

"LONDEY'S" — FROM MEMORY

by

David Londey

On a bright starry night in 1929 or 1930, I sat between my parents on the wide bench seat of Uncle Will's truck. Although I was only 2 or 3 years old, I remember staring at the stars blazing in the clear sky. I was probably more interested in them than in the fact that we were finally moving from a property next to the Kangaroo Flat Cemetery to a new place in Crusoe Road, which was to be my home for more than 20 years.

Our destination was the property now known as "Londey's", after our family, and which was the subject of an article by Mike Butcher in the Bendigo Heritage series (Advertiser, 9/11/91). This sequel to Mike Butcher's article is intended to fill out the story of the house, and to supply a few details which eluded him. My memory can supply some points on which I can be quite definite; but on others, even though I feel certain enough, I am conscious of the tricks memory can play, and can offer information only subject to suitable caveats.

My parents, George Longmore Londey and Doris May Londey, whose names are commemorated in Longmore and May Streets, bought the house and its land with the object of starting a market garden. My father operated the market garden very successfully until the late 1950s, at times employing as many as 6 or 7 people. The land at that time ran through from the Crusoe Road to the Calder Highway, and included a range of bush paddocks on its southern side. Hardly any of the trees were cleared in our time, my father being convinced of their value as a habitat for birds and as a windbreak, sheltering the market garden

from cold South winds.

Butcher laments the house's lack of a name. I can say quite definitely that it once had one, though apparently it has been forgotten in the neighbourhood. When we arrived there, it was already called "Tweedside", and my family used the name for years. Mail was often addressed to us at "Tweedside", Crusoe Road; and we used to joke about the implied resemblance between the Bendigo Creek and the Scottish River Tweed (since we always knew that the house had been built by a McColough, and that he had come to Australia from Canada).

One reason for the loss of the name may be that, as far as I can remember, the name was never displayed in our time, either at the gate or on the house. On the other hand, there used to be a white board somewhere around with "TWEEDSIDE" in black-painted capitals.

It would be nice to think that Archibald McColough called the house "Tweedside" in honour of some ancestral McColough home by the Tweed in southern Scotland. But all that is certain is that someone, sometime well before 1930, bestowed the name on it.

My father did buy "Tweedside" during the Depression when it was in considerable disrepair, as Butcher says. One memory, presumably from a visit before renovation, is of guttering dangling precariously, which may serve as an index of the dilapidation.

Certainly, many windows were broken, but it is a slight exaggeration to say that "not a pane of glass remained intact". For example, the windows in the two front rooms were glazed with very heavy plate glass, almost certainly original, throughout the time I

knew the house. Because of the heavy glass, the counter-weights in those windows were much heavier than the normal ones, and a broken sash cord announced itself with a thunderous crash.

I am puzzled by Butcher's supposition that all the fireplaces had originally had marble surrounds. Only the largest room, which was not part of the first stage of the house, had one in my time -- and that fireplace was equipped with a tiny coal grate which was much smaller than the wide chimney-breast would allow. The small grate required firewood cut very small, and was inadequate for heating such a large room. It is possible that the dark marble mantelpiece and surround were part of the original design of the room; but it is implausible that Archibald McColough would have put in such an inefficient fireplace when he had allowed space for a better one.

My family was conscious that "Tweedside" was very old -- and indeed we were quite proud of its age. The refurbishments of the 1940s and 1950s were not aimed at disguising the house's age, but at making it more efficient and at escaping from the rather spartan decoration and equipment which was all my parents could afford in Depression days. The changes included not only redecoration but also installation of such comforts as a hot water service, to replace the chip-fired heater for the bath and kettles on the wood-fired stove for the kitchen sink. And, of course, the inefficient coal grate was replaced by a larger fireplace, the tapestry brick finish reflecting the taste of the time. In this period, my father also had a damp-course installed round the entire perimeter of the main house.

One episode of redecoration is salutary. My parents decided to redecorate the front rooms of the house, and the decorator proceeded to strip off the Depression-period wallaper. Beneath it, he found more layers of wallpaper, interspersed with many coats of kalsomine,

often in very bright light blues or garish reds. The house had obviously endured generations of fiendish redecorators -- which may raise doubts about the "originality" of the wallpaper the present owner has found behind a built-in cupboard.

I should add that, when the decorator finally reached the plaster, it crumbled at a touch. Most of it simply fell off the brickwork, spreading fine dust through the house. From the colour and texture of this original plaster, it seemed to have been mainly mud with a little lime added, possibly with some hair to reinforce it. Replastering was a necessity. The most unfortunate aspect of this episode in the history of "Tweedside" was that my father had set the decorating in motion while my mother was in hospital, aiming to have it all finished before she came home. As a result of the need for replastering, the job was unfinished when my mother returned to a house that bore an unfortunate resemblance to a bomb site!

As for the outside finish, I cannot recall ever seeing it with the brickwork bare. The main block of the house was grey, having been coated with a cement wash. This may have been applied during the renovations following my father's purchase of the house, but it may have been much earlier. The purpose of the cement wash was almost certainly to protect the bricks, which are rather soft -- as Mike Butcher notes about early Bendigo bricks generally. But in my very early childhood, the long wing running parallel to Crusoe Road bore faded paint which had been either cream or light yellow, and had clearly been applied years before we moved in. The whole of the outside was re-painted by my father in the present colour-scheme, probably in the early 1960s.

These reminiscences of what is only a small part of the history of "Tweedside"/"Londey's" underline the fact that the life-story of any house lived in for well over a century is bound to be one of change and evolution — responses to changing needs and tastes, and often to changes in quite external circumstances. This is further borne out by the picture of the back of the house, which shows some of these changes over time — the TV antenna on one chimney, the header tank for the hot water system near another, the laundry built for my parents by enclosing part of the back verandah, the brick-built WC at the other end of the back verandah (dating from the arrival of sewerage), and, most recently, the inground pool.

Even the setting of the house has undergone great changes. In the last half century it has moved from being relatively rural to being basically suburban. But the most dramatic change to the setting must have occurred when the course of the Bendigo Creek was changed to run past the back door. That was in the 1870s, when the Crusoe Reservoir was built. When Archibald McColough built the house, its site was much further from the creek, which then ran in a wide curve, almost as far away as the present line of Longmore Street.

An interesting sequel to the changed course of the creek occurred during my family's time at "Tweedside". It was discovered that the rearmost part of the house lay within the creek reserve. Despite his argument that the creek reserve had been made to encroach on the site of the (already existing) house, rather than vice versa, my father had to buy from the Crown the relevant part of the creek reserve.

When we moved to "Tweedside", a good deal was known locally about the house. We knew that the house had been built by the McColoughs, and that between their time and ours there had been a number of occupants, including the Haskells and the Weddells (or Weldons?). Mr

Haskell was credited locally with planting the line of elms which ran from "Tweedside" to the main road -- and presumably the two large pines which stood in the same line in front of the house.

During my childhood, I think in either the late 1930s or very early 1940s, we were visited by the first Archibald McColough's daughter. I always think of her as "Miss McColough", so presume that she had never married. She was then a very old lady but quite spry, and was very interested in looking round her childhood home and in telling us about its early history. If I had the notes I recall making at the time, I should be able to cast more light on the date when the house was built. It is unfortunate that I cannot now locate them, since other surviving notes I made at about that time suggest that the lost notes would have been childishly done but informative about such details.

I cannot be dogmatic about the date on the basis of memory alone, but my firm impression is that Miss McColough gave us a date earlier than the commonly accepted 1855. To continue with these impressions, McColough came to the area intending to run sheep (which would account for his chosen house-site, even though it was probably inside the northern limit of Mt Alexander No.2 run). If this is correct, it is even possible that he arrived just before the gold rush.

In the absence of more direct evidence, we have a dilemma about dating the house. If it was built as late as 1855 (or even a little later), we need an explanation of why such a substantial house was then sited some five miles from the centre of Bendigo. But if it was built earlier than 1855, we need an explanation of McColough's letter of 1872, which implies the 1855 date (though only if we assume that Crusoe Road was an established thoroughfare before 1855).

I can be much more definite on some anecdotal items that Miss McColough told us. The family brought some building materials with them, by dray or bullock waggon, including the plate glass windows (which were intended to keep out the cold of a Canadian-style winter). The bricks were made on the spot, the clay being dug just south of the house, between, in modern terms, Crusoe Road and the creek. All the time I lived at "Tweedside", a large depression existed there, which she identified as the site of the clay-pit.

There was great urgency about getting the first stage of the house finished, since Mrs McColough was pregnant and they wanted the baby to be born in the house — rather than in the tents they were living in while the building was going on. If the birthdates of the McColough children were known, these would provide at least two extreme years between which the house must have been built.

Miss McColough also confirmed various points on which we had firm ideas, from observation or local tradition. These included the course of the creek when the house was built; the fact that the two large rooms at the rear of the main block had been built later, to link the front rooms and the long wing; the functions of the various rooms in the long wing, including that the southernmost section was the buggy shed (not the coachhouse, as Butcher has it); and that the room we used as a bathroom, because it was the only one in the main house without a fireplace, was intended as a nursery, thus explaining the door connecting with the bedroom to the front of it. The largest room, which we used as a combined dining and lounge room, had been the drawing room, while our kitchen had been the morning room. (The McColoughs' kitchen had been in the long wing, with their dining room in front of it.)

"Tweedside"/"Londey's" was a wonderful house to grow up in, with

the signs of its history ready to fascinate the eye and imagination at every turn. I count myself lucky to have been probably the last child to do so while the house and its surroundings were anything like what the McColough children knew as their childhood home. But Archibald McColough built the place to last -- and no doubt it will be there, in new stages of its evolution, for future generations of children to grow in just as happily. Houses like that deserve to live, and I hope that no preservation-minded body ever turns it into a museum piece. A loving owner, like Jane McLuskey, is its best insurance against such a fate.

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