

Established 1963

# PORT FAIRY POST

## THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PORT FAIRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

VOL. 9 NO. 7 NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2020

### Letter from the President

Dear Members,

With cautious optimism and enthusiasm the committee has met and plans are in place for the next step toward "COVID normality". We are in the process of writing policies, procedures and a COVIDSafe Plan to ensure the safety of our volunteers and visitors. As we implement these measures we feel confident we can safely reopen and maintain a COVIDSafe Museum while the state of Victoria continues to report low active cases of the virus.

As volunteers return, there is a general "buzz" as we plan for the opening of the Museum on the 2nd of January 2021 with an exhibition showcasing the tuna boat *Tacoma* and the Haldane Family. We have also planned for a photographic exhibition featuring the 1946 floods, 75 years on. We are hoping to gather with our volunteers early in December to chat about the roster for opening the museum in 2021. More news on this to come. If you are interested in joining the volunteer group please feel free to contact us with your interest and we will organise an opportunity to meet and chat about possibilities.

However, at this stage, as we move cautiously forward in 2021, unfortunately outings to sites of historic interest, general meetings and presentations by guest speakers are still on hold. Thankfully, our newsletter keeps us well informed and entertained.

The Historical Society has been approached by Moyne Health Services who are interested in capturing and displaying the history of the Port Fairy Hospital. Thank you to Richard who has kindly offered to consult with the hospital committee charged with this project.

This edition of the Port Fairy Post provides an update on the process of recording the books, paintings, prints and artefacts of the Belfast Mechanics' Institute Library. The society is also in the process of negotiating with the Moyne Shire to become co-trustees of this collection to assist with the care and preservation of these items.

Richard tells the story of Carol Heard's latest quest which she approached with "iron determination and a refusal to be deterred by apparently impenetrable barriers". Readers will agree she is indeed a remarkable investigator, our very own Sherlock Holmes.

We also meet Henry Bucher, in charge of the Port Fairy Lighthouse between 1895 and 1898, a resourceful gentleman who became unwillingly involved in a controversy over his eligibility to vote back in the late 1800s. It is reassuring to read that even in the early days of our colony, there was a pursuit for a fair and democratic election process.

A special thank you again to Teresa Murphy for her contributions to our newsletter and in this edition she clarifies confusion over where the Mills family members are buried and also tells a tale of a remarkable survival.

And for those who have asked, "What is the truth about the carronade that was once displayed in various locations around Port Fairy and was stolen from Battery Hill on Easter Saturday 1999?" Richard explains all.

Enjoy this edition and I hear that there may be a Christmas edition in the making!

Best Wishes

Andrea Coney

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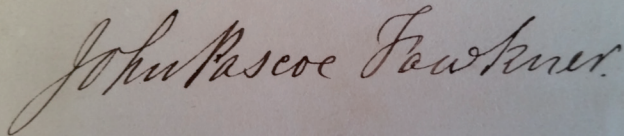
## History in the Making

### *Doing the Books*

With the recent easing of COVID-19 restrictions, the small team of Historical Society volunteers, under Lynda Tieman, has been able to continue its work of recording the books in Port Fairy's Library which are the remnants of the Mechanics' Institute Library and the town's former Free Library.

Quite by chance, a piece from *The Port Fairy Gazette* of 13 September 1956 recently came to hand. This says,

'It will be remembered that, some time back, the Port Fairy Borough Council suggested to the committee of the local library that action might be taken to put under lock and key some of the volumes in the library which it was thought might be of great value. At a subsequent meeting of the committee, the opinion was expressed that the volumes were not as valuable as might be thought, but it was decided to obtain expert advice. The secretary of the library has been advised



by the Registrar of the University of Melbourne that, according to their librarian, Rollin's Ancient History had little value these days, even with the autograph of 'Mag Dunlop'. It had appeared in many editions and had been noted in both book prices current [*sic*] and book auction records on numerous occasions since the war. Auction price at these times had rarely exceeded four or five guineas. Even in good condition this book would not have any outstanding value. Books autographed by Fawcner are quite common and had little monetary value'.

Charles Rollin's 13-volume Ancient History, dating from the 1730s, is still intact and more than one book signed by John Pascoe Fawcner has been identified, as the photograph above clearly shows.

The opinion about such signed books offered 64 years ago no longer holds good. Some time ago, a copy of the *Hobart Town Magazine* for March 1834, bearing Fawcner's signature, was offered for sale at auction with an estimate of \$150 - \$250. In the event, it was secured with a bid of \$1,100. And it should be no wonder that the signature of one of Melbourne's founding fathers is a sought-after item. At the same auction, the signatures of Edward and Wallis (Simpson), the former Duke and Duchess of Windsor, realised just \$650, while Percy Grainger's went for a mere \$75.

Under the circumstances, you may forgive us for not further identifying the particular volumes, although you can be assured that they are 'under lock and key'. We shall report any further noteworthy finds in future editions.



### *Over 170 Years of History*

Recently the Historical Society was approached by Moyne Health Services which is interested in capturing and displaying the history of the Port Fairy Hospital in the belief that 'our history is the essence of who we are, why we exist and shapes what we do - how we do it and where we will head into the future'. Naturally, we have offered all possible assistance with this important project. The hospital has a significant history which can be traced back to the 1840s and, in particular, the formation of the Belfast Benevolent Society in July 1849. It is interesting to note that, at the Society's AGM in July 1851, John Ritchie reported that 'John Ruttleton, an old man afflicted with palsy, and quite unable to assist himself', and 'Charles Duff, another old man, an incurable who has lost the use of his legs, and [is] in consequence bed-ridden', had had their distress 'mitigated and relieved' by the Society.

It is also worth remembering that Port Fairy almost lost its hospital on more than one occasion. In January 1923, the Hospital Committee met 'to discuss the advisability of closing the hospital' because of the institution's dire financial position.

Having weathered that crisis, the population of Port Fairy was dismayed in 1933 to learn that 'the Charities Board had confirmed its earlier decision that the Port Fairy Hospital should close, on the grounds that the present hospital building was unsuitable'.

The outcome of this second crisis seems to have been wholly beneficial in so far as it drove the building of extensive additions to the hospital, partially funded by the Charities Board which was obviously working to its own subtly manipulative agenda.



*Photograph of the 1934 hospital building works*

Before the 1930s were out, there were further financial difficulties, but ones that were shared by many regional hospitals and which compelled the State Government to increase taxation in order to provide the necessary funding.

Again, we shall keep you abreast of this interesting project as it progresses.



# The Lighthouse Keepers 6

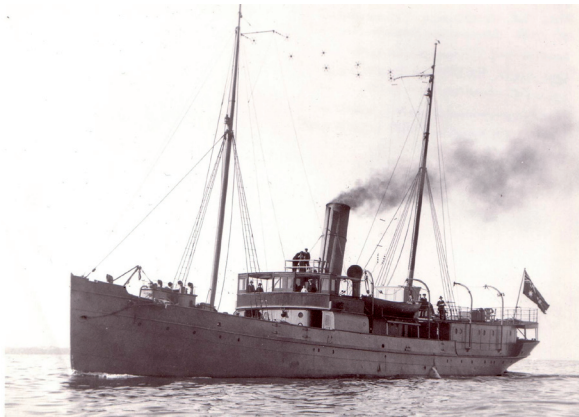
## Henry Bucher

Although the documentary evidence is incomplete, it seems that Henry Bucher was in charge of the Port Fairy Lighthouse between 1895 and 1898.

He had been born in 1866, the son of Henry Arthur Bucher, a fisherman, and Ann Bucher, née White, of Rosebud, the couple having married in that same year.

Henry Arthur Bucher died in April 1889, at the age of 50. He left all his property to his wife, to be distributed to his children, by his eldest son, Henry, on her death. It was noted that, when Henry Arthur had made his will in 1886, he could not sign it because of a paralysed hand.

Henry Arthur Bucher's property consisted of a weatherboard house at Rosebud and its contents. Life must have been difficult for the widowed Mrs. Bucher because she had seven children besides Henry, the youngest being just four years old at her husband's death. Henry spent the whole of his working life in the public service and began, in 1885, by being appointed 'Boy' on the Buoy and Lighthouse Tender attached to the Department of Trade and Customs. In 1886 he was promoted to Seaman on the tender and in 1887 was transferred to the new Government Steamer, the s.s. *Lady Loch*.



s.s. *Lady Loch* © Australian Maritime Safety Authority

On 1 April 1888 Henry became a junior assistant lighthouse keeper. Where he was immediately posted is unclear but we know that in November 1894 he was working at the Cape Schanck lighthouse. At that time he became unwillingly involved in a controversy over his eligibility to vote in the Mornington election. He was called before a parliamentary committee and explained that, on election day, he had been required to row eight miles to the polling place at Boneo. He was then told that his name did not appear on the electoral roll and that he should go away. He then rowed back to the lighthouse and so was unaware that his name had been found on a supplementary list. Someone was sent to bring him back, but too late. As Henry explained, 'the tides won't wait for you'.

At the parliamentary committee he was given the opportunity of voting, and registered his vote for L.L. Smith. The reason this was of such significance is

that Henry's vote put Smith just two votes behind Alfred Downward who believed he had been safely returned. In fact Downward was eventually declared elected and served for the next 35 years. Henry Bucher, meanwhile, felt that rowing 16 miles and not being able to vote was an inconvenience 'but it was well worth going through the whole of it for the time I had in Melbourne since'!

For a glimpse of the kind of man Henry Bucher was at this period, we may thank a reporter at the parliamentary committee who wrote that Henry was 'a well-built, stalwart, intelligent mariner, [who] gave his evidence before the committee in a most gentlemanly and unassuming manner'.

In the following year, 1895, Henry married Jean Hamilton. During that same year he came to Port Fairy and, in November, was involved in the incident in which George Williams was drowned and Frederick Presnell was rescued. Frederick Presnell clung to the mast of the stricken *Mayflower* for an hour before he was spotted by a man on Griffiths Island who alerted Henry Bucher.

Saving lives was merely an adjunct to the main duty of ensuring that the lighthouse was always operational, and yet the terms and conditions under which Henry and his colleagues worked were arduous. In the first instance, at Cape Schanck, three men were employed and hence were able to divide the twenty-four hour day into three eight-hour shifts. At Port Fairy there were just two men and therefore two twelve-hour shifts were required. At Cape Schanck the Keeper was required to pay £21 per annum for his quarters and light. At Port Fairy he had to pay £24 per annum, in both cases out of an annual salary of around £150. Thus a transfer could involve both a 50% increase in hours and a reduction in salary!

Little wonder that men like Henry Bucher sought employment of a more congenial nature and, by 1900, he had earned himself an appointment as a Truant Officer with the power to summon parents to court under the *Education Act* 1890. The position obviously required him to regularly attend the Police Court and to give evidence against parents who did not ensure that their children attended school. However, the job was constrained by an excess of red tape to the point that many people considered the function to be utterly ineffective.

For first offenders, a fine of a few shillings, or a few hours in prison in default of payment, was as much as the court would inflict. A second offence might attract a fine of £1, or 7 days in prison. However, if your children were employed in the family business, as an alternative to attending school, you might view such fines as merely another overhead.

Despite these frustrations, Henry remained a 'Truant Inspector' and, in 1922, was living in Church Street, Brighton. He died on 7 December 1942, at the age of 77, in Dromana. ❀❀❀

## It's Later Than You Think

This is a story of iron determination and a refusal to be deterred by apparently impenetrable barriers. Its protagonist is Carol Heard who, along with Jan Willey and Heather Templeton, looks after the Historical Society's collection of photographs.



In 2008, Mary Arnel died, the last of her clan to live in the family home in Cox Street. Following her death, Mary's niece and a girl friend set about clearing the house. There was a collection of old photographs, none of which meant a great deal to her niece, and these were donated to the Historical Society. Subsequently, one of them caught Carol Heard's eye – the photograph above of a bride, a bridesmaid and a flower girl. Jan Willey was able to identify the bridesmaid as Mary Arnel herself, but who was the bride and whom was she marrying? Certainly there were no names on the photograph to offer any clues.

At this point, many of us would have given up the idea of identifying these half-forgotten individuals, but Carol felt she was up for the challenge. She knew that the Arnel family was a Catholic one and that it was unlikely that Mary

would have acted as bridesmaid for anyone other than a member of her own faith. (Those were indeed different times.) Moreover, she was aware that Mary had been born in around 1920 and that the photograph was almost certainly from the 1930s or 1940s.

Carol put the photograph on the 'Growing up in Port Fairy' and the Port Fairy Museum and Archives Facebook pages, inviting input, but received no positive response. The photograph was sent to members of the Arnel family while other relatives came to Carol's home to view it – but to no avail. With her aunt, Teresa Lanigan, Carol visited friends and past neighbours of the Arnels but with no result. She took the photograph to Moyneyana House and Belfast House but still there was no positive identification. A number of people thought that the bride might be the wife of Greg Arnel – one of Mary's brothers - or Mary's sister, Agnes Arnel, although she was remembered as being shorter than Mary.

Then, for around a year, Carol printed off copies of the photograph and passed them to anyone who might be able to say with conviction at whose wedding it had been taken. She even carried copies in the glovebox of her car, just in case. Someone out there had to know something and they did: Greg Arnel's daughter was able to say positively that the bride was not her mother. Thus, after twelve months, little or no progress had been made.

At this point, and on an impulse, Carol decided to go through the Museum's photograph collection on the off-chance that other photographs from that wedding might exist. Eventually she came across the photograph below showing the entire wedding party



and was suddenly confident that this was a breakthrough. This second photograph, along with Carol's story, was printed in the *Moyné Gazette* and, yes, several people were able to recognise the best man as another of Mary's brothers, Bill Arnel, but as to the wedding couple, they could not help. By now so many members of the Arnel family had seen the photograph that Carol began to feel that neither the bride nor the groom could be an Arnel. One clue was that the photograph of the wedding group had been taken by Alex Wilkins of Warrnambool. Wedding photographers tend to keep scrupulous records of their subjects but this trail yielded no answers - not entirely unexpected after more than seventy years.

Next Carol contacted Jean Fitzgibbon who is the archivist for the Port Fairy and Koroit Catholic churches. Jean went through the marriage records for St. Patrick's and found two marriages where Mary Arnel had acted as bridesmaid. Both took place in 1943, within a few months of each other, and both involved members of the Hoy family. But, again, it was concluded that neither was the marriage in question.

Carol decided that she must cast her net wider than the Arnel family. One possible line of inquiry was the family

of Mary Arnel's mother, Beatrice Catherine; she had been born a Thomas and was one of thirteen siblings.

With the pandemic of 2020 came the opportunity to sort out some of the many photographs and documents donated to the Museum over the years. An old chocolate box came to light and was found to contain photographs of the Arnel family. One of these was a small amateur photograph taken at the same wedding and showing Bill and Mary Arnel, together with the flower girl, standing outside a church (*below left*). And it was that church that Carol was most interested in. For if the wedding had not taken place at St. Patrick's, surely this photograph would lead the way to the real location.

Predictably, over the next three months, there followed numerous visits to Catholic churches to see if that window and the visible piece of wall could be matched. The Church of the Infant Jesus at Koroit was dismissed early in this process because, although the stonework was very similar, there is a stained glass window where the one in the photograph is obviously plain. It was known that Bill and Greg Arnel had both been based in Geelong but no likely church could be found there. Could it be Ballarat? No, but a far more hopeful match seemed to exist at Penshurst. However, a visit there failed to identify the spot from which the photograph had been taken.

Then, when Carol was one day using Google in an attempt to find the right church, some photographs of the Church of the Infant Jesus appeared. Immediately Carol realised that Koroit had been the correct location all along and that, at some point, a decorated window had replaced the plain one.

Once again Jean Fitzgibbon was contacted and, recently, Carol received the news that the groom was Joseph David Brooks (22) of Warrnambool, and that the bride was Mavis Veronica Thomas (21) of Koroit, a niece of Mary Arnel's mother.

Looking back to some of the occasions when supposedly well-informed local historians considered the detail of the original photograph, it is sobering to recall that the consensus was that it was taken in the 1930s and was definitely pre-War. And certainly Mary Arnel could easily have been 15 or 16, couldn't she? Well, the wedding took place on 15 November 1947, and we now know that Mary Beatrice Arnel was born in 1919 and so was 28 at the time.

Carol herself says there is just one moral to be drawn from this story. If you have photographs at home, write the names and locations on their backs right now. Don't delay. It is later than you think. Oh yes, and she would still like to know the name of that flower girl. ❀❀



## Some Grave Matters

By Teresa Murphy (teresafmurphy@bigpond.com)

The Mills family is extensively chronicled but there is some confusion about which members are buried at Port Fairy cemetery.

Some websites claim Captain John Brabyn Mills is buried with his brother, Charles Frederick Mills. But the John Brabyn Mills in the grave is actually Charles' son, also named John Brabyn Mills, who died in a tragic accident at just 20.



*Charles Mills is buried with two sons, who died in separate accidents*

Young John broke his collarbone while salvaging timber from an old wreck on the beach. Though strong like his father, complications set in and he died a few months later, on 4th September, 1864.

To his mother, Olivia, he was her 'farmer son', like his father in his love of the land, according to J. R. Carroll in *Harpoons to Harvest* (1980), the story of the Mills family.

But Olivia's misfortunes were far from over: eight months later, on 5th May, 1865, her 15-year-old son James George Pymont, also died in an accident. Carroll writes: 'James was driving a dray laden with stones when a sudden lurch threw him off the load and a wheel passed over him.'

When her two younger sons died, Olivia, who married at 17, had been a widow for a decade, and had lost a newborn daughter in 1854. In November 1855, Charles Mills, a strapping, healthy farmer, former sealer, whaler and legendary rescuer of shipwrecked crew, died at just 43, probably from meningitis, at his property Lagoon Farm (Woodbine) at Rosebrook. Grief-stricken Olivia said 'I have lost the best of husbands'.

Carroll describes the funeral of 'big Charley', whose



*Charles Mills died at just 43, probably from meningitis* sudden death shocked the community far and wide. 'So many horses waited and stamped as the cortege assembled and moved off, it was said that no new grass grew near the house for years. 'Some five hundred people attended the funeral, representing all the families within travelling distance



*Olivia Mills, widowed at 36, outlived six of her 10 children*

... The long, slow cortege of horsemen, broken now and again by a carriage, wound its hour-long journey at walking pace along a churned and squelching track to the cemetery ... Before the last mourners left Lagoon Farm, the head of the cortege was almost a

mile off, hidden by the rain squalls which swept across the dunes.'



*Jennyfer "Jane" Ann Mills, mother of John, Charles and Eliza*

Two months later, Olivia - just 36 - gave birth to their 10th child.

Olivia Mills left Port Fairy around 1868, selecting land at Ellerslie, near Mortlake, with son Charles, brother-in-law George Tait and her mother-in-law Jennyfer (Jane) Ann Mills. She had hoped to buy the freehold of Woodbine but the complicated land tenure and tenancy deals of early Port Fairy deprived her of that. She then moved to Gippsland.

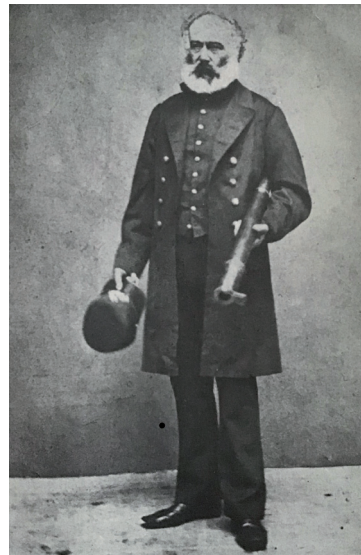
Olivia Mills, née Williams, whose mother was born on Norfolk Island to First Fleet convicts, died in 1905, aged 85, in Thorpdale South and is buried at Narracan cemetery.

Poor Olivia actually outlived four of her five sons and two daughters, with the eldest, Peter, dying at 50 in 1888 at Macedon and second eldest, Charles Frederick, like his namesake father, dying at around 43 years of age, in 1883 in South Melbourne.

Seventh child, Mary Ann, was 48 when she died, at Darlington in 1900. Three daughters - Jane Ann, Olivia and Sarah Maria - and surviving son, William Henry, lived to a good age, like their mother.

Jennyfer/Jane Mills (née Brabyn, and quite a back story she has too!) - who also had two children to her second husband James Tate/Tait, their son George coming to Port Fairy - died at Ellerslie on 1st January, 1871 and is buried at Port Fairy in an unmarked grave.

Her eldest child, Captain John Mills, sealer, whaler, and ship master, was also highly esteemed in the community for his role as Port Fairy's harbourmaster from 1853 to 1871. 'The Old Captain' died in Echuca (where his son John was a bank manager) in September 1877 and is buried there. He was 66 (certainly not old these days!).



*Captain John Mills died in Echuca and is buried there*

John and Charles' sister, Eliza Glare, lies close to her brother Charles in the Port Fairy cemetery, with a son who died at two.

Like Olivia Mills, Eliza suffered much heartbreak. One child was lost in the bush in Tasmania and another two died as infants or toddlers.

In Launceston in 1830, Eliza married former convict James Glare, transported to Van Diemen's Land at 19 years of age for stealing five pounds. James won a full pardon in 1846, when the family (with Eliza's mother Jennyfer) joined the Mills brothers in Port Fairy, farming at Woodbine.

The Glares had 12 children, nine surviving to adulthood, and also raised an Aboriginal boy found abandoned in the Tasmanian bush.



*The crumbling grave of Eliza Glare and two-year-old son Charles*

## The Holy See

J. R. Carroll writes of Eliza and James' early days in Port Dalrymple (Launceston):

'When their first-born child [John] was little more than a toddler, he was sent to carry a hammer or some small item to his father, working a short distance away from the house. He disappeared and was never seen again by his parents, nor did an extensive search ever reveal anything of his fate.'

Eliza was so traumatised by the loss, Carroll writes, that throughout her life she was to 'hear' children crying in the bush round about.

'On one occasion, when travelling in a wagon with her husband, she was so certain of this crying that she threatened to jump from the wagon if James did not stop. A search in the scrub nearby revealed an abandoned Aboriginal infant whom James and Eliza reared. Commonly called "Black Tommy" [or "Black Tom"]', he later accompanied them to Port Fairy.'

Eliza died in 1860 of apoplexy (probably a cerebral haemorrhage) at Woodbine, six weeks shy of her 46th birthday. Her humble headstone is crumbling and the inscription is hard to read. Her death certificate lists her children as John, 25, Charles, 23, Eliza, 21, Mary Ann, 19, Olivia, 17, Jane, 15, Isabella, 13, James, 11, and Sophia, nine, (though these ages don't quite tally with their birthdates). John went on to have 15 of his own children.

James Glare, who died in Hamilton in 1876 aged 73, is said to be buried in Port Fairy, but in an unmarked grave. Like his brothers-in-law, Charles and John Mills, James became a respected member of the Port Fairy community as farmer, bridge builder and timber carrier. His "life sentence" to a penal colony gave him opportunity undreamt of in Britain.



Woodbine today

The Mills and Glares employed and housed many families on their neighbouring farms and even at one stage hired a tutor to educate their large broods of children, and those of their workers and neighbours.

Like so many of our pioneers, the Mills and Glare families bore too much trauma and loss. But despite the times of high infant mortality, most of their children survived to adulthood and today there are many, many descendants. ❀❀

Looking back to the era of the silent film - populated by stars such as Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford and the Keystone Cops - it is hard to imagine that there was much on offer to stir the emotions of church leaders.

Nevertheless, on Sunday 23 July 1911, at both Masses, Father Patrick Joseph Rohan criticized, in the strongest possible terms, a film that had recently been shown by a biograph company at the Lecture Hall. 'He said he had been informed that there was one picture on the programme which was not fit for any Roman Catholic to see'. In true *Father Ted* fashion, we are then told, 'He went to see what it was.'

The film was *Sixtus the Fifth*, released in 1911, a contemporary synopsis of which says, in part,

'Prince Farnese is condemned to death and his wife makes an impassioned appeal to the Pope for his life. Moved by her eloquence and anguish, he cannot refuse her request, and gives her an order to the prison warden to deliver the prince to her at the stroke of two of the castle clock. After she has departed he issues orders to have the execution take place at the stroke of one ...'

Of course the Catholic church was unhappy to see one of its Popes portrayed in this way and, to some extent, was justified in being outraged. Sixtus was far from saintly, destroyed many of Rome's ancient buildings, had a statue of St. Peter put on the top of Trajan's column and was deeply disliked by many in the church. Even so, the film portrayed him as unreasonably villainous and the distributors did eventually apologise for its lapse in good taste. Or at least removed the film from Melbourne cinemas but 'had the shamelessness to exhibit it here, as if', Father Rohan said, 'the people here were not as good as the Catholics in Melbourne'.

By the same token, there were productions of which some clergy approved and one of these was shown in Port Fairy in 1925. *Everyone's* magazine reported on the showing of Cecil B. DeMille's 1923 film, *The Ten Commandments*. The magazine said,

'Out of a population of 2000, 1496 people saw "The Ten Commandments" at the Fairy Palace, Port Fairy. Several splendid letters were received from members of the clergy, and a criticism of 1300 words by the Rev. A. Hamilton Ross appeared in the local newspaper, recommending that all see this "wonderful production." The town was well plastered with posters, and souvenirs of "The Ten Commandments" were on sale several weeks before the opening of the picture'.

Unlike the 1956 sound version of the film, the 1923 film contained a 'modern' storyline - a morality tale of corruption, adultery (and leprosy!) - which many reviewers regarded as disappointing when compared to the Technicolor Biblical sequences. But, clearly, this did not deter the Presbyterian Rev. Archibald Ross, nor the majority of the population. ❀❀



## Myths and Phantoms

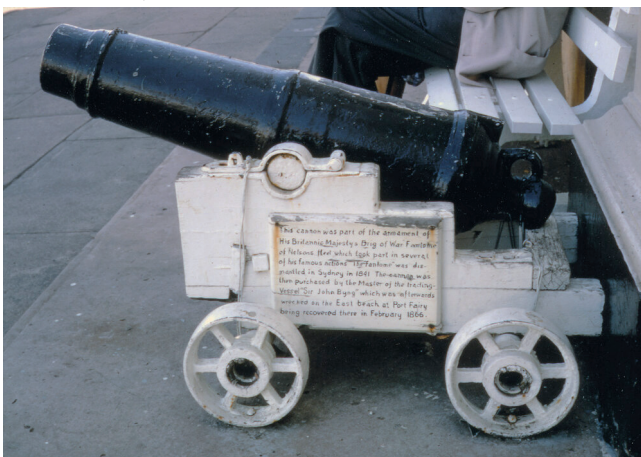
What is the truth about the carronade that was once displayed in various locations around Port Fairy and was stolen from Battery Hill on Easter Saturday 1999?

We know that, on 21 May 1852, the brig *Sir John Byng* was wrecked at Port Fairy in a storm. She was carrying coals and other cargo but was said to have unloaded most of this before she foundered. Her master, Captain Frith, was held largely responsible for the wreck. Frith had a carronade mounted on the *Sir John Byng* and this was lost with the ship. However, when the wreck was exposed by high tides in 1865, the carronade was recovered.

On 15 August 1890, *The Gazette* recorded that the carronade had been found by Captain Mason, 'near Mr. Castwood's residence'. It was cleaned and mounted and was 'for some time an object of interest, but it has now been relegated to an obscure position in the battery at the local Look-out'.

By 1938, the cannon was parked outside the Mechanics Institute. On 3 January of that year a writer for the *Gippsland Times* recorded the following:

'In the Main Street of the town, Sackville Street, we saw an ancient gun, that was mounted in a small plot of ground in front of the Mechanics' Institute, with this inscription: "The Lords of the Admiralty having had this carronade's marks and general description submitted to them, state that it formed part of the armament of His British Majesty's brig of war "Fantome" of Nelson's time, which vessel took part in several of his famous actions. The "Fantome" being dismantled at Sydney in 1841, the gun was purchased by the master of the trading vessel, "Sir John Byng," which was afterwards wrecked on the East Beach, Port Fairy. The carronade being recovered by a local citizen in February 1865.'



*The Carronade with its Sign*

As the photograph (above) shows, a similar sign remained until recent times.

So what opinion had 'the Lords of the Admiralty' voiced about the carronade? Well, that same 15 August 1890 edition of *The Gazette* tells us that, towards the end of 1889, a local resident had written to the Admiralty in an

attempt to establish the gun's origins. The response to that letter was as follows:

'Sir - I am commanded by my Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to thank you for your letter respecting a small old cannon washed up on the shores of Port Fairy Bay, and to inform you, with reference to your enquiries, that if the gun referred to weighs about 18 cwt, it is probably one of the guns that formed the armament of H.M.S. *Fantome* between 1851-5. There is, however, no record of this ship having lost one of her guns whilst on the Australian station during that period. I am &c. Evan McGregor'.

Thus, there is no reference to the 'carronade's marks and general description' because, if there had been, Evan McGregor would not have suggested that this small cannon might weigh 18 cwt. Moreover, it seems clear that it was the local resident who had mentioned H.M.S. *Fantome* since there is little likelihood that McGregor would have nominated that particular ship unprompted.

There have been five Royal Navy ships named H.M.S. *Fantome*, after the French word for a ghost, 'fantôme'. The first was a French privateer captured in 1810 (five years after Nelson's death) and wrecked in 1814 at Prospect, Nova Scotia. The last three date from the 1870s or later. The ship referred to by Evan McGregor of the Admiralty can only have been the H.M.S. *Fantome* launched in 1839. This was a brig-sloop of 483 tons carrying 16 guns. Far from being broken up in 1841, she was just beginning her career operating off the West African and South American coasts.

Was the 1930s inscription based on some half-remembered facts from the Admiralty's 1889 letter or was a second approach made? For the latter to be true, the second response must have mentioned the *Fantome* being broken up in 1841, but since we know that this is a fiction, the inscription must have been based on the 1889 letter. And, we may add, was fairly shoddy work for a town attempting to represent its history to visitors.

Since the 1889 letter is, therefore, the sole document to mention H.M.S. *Fantome* and was clearly referring to the 1839 vessel, can we infer anything else from its contents? Well, as already mentioned, it refers to a cannon weighing 18 cwt. We know that H.M.S. *Fantome* carried 16 guns and these are recorded as being four 32-pounders and twelve 32-pound carronades. So, two quite distinct types of cannon sharing a common projectile, a 32-pound shot. However, the four 32-pounders were long guns that each weighed around 56 cwt. or 2845 kgs., while the carronades weighed around 17 cwt. These carronades were shorter and lighter than the long gun, and used less powder. And, as we have said, for the Admiralty to have speculated that the gun might have been one of the latter carronades, the local resident must have omitted to provide the gun's dimensions or its markings. Had he done so, its weight would have immediately been revealed and any confusion

with a 32-pounder eliminated. Below, for instance, is the weight and date of manufacture of a long 32-pounder. The weight is expressed in hundredweights, quarters and pounds. This cannon weighs 43 hundredweight and 16 pounds - 4832 pounds or 2192 kilograms - and was obviously manufactured in 1843.



We know that the 'Port Fairy' carronade was a six-pounder with a bore of  $3\frac{5}{8}$  inches that had been manufactured by the Carron Company of Falkirk, in, it is said, 1803. The Carron Company gave its name to this class of cannon, the larger versions of which are generally suited only to close-range contact with the enemy. We also know that this carronade weighed around 262 kgs. or just over 5 cwt. As cannons go, it really is a very small gun, smaller, indeed, than the cannons used to start races at the annual Cowes Regatta on the Isle of Wight. (It is interesting to note that at least four of the latter have been stolen since the Sixties, so it is not only Port Fairy that is the victim of such thefts.) It is recorded that some small armaments were the personal property of ships' captains, although most belonged to the Admiralty and were provided as signal guns. What is most unlikely is that a civilian captain could have obtained one from a ship on active service - hence the necessary fiction that the ship was broken up in 1841.

Evan McGregor's reference to the absence of a record of a gun being lost allows for the fact that, occasionally, a cannon might drop into the sea during a naval action or storm, breaking loose and rolling about the deck. Loose cannon balls on a deck could cause broken bones but, as Patrick O'Brian wrote, 'far more dangerous were the loose guns running free - concentrated, lethal weight, gone mad'<sup>1</sup>. But it was far better that they should smash through the side and fall into the ocean than slip down a hatchway and through the bottom of the ship!

Should there be any lingering belief that the *Sir John Byng* and HMS *Fantome* were moored in close proximity at some stage and that an illegal transaction may have taken place, it is important, first, to recall that the Royal Navy guarded its property jealously. Thus, when capital punishment for murder was abolished in the UK in 1969, arson in royal dockyards was still punishable by death for another two or three years. For anyone to sell even a signal cannon in the Nineteenth Century would be to risk the same sentence.

Regarding the *Fantome's* movements, we know that she was refitted in 1849, following which she was to sail for New Zealand, never having previously been in Australian or New Zealand waters. In fact she did not sail until 4 March 1851. On 25 July 1851 she reached Sydney, having first arrived at Hobart on 10 July, which she left on 19 July. By 10 March 1852 she was in New Zealand and by January 1853 was back in Sydney. Her movements after this are irrelevant since by this stage the carronade was under the sea off Port Fairy.

Can we co-locate the two ships at any stage? Well, on 19 July 1851, the *Sir John Byng* left Sydney for Guam, whereas the *Fantome* did not reach Sydney until six days later. On December 11 1851, the *Sir John Byng* reached Sydney from Sourabaya. On 22 December *Fantome* reached Hobart but did not sail for Sydney, as she was expected to do, but made for New Zealand. The *Sir John Byng*, meanwhile, left Sydney on 24 February 1852 for Newcastle, possibly the start of her last voyage.

The cannon's alleged connections with Nelson, the *Fantome* or, indeed, the Royal Navy, are all illusory. Despite this, on Trafalgar Day 1905, the centenary of the battle, *The Gazette* told its readers that, 'Sergeant Artis and Gunner Chamberlain fired two charges from a gun which had been on one of Nelson's ships and which gun had been removed from its position on the eastern beach to the school grounds'.

Moreover, reasonable authors such as Jack Loney have been taken in by this nonsense. In *Shipwrecks Along The Great Ocean Road* he tells us that the *Sir John Byng* 'carried a small cannon which her master had purchased in Sydney from H.M. Brig *Fantome*, which had been dismantled in 1841'.

But if Captain Frith did not obtain the carronade from the Navy, where else might he have acquired one in Sydney, in 1841, the recurrent date in all these accounts? The answer is 'George Street' where, at the premises of the Australian Auction Company, on 13 and 14 May 1841, a wealth of maritime equipment was put on sale, including 'Two brass six-pounder guns with gun carriages complete, government pattern'. And Captain Firth was in Sydney at that time as the Master of the barque *Sir William Wallace*. Which would have made this a neat story if it was not for the fact that carronades are made of cast iron not brass! Even so, the possibilities are obvious.

When stolen in 1999, the cannon was mounted on a Naval Truck Carriage that had been rebuilt in the mid-1980s from a 1790 drawing. It was stolen from a stone plinth at Battery Hill to which it had been secured in 1997 despite wiser heads warning that it would be sure to disappear. Given that, with its carriage, it weighed between 300 and 350 kg, it was assumed that several men, a crane and a truck were involved in the theft. The cannon was said to be valued at \$25,000. However, over twenty years later, given its lack of any real provenance, such a price seems vastly in excess of the true value of this maritime equivalent of a starting pistol. ❀❀❀

<sup>1</sup> *H.M.S. Surprise* (1993) HarperCollins

## Our Forgotten Chief Commissioner

When Robert Haldane wrote *The People's Force: A history of the Victoria Police*, Melbourne University Press, 1986, he saw the book as, in part, a response to the rising tide of publications about criminals and, especially, Ned Kelly. He wrote, 'In Australia the focus on bushrangers and others of their ilk has contributed to a dearth of research and literature about the police'. Even at that date, almost thirty-five years ago, Haldane was able to record that 'one bibliography of Kellyana lists over 350 items'.

Despite being a serving police officer, Haldane pulled no punches in his account. For instance, he records that, under Chief Commissioner F. C. Standish, in the 1850s, the best known of all the sly-grog shops in Melbourne operated from the Police Hospital and that Standish gave 'private dinner parties where nude women sat about the table "the whiteness of their forms contrasting with the black velvet of the chairs"'.

While it is easy to criticize the shortcomings of men in that distant era, a far more recent Chief Commissioner was also given short shrift. Step forward Rupert Henry Arnold who was the 13th man appointed to the position, on 15 October 1963, and who retired on 1 February 1969. Rupert Arnold also happens to have been born in Port Fairy, in 1904, the son of Joseph Arnold and Alice Maria, née Baulch.



*Rupert Henry Arnold*

Despite this, Arnold seems to be barely remembered in his native town. He was almost 60 years old when he was appointed - the oldest man ever to be given the job - and was the first serving member of the force to attain the position in forty years. The Victoria Police Annual Report for 2012 - 2013 lists all the Chief Commissioners and their achievements in office, save in the case of Arnold's six-

year tenure where nothing apart from his appointment is listed. This is unsurprising when one reflects that Arnold's first message as Chief Commissioner was that 'no reforms are contemplated by me'.

Haldane records that Rupert Arnold was a farm labourer when he joined the force in 1924 and was 'schooled as a constable under Blamey's tough anti-union administration, when protests and marches were things to be quickly crushed'. It was unfortunate, therefore, that Arnold's rise to the top coincided with student protest, street demonstrations and the 'youth revolution'. He reacted against this unrest in the same way as the police had dealt with communists, unionists and the unemployed between the wars, and with the 'bodgies' in the 1950s.

Moreover, he was quite unrepentant about his tactics. In October 1968, in the official police journal, *Police Life*, Arnold said that he would 'not let civil violence get out of hand. I require it to be crushed in its incipient stages with all the force necessary'. He also turned on the media, saying 'newspapers, radio and television stations were partly to blame for undermining community discipline and bringing about civil disturbances' and referred to 'so-called intellectuals who want to change the world'.

This came after the 4 July 1968 protest outside the United States Consulate in Prahran when 45 demonstrators were arrested and 30 civilians and 6 policemen were injured.

By the time that the Annual Report of the Police Department for 1968 was issued, Arnold had retired and been succeeded by Noel Wilby. Even so, the report makes interesting reading. Wilby wrote that the report was really that of his predecessor, 'Mr. R. H. Arnold, C.B.E., C. St. J., Q.P.M.' and added that,

'Mr. Arnold served for over 41 years [*actually 44 years*] in the Victoria Police Force where he performed duty in most sections and saw many changes, the majority of which emanated from the rapid development of the motor car as a means of transport.'

This is the sole mention of Arnold and reads like a highly guarded job reference! The Annual Report inevitably mentions the 4 July 1968 protest, noting that 'many persons, including bystanders, on this occasion, have generously praised members of the Force for the tactful manner in which they handled this and other delicate situations, arising during demonstrations'.

But letters to the newspapers complained of police 'brutality' and Sydney's *Tribune* said:

'In Melbourne, the Government sent police, including mounted men, against the demonstrators. The result: Violence, baton bashings, arrests.'

Writing almost twenty years later, Haldane noted that, before Arnold, Alexander Nicholson had been the last serving member appointed to the job and that Arnold 'stamped it with the same lack-lustre conservatism'.

Rupert Arnold died in 1974 in Hampton. ❀❀

## Miracle Man

By Teresa Murphy (teresafmurphy@bigpond.com)

Our last newsletter's fascinating article on shark attacks in the early days of Port Fairy had us wondering: when actually was the last attack off our coastline?

You may remember the front-page story in the *Warrnambool Standard* from last summer when a shark was seen chasing a seal near surfers at the South-West Passage. It was Friday, December 20 (also memorable for being a 45-degree day!).

Big sharks of the *Jaws* variety are never seen so close to shore these days; in fact, not for three decades, according to the *Standard*. Which is a relief to those of us who love an ocean dip.

You need to go back 56 years, to 1964, to the last shark attack in local waters and it's quite a story.



*Henri Bource, a man of many talents, played sax for The Thunderbirds, one of Australia's first rock'n'roll bands*

The victim was Dutch-born, Melbourne-based Henri Bource, a charismatic rock'n'roller who loved the ocean. He preferred to shoot fish with a 16mm camera than with a speargun, so it was bit unfair a shark chose him that fateful day in the waters off Lady Julia Percy Island.

It was Sunday, November 29 and a beautiful day as members of the Victorian Aqualung Club and Port Fairy Skin Diving Club left Port Fairy wharf aboard the Raemur-K, a commercial shark fishing boat. Skipper Walt Kelly had volunteered his time and the boat for the group to explore the island and its large seal rookery.

Two hours later, with the boat anchored in 30 feet (10 metres) of water near the island, Bource - in a hooded black wetsuit - snorkelled with curious seals, who frolicked around him and two fellow divers. Suddenly the seals disappeared. Sensing danger, the divers descended to the bottom, then ascended. Bource didn't see his attacker but was lifted waist-high out of the water and

then dragged back down to the bottom.

He tried to gouge the monster's eyes but he was being shaken like a rag doll, and dragged down further and further. Then suddenly he was free and he surfaced, gulping in air.

The shark had let go because he had bitten off Bource's left leg from below the knee. Bource screamed for help and fellow divers swam to his aid. The shark kept returning and they fended it off with their handspears as the Raemur-K, dragging its anchor, went to the rescue. Bource's lower leg was seen floating in the water.

With Bource on board and a tourniquet applied, the skipper Walt raced back to Port Fairy (it still took 80 minutes) where local doctors were waiting. Bource had lost 6.5 pints (three litres) of blood; two minutes later and it would have been too late, the doctors said. They dubbed him 'Miracle Man'.

Bource was carried to an ambulance through a large, parting crowd that had gathered at the wharf, with a news crew. He was cut out of his wetsuit and operated on at Warrnambool Base Hospital, where the next day he was sitting up bright as a button, reading global news reports about his ordeal. Five hundred letters and cards arrived during his hospital stay.



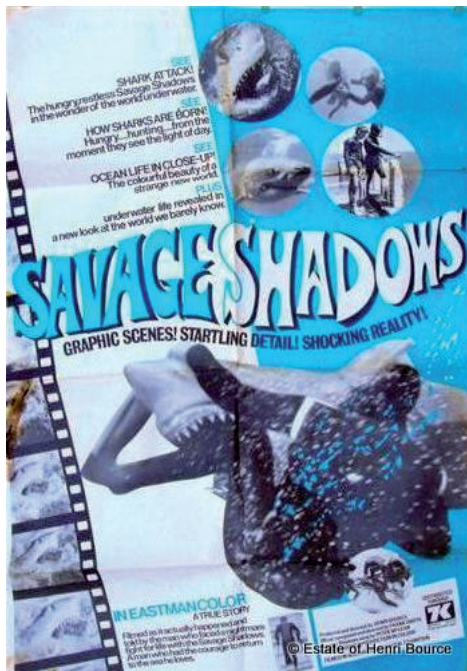
Henri Bource in 1966 with Raymond Short who also survived a shark attack

Three weeks later Bource was back playing rock'n'roll with his Melbourne band and six weeks later he returned to the ocean, with a modified fin. Self-hypnosis rid phantom pains, particularly an itchy toe.

The shark that attacked Bource was most likely a great white shark, believed to be 2.4 metres long. Lady Julia Percy Island - one of the largest breeding colonies of Australian fur seals - is the McDonald's drive-through for this species, which much prefer fat juicy seals to gristly humans. If they bite a human, it is usually exploratory, a case of mistaken identity.

In Bource's case, however, the shark appeared to make a beeline for him, ignoring the tasty morsels around him. "The thing that amazed me was that it apparently came through all the seals just to get me," he told the *Warrnambool Standard*. He said it felt like he'd been hit by a train.

Not only was his survival remarkable, his rescue was captured on film and this footage was used in his 1969 documentary, 'Savage Shadows'. You can watch the two-parter online, though you might want to skip the hour-long part one, which features a lot of blood and gore when large sharks are caught. You actually feel sorry for Jaws - who'd ever think that?!



Poster for Savage Shadows

Part two shows glorious colour footage of the Raemur-K leaving the Moyne River, frolicking seals off Lady Julia Percy Island, the boat's return to Port Fairy, the crowded wharf and the ambulance leaving for Warrnambool. There are also recreated scenes of Bource's attack, again featuring plenty of blood (animal blood, not Henri's) spurting on the boat deck.

A pioneering documentary of its day, but of its time - with a strange mix of music (think elevator, French bistro and 'Jaws' the seminal movie) - 'Savage Shadows' screened in Australia and sold overseas, though Bource said he made more money from stock footage sales of the recreated attack than the film.

Regarded as one of the best aqualung divers in Victoria, Bource was a recreational scuba instructor, underwater photographer and conservationist, campaigning against the hunting of sharks, including great whites. In 1965 he formed a commercial diving company servicing the offshore gas and oil industry.

And Henri loved rock'n'roll! He was band leader and saxophonist with the Henri Bource All Stars, who cut the first rock'n'roll record in Australia - Rock'n'Roll Party

in 1958. He also played sax with The Thunderbirds, the Planets and the Johnny Donohue Quartet. Years after his attack, he was back in Warrnambool, playing at a local dance.



Bource with a modified fin after a great white shark bit off half his leg near Lady Julia Percy Island in 1963. It is the last shark attack in local waters

It's not PC to say this these days, but he was also very dishy looking!

Henri Bource died of leukaemia in 1998, aged 64, survived by his wife and two sons.

By all accounts, he was quite a man.



### No Comment Required

'On Sunday last another well-known resident [of Port Fairy] - Mr. Jack Stretch - died. Mr. Stretch had for years been unable to do any active work, his extreme obesity preventing him moving about. He weighed some 23 stone, and had recently suffered from dropsy, or Bright's disease of the kidney. Years ago, he was well known throughout the Western District as a successful jockey, and horse-breaker'.

*Hamilton Spectator - 20 June 1891*

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