted throughout the Moravian Church as an Advent symbol. It did not take long for the stars to



The Moravian Star.

go from a pastime for children to an occupation for the congregation. Many congregations build and sell the stars as fundraisers.

By 1880, Peter Verbeek, a former student of this particular school, began making these stars and their instructions are available for sale through his bookshop. His son, Harry, founded the Herrnhut Star Factory. It was the main source of stars until World War I. During World Wars I and II, the factory was heavily damaged but was returned to a company owned by the Moravian Church in 1950, and it continues to make the famous stars.

Sophie, wife of Charles Joseph La Trobe, introduced the first Christmas tree to the early settlers of Melbourne, and the Moravian Star would certainly have enjoyed the honoured place at the very top of the family's tree.

## FUTURE EVENTS 2011

A number of special events to mark the La Trobe Society's 10th Anniversary are planned for 2011. While some arrangements have not yet been finalised, there are already dates on the list below for your diaries. A check list will be sent out in due course when more information is to hand, for you to indicate your interest in proposed events.

### January

**Wednesday 26 January, 2011- Government House Open Day**

**Wednesday 26 January, 2011.**

**Gates open at 10.00 am until 3.00 pm.**

**(Last entrance to the House, 3.00 pm)**

**Ease of access for people with disabilities.**

All citizens of Victoria and visitors to the State are invited to visit Government House, Melbourne on Australia Day 2011. Visitors will be able to view the State Apartments, the Private Apartments and the Governor's Study. Many of these rooms are not normally open to the public.

### Activities

- Visitors are invited to tour the House and picnic in the grounds.
- Refreshments available for purchase.
- Children's entertainment in the grounds.
- Musical performances in the grounds and inside the House.

**Venue: Government House.**

**Government House Drive, Melbourne.**

**Melways Map 2G, A1.**

Parking: Birdwood Avenue and St Kilda Road.  
Condition of entry: Present bags for inspection to security.

**COST: Admission is free.**

For further information, contact:

Alex Hodgson or Wendy Heintz — Open Day

Co-ordinators. Telephone: 9655 4211 or

Alexandra.hodgson@govhouse.vic.gov.au

Wendy.heintz@govhouse.vic.gov.au

## March

### **A Traveller in South Africa in 1815-16**

**Friday 4 March, 2011**

**6.30 -8 .30 p.m.**

Dr Brian La Trobe will visit Melbourne from South Africa, specially to meet with members of the La Trobe Society, and to discuss in this illustrated talk, Christian Ignatius La Trobe, his ancestor and father of Charles Joseph, and his recollections of the journey which were supplemented with high-class illustrations, unrivalled in the early 19th century.

**Venue: The Lyceum Club, Ridgway Place, Melbourne.**

### **Charles Joseph La Trobe's 210th Birthday:**

**Evening Picnic at La Trobe's Cottage**

**Saturday 19 March, 2011.**

**5.00-7.00 p.m.**

Please bring a plate to share. Sparkling wine for the birthday toast and birthday cake provided.

**Venue: La Trobe's Cottage.**

## April

### **Jazz at the Savage Club**

**Friday 8 April, 2011**

**7.00-10.00 p.m.**

Join Dr Joe Stevenson and *The Rockets* for hours of sparkling jazz.

Drinks and finger food served throughout the evening.

**Venue: Melbourne Savage Club, Bank Place, Melbourne.**

## May

**The Music of Christian Ignatius La Trobe and his Circle**

**Date TBA**

**6.30-8.30 p.m.**

Under the direction of Professor Max Cooke, talented pianist Kevin Kanisius Suherman will entertain members and their guests with the music of Christian Ignatius La Trobe, Franz Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Cocktails and Canapés.

**Venue: The Lyceum Club, Ridgway Place, Melbourne.**

## June

**AGL Shaw Lecture – jointly with the Royal Historical Society of Victoria**

**Date TBA**

Speaker to be advised.

## July

**La Trobe Exhibition**

**Date and time TBA**

An exhibition of portraits of Charles Joseph La Trobe and related memorabilia.

**Venue: Kay Craddock's Antiquarian Book Shop, Collins Street, Melbourne.**

## August

**Annual General Meeting and Dinner**

**Thursday 18 August, 2010**

**6.00 p.m.**

Guest Speaker: Emeritus Professor Geoffrey Blainey, AC.

**Venue: The Lyceum Club, Ridgway Place, Melbourne.**

## October

**La Trobe, Miss Drysdale and the Bellarine Peninsula.**

**Date and arrangements TBA.**

Visit to St George's Anglican Church, Queenscliff, the site of the La Trobe family's holiday house.

Also visit *Coryule* (Coriyule), the former residence of pioneering farmers Anne Drysdale and Caroline Newcomb. (See article in this issue by Bev Roberts).

## **November**

### **The Western District – in the Footsteps of La Trobe**

**Date and arrangements TBA.**

A weekend tour of the district, with Hamilton as the base.

## **December**

### **Christmas Cocktails**

**Details TBA –**

## **CONTRIBUTIONS WELCOME**

The Editorial Committee welcomes contributions to *La Trobeana* which is published three times a year. Further information about the Journal may be found at

<http://www.latrobesociety.org.au/LaTrobeanaIndex.html>.

Enquiries should be directed to  
The Honorary Secretary  
The La Trobe Society  
PO Box 65  
Port Melbourne, Vic. 3207  
Phone: (03) 9646 2112  
Email: [secretary@latrobesociety.org.au](mailto:secretary@latrobesociety.org.au)



