

# PORT FAIRY POST

## THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PORT FAIRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

VOL. 9 No. 2 APRIL - MAY 2020

### Letter from the President

Dear Members,

As I commence my term as President of the Port Fairy Historical Society I would like to begin by acknowledging the outstanding contributions by our outgoing President, Judith Kershaw, and thank her for the leadership she has provided over many years. Judith's outstanding contributions to the society have resulted in much being achieved under her wise leadership and guidance. I look forward to continuing to work with her as she kindly offers her skills as a volunteer. On behalf of our members I would like to extend our heartfelt thanks and gratitude to Judith.

I would also like to acknowledge the generous contributions of Angela Syme who has stood down from the Committee. Angela has contributed to the society for many years and in a number of roles, working tirelessly to benefit the society. Thank you Angela for past contributions and we look forward to your further work as a continuing volunteer in the coming years.

Over the past five years Graeme Kershaw has kept us up to date with the latest news from the society while also providing us with fascinating insights into the history of Port Fairy. Thank you Graeme for your insights, fascinating glimpses into our history and anecdotal stories as you "paint pictures of the life and language at those times, and include cover of major issues and events". We now welcome on board Richard Patterson, our newly elected Newsletter Editor. Richard's skills as a writer are well known and respected and we look forward to his contributions to the society newsletters.

We also welcome two new committee members in Virginia Mack and Debra Walker and we look forward to working with them as they share their valued skills.

As we practice physically distancing I do hope that you are managing in these unprecedented times. We are witnessing history in the making as events continue to unfold, with the impact of Covid-19 continuing to spread, resulting in rapid changes to our daily lives. These changes can be challenging and disturbing, particularly as we isolate ourselves to protect others in our community. It has been heartwarming to see our community rallying to support each other and businesses in our town

and region. How fortunate we are to find ourselves in such a supportive community along with a scenic environment where we are able to take daily walks.

Our plans for the coming year are postponed at present but certainly not cancelled and our committee, volunteers and members are ready to swing back into action once the pandemic is under control. So while meetings, guest speakers, Museum openings and working parties were postponed as a precautionary measure earlier, we are now regulated to isolate and therefore forcing a full shut-down of the Port Fairy History and Archives Centre. I wonder how the "Spanish flu" impacted Port Fairy at the end of World War One. Perhaps some of our members may have stories that have been handed down that they might like to share.

I look forward to our newsletters, which will provide much needed contact with our community. Our social media pages, Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/PortFairyHistoricalSociety/> will also provide an opportunity to remain connected. We would welcome further suggestions for ways in which we can continue to engage with each other and stay connected during these most exceptional times.

Best wishes to all our members for good health and wellbeing.

Andrea Coney  
President

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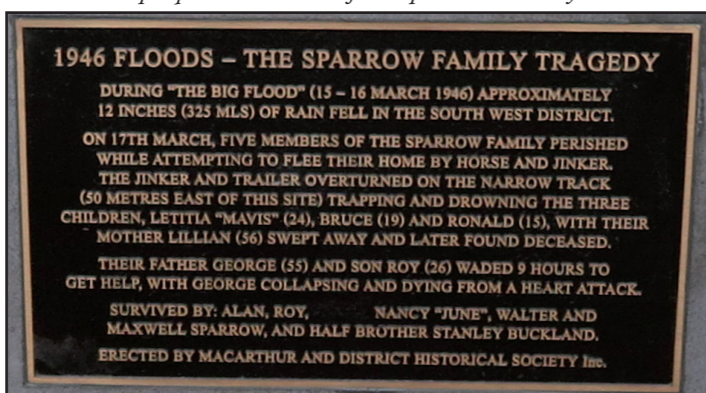


## The Sparrow Family Memorial

On Sunday, 15 March 2020, just two days short of the 74th anniversary of the event, a plaque was unveiled in Lake Gorrie Road, Macarthur, to commemorate the tragedy in which five members of the Sparrow family met their death. The unveiling was preceded by a number of speeches at the Macarthur Mechanics Institute Hall, by Geoff Sharrock and other members of the Macarthur and District Historical Society, and by Judy Hargreaves, eldest grandchild of George and Lillian Sparrow. There was even a poem about the tragedy, read by its author. Around 150 people attended this part of the proceedings, far exceeding Secretary Nathalie Gash's initial hope that up to 60 might come along. In the event, some of those attending had travelled interstate and the day had become both a commemoration and a reunion for the extended Sparrow family. Geoff Sharrock was able to share the information that 'a woman from Queensland' had initially suggested that there should be a memorial, planting a seed that had taken root and resulted in the plaque. Almost inevitably, the latter is mounted on a backing and base donated by Bamstone. The plaque is positioned some few hundred metres from the site of the Sparrow home, long since demolished. Now there is merely a tank (and, on our visit, a small herd of cows) to mark where the homestead once stood. And in the space between that spot and the road is where the tragedy occurred. Today it is a lonely and windswept place but what it must have been like on that dark night in 1946 with waist-deep water and little, if any, light is beyond imagination. And one detail provided by the present owner of the land tends to stick in the mind. This is the fact that, when



*The plaque with the site of the Sparrow home beyond*



*The wording of the memorial*

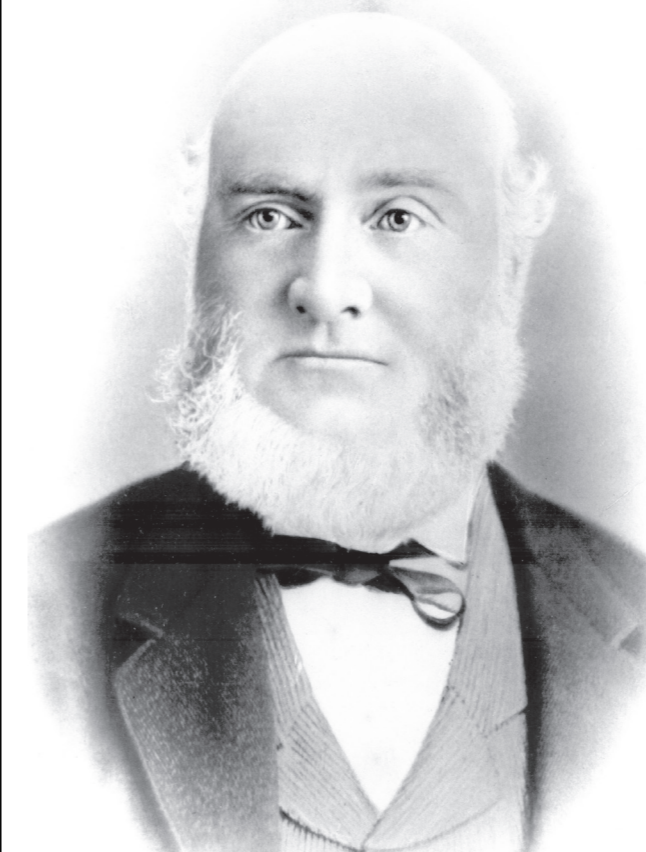


*Sparrow relatives and others at the unveiling*

Lillian Sparrow's body was eventually found about a mile away, her hair entangled in the barbed wire of a fence, it was found to have been repeatedly punctured by the bites of snakes. Indeed, as Tony Wright mentioned in his article about the tragedy, in *The Age* of 7 March 2020, 'It was said that every fence post that stood above water level was crowned by a snake'. On 28 March 1946 the five dead members of the Sparrow family were buried, and on 1 April *The Gazette* was able to provide information about how the bodies of the victims had been recovered. The search had been led by L. Dyson of Broadwater and it was recorded that, 'he and his party swam horses through the flooded areas during the search ... and that hundreds of eels and snakes were lying dead in the stones area. Mr. Dyson said that, despite rumours to the contrary, water was flooding into the Sparrow house when the family attempted its fatal getaway. This could plainly be seen by the water mark on the wall. ... This effectively disposes of rumours that the ill-fated family had left their house without need, and of statements that the water did not rise in the house at all. The Sparrow home, days after the first flood, was still an island in the middle of a lake'. After the proceedings at the Mechanics Institute, over 100 people travelled to Lake Gorrie Road by coach and car and, given the speeches that had already been made, Judy Hargreaves, without further ceremony, removed the Australian flag, in which the memorial had been wrapped. Some hardy types then went tramping across the paddock although, for others, the thought of the tragedy and the pall of melancholy that hangs over this unhappy place were sufficient deterrents against joining them. ❀❀❀

## Robert Ireland's Error

Robert Ireland (*below*) has the distinction of having been the last Mayor of the Borough of Belfast in 1886 and the first Mayor of the new Borough of Port Fairy in the following year. He was Mayor once more in 1895.



J.W. Powling's references to Ireland are as a source of new ideas. He tells us that, in 1878, he first raised the notion of building a town hall, to the dismay of some of his colleagues. Two years later he proposed a public weighbridge while, in 1885, he suggested the idea of 'hot and cold sea water baths'. In 1887, Ireland was Mayor when Queen Victoria celebrated her Golden Jubilee. He had a large bronze medal struck and given to every school student in Port Fairy. It was inscribed 'To commemorate the Public Rejoicing, Port Fairy, Robert Ireland, Mayor, 21st June 1887, Victoria, Australia, Victoria's Jubilee', the Mayor's name being just as large as the Queen's. In December of the same year, Councillor Ireland turned the first sod for the construction of the railway at Port Fairy, at the corner of Gipps and Cox Streets. Ireland placed the sod in a wheelbarrow that had been painted red, white and blue for the occasion, and wheeled it for some dozen yards to the cheers of the large crowd that had gathered.

In 1896, one of his fellow Councillors, Robert Holland, brought a case against Ireland for having breached the Local Government Act. Ireland was in business as a builder, contractor and timber merchant and, during the last quarter of 1891, had supplied the Council with goods to the value of £9 5s. while at the same time sitting as a Council member. This breached the Act which required a councillor who had entered into a contract with a Council not to act as a councillor during the life of that contract. Ireland continued to be a councillor until August 1894 and, under the Act, was liable to a fine of £50 for each day that he had sat in that capacity. Ireland was then re-elected and, allegedly, again supplied goods but also attended Council meetings on eight occasions. Added to the 62 occasions when he had attended up to August 1894, this totalled no less than 70 sittings which, at £50 a time, left him open to a fine of £3500 - well over \$500,000 today! The 'Full Court' reserved its position but by June 1896 had decided that Mr. Ireland should pay the Council (and not, as some supposed, Mr. Holland) the sum of £3400 for supplying goods to the total of £26. The Chief Justice, Sir John Madden, expressed regret that the Act could not be interpreted more leniently. Immediately the Borough Council approached other Councils, seeking donations towards Robert Ireland's fine, stating that he had 'innocently violated' the Act. However, if the Courts could not relieve Ireland's distress, the Victorian Cabinet had it in its power to reduce the fine and did so by determining that Ireland should pay just £50 - the equivalent of around \$8000 today. It was explained that, while the larger sum was out of all proportion to the offence, it was still necessary to warn other Councillors of the fate that would await them should they transgress the Act. On 2 March 1900, Ireland was one of those who addressed a large crowd from the balcony of the Star of the West as part of the celebrations for the Relief of Ladysmith. In the following year, he decided to quit Port Fairy and retire to Casterton. A collection was taken up 'in recognition of his lengthy service as a townsman' and the sum of £46 15s. was eventually sent to him. Robert Ireland died on 12 August 1904 at Casterton, at the home of his daughter, Mrs. George Grant. He was 73.





## The Lighthouse Keepers 1

The first in a new series about Port Fairy's Lighthouse Keepers

### Wemyss Thomson

Wemyss Thomson, whose image appears below, was born in Wick, Scotland, in December 1829. Wemyss (pronounced 'Weems') was the Assistant Lighthouse Keeper in Belfast between October



1880 and January 1884. He died on 6 November 1909 and this photograph was taken just five months before his death.

Wemyss, who came to Australia on board *The Lightning* in 1854, was a month short of his 80th birthday when he died, although his wife, Isabella, née Smith, a native of Leith, Scotland, was twenty years his junior. She died in 1924.

In an earlier edition of this newsletter we told how, on 27 February 1883, *The Gazette* commented on the poor quality of water that the Lighthouse keepers and their families were required to use and the fact that Isabella Thomson 'had been taken seriously ill several times'. Indeed, *The Gazette* expressed the view that the families on Griffiths Island were provided with 'miserable accommodation' and hoped that the newly-elected member for Belfast would make representations to the Public Works Department. At all events, the couple's baby son, Charles Alexander, was born and died on the island in 1882 and some believed that the appalling living conditions were to blame.

Wemyss was an expert at making models and half models of ships. In 1867 he displayed a model of a

schooner, a case of models, and two half models at the Museum of Industry and Art in Melbourne. One of his models, of a top sail schooner, still exists and can be seen on the Museums Victoria web site. This won second prize at the 1866 Intercolonial Exhibition.

Prior to his appointment to Belfast, Wemyss had been a dock labourer and one of the gatekeepers at the Williamstown dockyard. He left Belfast in January 1884 to be the Junior Assistant at Shortland's Bluff, Point Lonsdale. In October 1888 he was made a Senior Assistant Lighthouse Keeper and finished his career at the MacCrae Lighthouse on the Mornington Peninsula.

Wemyss and Isabella had nine children, four of whom predeceased him. One son was Adam Bain Thomson who was born at Queenscliff Barracks in 1888 and died in World War One, at Albert, in February 1917. Another was the confident-looking



George Nelson Thomson (*above*) who was born in Belfast in 1883 and died at Sorrento in 1955. It was he who, in 1924, donated the model of the schooner that Wemyss had made to the Melbourne Museum, along with the certificate with which he had been awarded. ❀❀❀

## Tsunami!

A tidal wave in Port Fairy sounds fanciful, and yet it has happened at least once. The first recorded occasion was on 16 August 1868. *The Belfast Gazette* reported that at 'about one o'clock p.m., an unusual rise was noticed in the river, and some lighters which were going out to sea, having great difficulty in making way, dropped anchor in the stream. A sudden reflux took place, and the boats were very nearly driven on the shore. Shortly afterwards a wall of water, some three or four feet high, rushed up the river and carried some of the lighters from the bend as far back as the Moyne Mill, and one was forced high up on the rocks in the south-west passage. The river, which is usually very clear, had a muddy appearance.'

This was the result of an earthquake that occurred under the sea, close to the city of Arica in Peru. The force of the earthquake has been calculated as between 8.5 and 9.0 on the Richter Scale and its effects were observed around the Pacific, including at Port Jackson, Sydney. It was the sixth largest earthquake by magnitude yet recorded and resulted in 25,000 fatalities.

A second event also occurred in 1868, on New Year's Eve. *The Belfast Gazette* recorded that,

'On Thursday afternoon (Dec. 31st), at about four o'clock, an unusual commotion was noticed in the river. A large wave some three feet and a half to four feet high, as black as ink, rushed upwards from the bay, and in a few minutes the river fell as much below the low water mark. The phenomenon continued about an hour, the flow and ebb taking place about every ten minutes, but becoming gradually weaker, with each reflux.'

*The Banner of Belfast* reported that,

'As the waves receded, the river which was previously clear, became black and muddy, from the frequent perturbation of the water. The waves were in every particular similar to those which were also visible in the Moyne, and which heralded the earthquake at Valparaiso [*sic*] in August last. In the bay the fluctuation of the tide was still more remarkable, the water rising between four and five feet, and its motion so violent that the steamer and other vessels swung repeatedly round their anchors.'

*The Argus* subsequently speculated why no other sea ports reported similar phenomena. *The Banner of Belfast* commented that,

'... it is possible that in the land-locked bay of Port Phillip such a phenomenon would not be so visible as in ports more exposed to tidal influences. It might have escaped general observation in Belfast but for the circumstance of the Moyne River, which

runs through the town, being peculiarly exposed to such influences ...'

A third wave was recorded on 4 January 1876, *The Age* reporting that,

'A very curious tidal phenomenon was noticed at noon in the River Moyne on Tuesday last. *The Banner of Belfast* states that the water all at once came rushing down the river with a sudden force, as though impelled by some power at the mouth. In a minute all the flats were covered, but just as quickly the water receded, and they were left as dry as before, the only difference being that numbers of fish and eels were deposited on the banks. This occurred two or three times within about ten minutes, and was noticed by several persons on the bank. One gentleman, who was fishing, suddenly found himself in deep water, and "before he could get out of it," as he termed it, the water receded and left him high and dry.'

The next event occurred on 16 August 1877. *The Hamilton Spectator* reported that, at 11am, a tidal wave came up the Moyne and caused the water level to rise by three feet. This was followed by 'two distinct waves'. Subsequently, the *Portland Guardian* reported that,

'On Thursday afternoon a strange phenomenon was witnessed on the banks of the Moyne River, Belfast. Those people that witnessed it say they never saw the like before, the water rose fully three feet and receded again. It did not occur only once, but three or four times during the afternoon, whilst there was a great rush of water coming in from the western passage, and a very strong current running down the river. Some people think that before long we will hear of a tidal wave having occurred on the coast of South America. My opinion as to what caused this strange commotion in the river is the heavy sea that has been running into our bay of late, in fact it is some time ago now that we witnessed such a heavy sea as was running in our bay last week, and it was on this account that the *Nelson* was not able to get to Portland sooner.'

The next account, of events on 18 November 1904, sounds more like a severe storm. Once again, there was no earthquake activity to which it could be linked. *The Age* reported on the following day that,

'A thunder storm occurred on Thursday. The steamer *Casino*, on her down trip from Melbourne, experienced one of the roughest passages met with in her run between Melbourne and Port Fairy. The seas were very heavy, and at times swept over her decks, carrying away a portion of the galley. There was practically no wind. A small tidal wave was





Photo: Gallery Yopriceville

experienced along the coast’.

On 8 April 1911 what again seems more akin to storm activity was observed although, in subsequently reporting the event, the *Port Fairy Gazette* had no doubt about what had occurred:

‘About 6.30 on Saturday night, a tidal wave came down the south-west passage. The wave, which was very strong, passed over the bridge leading to the island, and further, streamed into the blacksmith’s shop at the eastern side of the Moyne river, many fishermen having narrow escapes from being swept away by the strong sudden current. Fortunately no damage resulted, except for a few stern lines on the fishing boats being washed away’.

On the following day the *Mercury* of Hobart carried the following report of the event:

‘A TIDAL WAVE.

Very heavy seas were witnessed at Port Fairy on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, but, fortunately, no serious damage has resulted. On Saturday evening what was stated by the fishermen to be a tidal wave swept over the south-west passage, and flooded a portion of the golf-links. Residents state they have never seen the sea so rough as it has been during the past few days. The steamer *Casino* was delayed in her departure from Port Fairy to Portland owing to the heavy seas. She left on Sunday morning at 9 o’clock in the teeth of a strong gale, and after getting out of the river made very slow progress. In her passage along the south beach she hugged the shore as closely as possible’.

The same newspaper carried a report of a freak wave at Warrnambool on the same day:

‘A sensational accident occurred on the breakwater at Warrnambool on Saturday afternoon, when a huge wave struck the end of the structure, submerging it for a distance of over 50ft., and sweeping into

the bay a man named Charles Wilson, and a boy named Leslie Baulch, aged 14 years, who were fishing on the pier. The contract of finishing off the end of the breakwater with concrete blocks is now in progress and for this purpose the Titan crane and a donkey engine are stationed on the pier. The wave was estimated as high as the crane, or about 40ft. from the sea level’.

Our last event occurred on 12 January 1922 and, once again, appears to be unrelated to any known seismic activity. Writing to Donald MacDonald’s *Nature Notes and Queries* column in *The Argus*, Mr. W. Maher of Port Fairy reported that,

‘About the 12th of January last a peculiar and rapid rise and fall of tide occurred in the Moyne River which puzzled the oldest fishermen of this part. The tide rose very rapidly, and in less than 10 minutes it fell 3 feet, some of the fishing fleet that were moored at the wharf being carried from their moorings and stranded high and dry on the opposite side of the river. This same thing again happened between 12 noon and 1 p.m. on the 18th inst. The tide on this occasion rose very rapidly, but the fall, which was about the same - 3ft - took about half an hour. There was a sandbank in the river close in to the south wall which had been there about 12 months, and after the first big tide this bank had completely vanished. The usual tide here is about 2ft in six hours.’

In reply, MacDonald wrote that

‘The description, especially in the first instance, suggests a tidal wave or bore, which may be due to some remote under sea disturbance acting with the ordinary rise of tide. This, it seems to me, is more likely to occur in our seas, where all tides are simply vast waves.’ ❀❀❀

## The Goose Lagoon Affair

On the last day of February 1933, Mr. A. Thomas of Yambuk discovered a double-barrelled shotgun on the Princes Highway, about a quarter of a mile past Goose Lagoon on the Yambuk side. He took the gun to the police who found that its stock was cracked and that there were two empty but recently-fired cartridges in its chambers.

An inspection of the site established that, not far from where the gun had been found, was a very large pool of blood, with a trail of more blood leading away to the side of the road. Nearby there was a broken dog-collar of the canine rather than the clerical kind. Constable A. Atkinson searched the area for further clues but found nothing.

It was obvious that an act of violence had been carried out, but where was the victim and was he or she still alive? The mystery was instantly dubbed ‘The Goose Lagoon Affair’ and *The Gazette* reported that, ‘For a time astounding rumours were current, and all sorts of theories were advanced by local criminologists and sleuths’.

On the following day, Senior-Constable West continued the search and, buried in the sand about 300 yards from the road, found the body of an enormous Airedale dog.



Photo: justusdogs.com.au

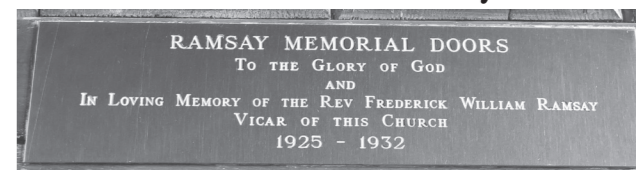
Only now was a connection made with three men who had been seen driving through Port Fairy on the day in question, with a dog tied in the ‘dicky’ seat of their car. Then it was recalled that, on the same evening, three men had been seen coming from the sand hummocks near The Craggs.

Assembling the evidence, the Police assumed that the dog had broken its collar in attempting to get out of the moving car, and injured itself as it hit the road. The three men had then shot the dog, to put it out of its misery, and buried it in the hummocks.

This was the only explanation that seemed to fit the evidence, although no one could understand why the men should have left the gun in the road.

None of the reports mentions the blood being tested to ensure that it really came from a dog rather than a human, although such a test had been available since 1901. After all, the ‘neat’ explanation might have obscured a far more sinister crime. ❀❀❀

## Rev. F. W. Ramsay



On 6 April 1997 a set of doors in St. John’s, Port Fairy, was dedicated by Bishop David Silk. The doors were to commemorate the life of the Reverend Frederick William Ramsay, who had been Anglican Vicar of Port Fairy between 1925 and 1932. Ramsay trained at the Brisbane Theological College, and was ordained in 1906. In 1900 he had become part of the Anglican Mission of St. Paul’s, Samarai, New Guinea. He was appointed Rector in 1909 and stayed there for the subsequent ten years.

A 2009 book by Gerry Barton and Stefan Dietrich, *This Ingenious and Singular Apparatus: Fishing Kites of the Indo-Pacific*, casts an interesting light on the young Ramsay in New Guinea:

‘Ramsay, sporty, useful with his fists, was in his bachelor years a concern to his superior on account of his relationships with the Samarai bar girls, a problem pragmatically resolved by the mission hierarchy by permitting him to marry’.

Ramsay was married in Samarai, in the year of his ordination, to Annie Ada Armitage. Certainly, he was an example of muscular Christianity, being a keen amateur boxer and athlete. Even so, while in New Guinea, on one occasion he almost died of blackwater fever.

When he left Samarai after 19 years *The Church Chronicle* recorded that,

‘In addition to being Rector of Samarai Mr. Ramsay acted as the business manager of the Mission and purchased the bulk of the stores required at Samarai. He also gave the first welcome to Mission workers on arrival and bid God-speed to those leaving on furlough or otherwise.’

Subsequently, Ramsay was appointed assistant organising secretary of the Australian Board of Missions. Later, he became vicar of Coleraine before his appointment to Port Fairy. In 1932 he was appointed to St. Paul’s, Ballarat East. Ramsay died on 1 March 1938 at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, leaving a widow and two daughters, Viola and Betty. Annie Ada Ramsay, who survived her husband by almost thirty years, died in February 1967.

❀❀❀



## Holy Disorder

On 1 November 1856, Father Patrick Dunne left Belfast, much to the dismay of the greater part of his congregation. Indeed, 'upwards of one hundred residents of Belfast, Tower Hill and Yambuk' signed a letter expressing sorrow at his departure. He was also presented with a purse containing ninety sovereigns - the equivalent of a year's income for a Catholic priest.

Dunne had been dismissed because he was unable to support the actions of his predecessor, Father William Shinnick. The latter had decided to build himself a house in Belfast and had amassed no less than £850 for this purpose: £400 had been collected by parishioners, £400 donated by the Government and £50 had come from Shinnick's own pocket. However, Shinnick's extravagant plans demanded a further sum of £250 which he 'borrowed' out of the Church Fund - money which had been collected from parishioners, since before Shinnick's arrival, for the specific purpose of building a church. Moreover the Bishop, the Rev. Dr. Goold, defended Shinnick's actions and suggested that, once lay members of the Church had donated funds, it was nothing to do with them how the clergy might dispose of them.

Dr. Goold removed Dunne 'for having allowed a lay committee (the Building Committee) to slander their bishop and encouraging them to take control of church matters'.

Subsequently a statement appeared in the *The Banner of Belfast*, saying that 'Fr. Dunne was removed because he refused to identify himself with the misappropriation of the church funds by the Bishop'. This was quoted in the *Argus* and other newspapers and Dunne was forced to issue a statement saying that he had had nothing to do with the accusation and that for him to impute such motives to the Bishop would have been both 'uncharitable and foolish'.

However, Dr. Goold was not satisfied, summoning Dunne to Melbourne and ordering him to sign a document stating that it was 'a false and malicious statement'. Father Dunne refused, on the grounds that it would have no effect and would embroil him in a newspaper controversy. He then left for Sydney where he stayed for three months and, on his return, considered his better option was to sail for Ireland. Writing in 1947, the Rev. W. Ebsworth observed,

'Thus was lost to Victoria one of the greatest of the pioneer priests'. It is certainly significant that, on his departure from Australia, Father Dunne was presented with an address signed by almost 2000 Catholics from all over Victoria, together with the considerable gift of 600 sovereigns. Dunne was replaced by Father Shinnick once more and the latter spent an uncomfortable few months in Belfast carrying the blame for Father Dunne's treatment.

But Shinnick could not help himself and, on 23 February 1857, wrote to Eugene Flannery, the Master of the Roman Catholic Denominational School in Belfast, advising him that his services would not be required after 31 March 1857. The letter did not give any reason for the dismissal of Flannery who had been in the position since the school had been established, just nine months before. On the following day, twenty-five concerned parents wrote to the members of the School Committee expressing their anger at this 'flagrant violation of justice'. The Denominational School Board in Melbourne was approached and, in response, said that they did not take sides in such disputes but, having approached the Bishop, Dr. Goold, had been told that Mr. Flannery had been replaced by Mr. O'Donohue. The incident did little to endear Shinnick to the congregation who were still smarting over the removal of Father Dunne. Indeed, many believed that Eugene Flannery had been removed precisely because he had been on good terms with Dunne. Several parishioners were in favour of abandoning the Roman Catholic school and establishing a national school in the town, but before a major confrontation could erupt, Shinnick was transferred to Geelong.

Father Dunne returned to Australia in 1858, accompanying 400 Irish immigrants. He then became president of a Catholic seminary at Tullamore, County Offaly, Ireland, which was intended to prepare young priests for the Australian mission. Tullamore was Dunne's native town and, during the potato famine, large numbers of tenants in that area were evicted because they could no longer pay their rents. Father Dunne chartered a ship and 400 more migrants were transported to this country, in this case to Moreton Bay. Over the next few years he was responsible for

three further shipments.

In 1862 Dunne, who was in Brisbane, enquired how the Roman Catholic Church would view his return to Victoria. The Vicar General, Father John Fitzpatrick wrote,

'The Bishop desires me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter from Brisbane expressing your regret for the Scandal which you caused in this Diocese a few years ago, and stating that on your return to Melbourne, you are willing to make any reparation which the Bishop may require.

His Lordship desires me to say in reply that he protests against your returning to Melbourne until you have obtained the sanction of His Eminence the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda for doing so. His Lordship believes that your not returning to Melbourne will be the best proof which you can give of the sincerity of your request for the scandal which you so foolishly caused in Melbourne and that no other proof is necessary or desirable'.

Father Dunne did serve again in Victoria, at Bacchus Marsh in 1867/1868 and, subsequently, at Ballarat. Later on he was appointed to Goulburn, eventually becoming its Vicar-General. Later still he was the chaplain to an orphanage near Albury, which is where he died in 1900.

Father Shinnick subsequently served at Ipswich, Queensland and in the Archdiocese of Adelaide. He died in 1912.

While you may feel that the discord illustrated by these events was unusual, it has to be said that it was a minor matter compared to the all-out war that erupted in Belfast just a few years later between Father Thomas Lenehan and Father Maurice Stack. But that, as they say, is a story for another time.



## Plague!

On 11 November 1898, Inspector Christie of Her Majesty's Customs arrived in Port Fairy by express train on a most unusual errand. On the following morning he drove to Macarthur to ensure that stocks of the Bubonic Plague bacillus held by Dr. Leonard Haydon were destroyed.

News of Inspector Christie's arrival had already reached Macarthur and Dr. Haydon and his brother

were waiting in the main street, greeting them with, 'We heard you were coming'. Dr. Haydon eventually handed over thirty-two glass tubes full of gelatine that contained the bacilli, but only with the greatest reluctance, immediately claiming that he should receive £300 compensation.

The actual destruction was carried out by Dr. T. Gray M.B. of the Board of Public Health who boiled the tubes in water on the spot, their removal to Melbourne being considered too hazardous. Dr. Haydon, meanwhile, claimed that he had brought the bacilli from India to Victoria with the sole intention of protecting Victorians should the plague break out here. Moreover, officers of the Board had inspected the tubes shortly after Dr. Haydon's arrival in Victoria and so had been aware of their existence for fully three months.

Dr. Haydon, who was just 26, was staying with his brother, Gerald Haydon, who had a practice in Macarthur as an apothecary. Dr. Haydon asserted that the tubes contained only the attenuated virus which is used as an antidote to the disease by injection. All agreed that the 'raid' on the Haydon household would never have occurred had it not been for the hair-raising accounts of the plague in India appearing daily in the press.

It was reported that Dr. Haydon gave his word of honour that he had handed over all the plague bacilli and that he had not conducted experiments on rabbits or other animals, in the months since he had arrived from India, in order to generate a fresh supply of the bacillus.

On 19 November *The Weekly Times*, commenting on the case, said that,

'This scourge has been decimating the population in parts of the Bombay Presidency of late, and has not yet been stamped out, while it is only within the past week that the Bengal Presidency has been declared free of the plague. Again, the recent tragic death of a noted Austrian professor, at a Viennese Hospital, and several of the attendants, from the effects of this plague, incurred in the course of scientific investigation, increased the feeling of dread of its introduction into Victoria. Hence the general view of the public, not based upon scientific ground, will be that the Government of Victoria has acted wisely in causing the germs in the possession of Dr. Leonard Haydon, of Macarthur, to be destroyed.' ❀❀



## The Sarah's Log

To handle a ship's log that is over 170 years old is a rare privilege, but when it is a log with a strong local connection, that privilege is all the greater. The full title of this volume is *Journal of a Voyage from Sydney to Launceston in the Brig Sarah, Lewis Grant Commander, Kept by H. R. Stevens, Chief Officer 1848*. The log covers the period between 20 June 1848 and October 1849 and is in excellent condition. It details the considerable distances sailed by the *Sarah* during that fifteen-month period. By the time this piece appears, the log will have found a permanent home in the State Library of Victoria.

It is ironic that the log should have belonged to J.W. Powling because, in his history of Port Fairy, he states that, in August 1843, 'the barque *Socrates* (152 tons) was wrecked on the East Beach and its Master, Captain Lewis Grant, finally decided to give

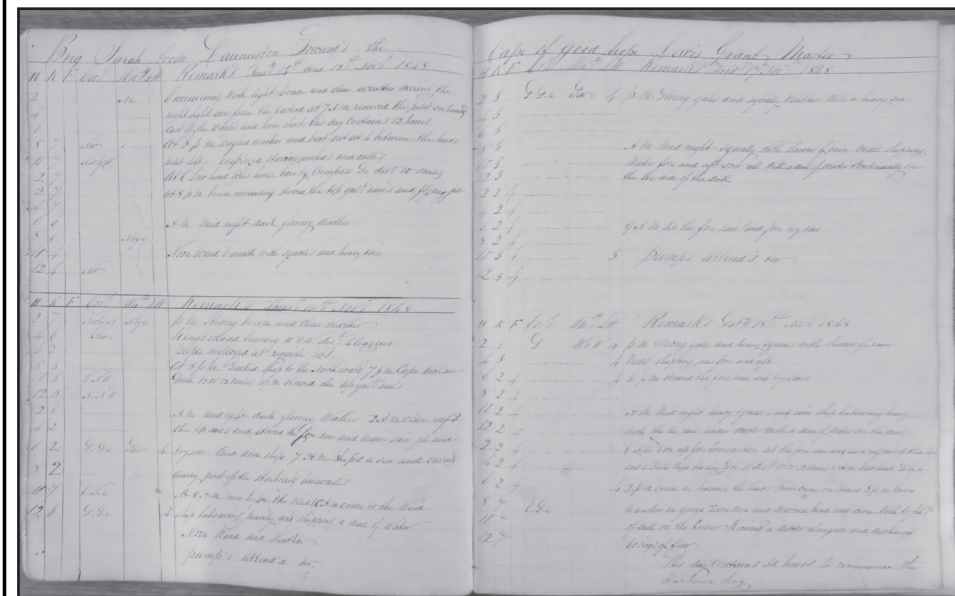
more shuttling between Sydney and Tasmania before it makes another trip to Kawau, via Newcastle, and then returns to Sydney. Grant was taking coal from Newcastle to Kawau and bringing back copper regulus, the end-product of copper ore smelting. By its very nature, a ship's log mainly reports weather conditions, the ship's position at the end of each day, and how the crew has been occupied. In this instance, the latter includes both making and repairing sails, 'varnishing the seams of the quarter deck', 'scraping and varnishing the jolly boat's bottom', and 'blackening ends'.

On the voyage from Launceston to the Cape of Good Hope, on 2 December 1848, the log records 'Midnight more moderate; let a reef out of the top sail and set jib and main sail. Light on Cape Otway bearing North'. The Cape Otway Lighthouse had come into operation barely three months earlier, on 29 August 1848. The light flashed white for four seconds in every minute, and in those distant times would have been welcome confirmation that the ship was successfully navigating this perilous coast.

It would be another eleven years before the Port Fairy lighthouse was operational although, on 7 May 1849, on the return voyage from South Africa, the log records that 'Daylight saw the main lands

about Port Fairy'. Later that day it records seeing Cape Otway once more and, before dark, 'King's Island'. This is far from being the only place-name mentioned that has since been modified. A few days later the *Sarah* passed 'Sir Roger Curtis Island', now known simply as Curtis Island, a granite outcrop that supports a shearwater colony numbered in the hundreds of thousands.

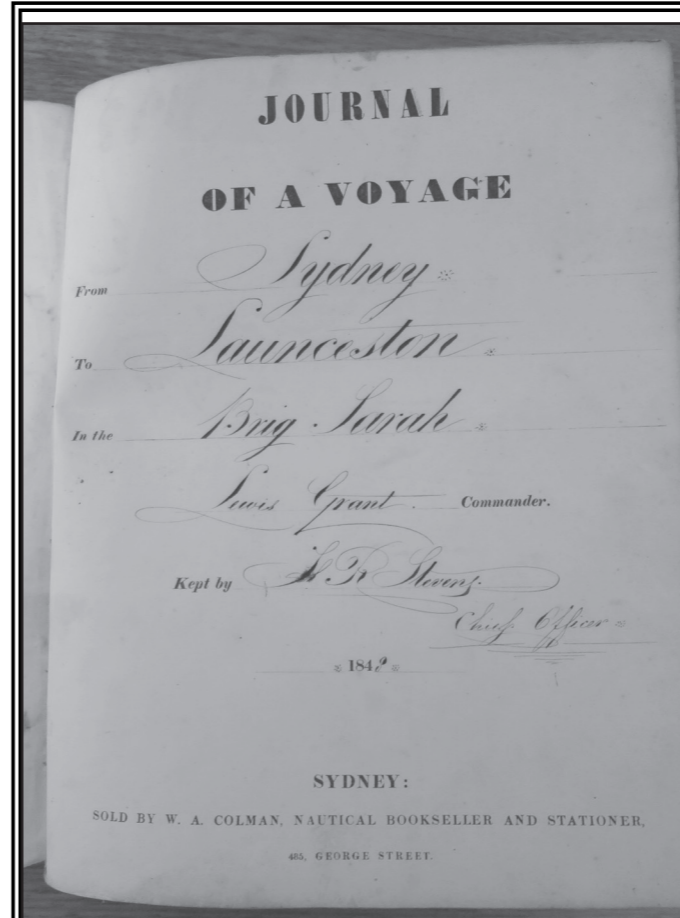
There are few references to the ship's crew, beyond the details of how they were occupied. However, we read, on 8 December 1848, 'Edward James, the cook, taken sick'. On the following day it is recorded, 'Inquired of Thomas James, Cook, if he wanted any



A sample of the log

up the sea'. Obviously the log came into Powling's possession too late to amend this statement. Incidentally, a slightly more guarded reference to the same effect was made by Stan Evans in his book, *Fins, Scales and Sails*.

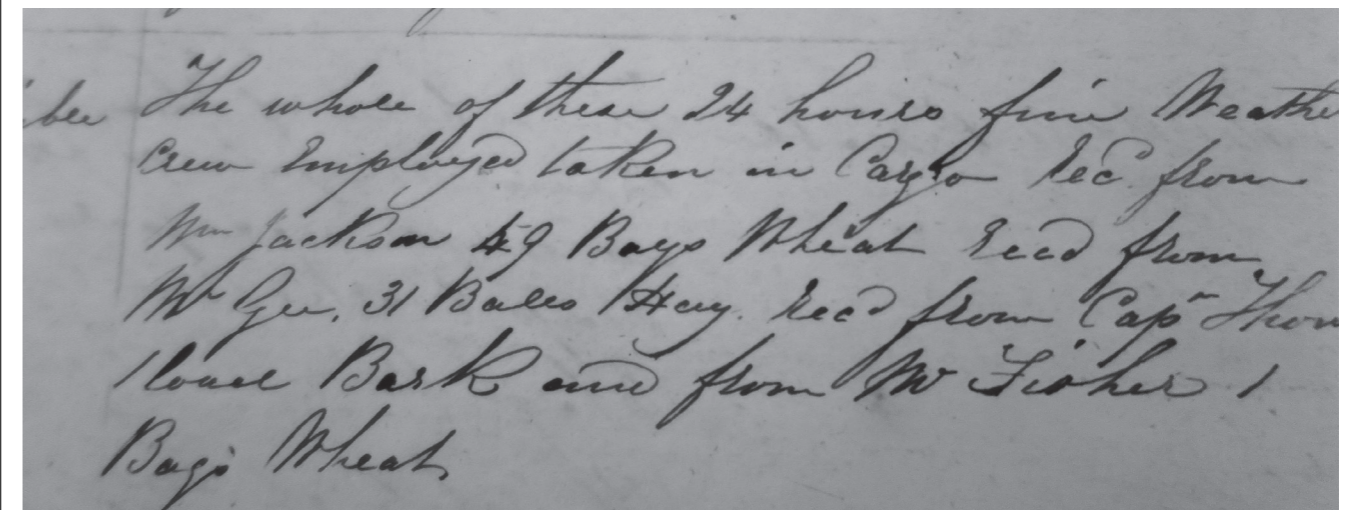
Initially, the log details four return trips between Sydney and Launceston. Then the *Sarah* sails from Sydney via Launceston to the Cape of Good Hope and an anchorage in Table Bay. The vessel next returns to Launceston, via Port Adelaide, and on to Sydney, Newcastle and Kawau Island, off the eastern coast of New Zealand's North Island. From there the *Sarah* returns to Launceston, via Newcastle, for



The log book had been bought off the shelf in Sydney

medicine. He said no he would turn to his duty again but found he was not capable of performing his duty in the cabin.'

Presumably Stevens was not good with names!



Detailed view of one entry

Then, on 23 January 1849, we learn that 'John Wilson refused duty and using [*sic*] profane language'. How this act of indiscipline was treated is not recorded. There is also no recorded outcome to the following entry which was made on 10 March 1849 on the voyage from Table Bay to Adelaide:

'At 8p.m. went into the Pantry and found every thing in a most filthy state. Called C. Bust, Steward, to know the reason, when he replied with much abuse, telling me he could do his duty and did not care what be done with him. I might put him in irons if I liked.'

At Table Bay the *Sarah* took on two passengers, Mr. and Mrs. Merryweather. As soon as they were on board, the *Sarah* immediately weighed anchor and by evening 'the Lyon's Rump' was visible at a distance of 12 miles. This was Signal Hill, also known as 'the Lion's Rump', a landmark flat-topped hill in Cape Town. But, not for the first time, the weather turned dirty and, by midnight, no doubt to the Merryweathers' discomfort, the *Sarah* was 'pitching and labouring very much'.

The passengers were John Merryweather and his wife. In the *South Australian Gazette and Mining Journal* of 13 September 1849, John was described as 'recently arrived from England, via the Cape, to which colony he came a cabin passenger'. He took up the licence of the Bird-in-Hand, Dry Creek, an establishment which, against all the normal odds, he was still managing in 1852.

The log ends in mid-voyage, the last page having been stuck down to the cover. However the glue must have deteriorated over the years and tantalising doodles and calculations can be seen where it has become unstuck.

Our thanks go to Joan Powling for the opportunity to examine this extraordinary link with the past. Its placement in the State Library is wholly appropriate since it is, without doubt, a significant historical treasure.





## Unconsidered Trifles

On 31 December 1958, George Gibbs, State Member for Portland, rode an elephant bareback on a circuit of Port Fairy, in a race with the Mayor, Councillor Sam Ryan. The latter had wagered £20 that he would beat Gibbs, but lost the bet because he failed even to mount his elephant. The race opened the New Year's Eve Carnival. Later on, the £20 was donated to the Port Fairy Hospital Appeal.

On the same date, 40 years earlier, the Bank and Market Hotels closed following a decision by the Licences Reduction Board. This was despite the fact that the town had only one excess hotel according to the statutory ratio of hotels to population. The owner of the Bank Hotel, E. W. Powling, received £700 compensation (the equivalent today of over \$60,000), with the licensee, Richard Lewis, receiving £140. Powling had bought the hotel for £1500 on 29 June 1898. In the case of the Market Hotel, the owner, Emma Revell, received £575 and the licensee, her son, Edward Alfred Revell, just £50. It was reported that Powling represented the other three parties as well as himself.

In August 1969, *The Gazette* reported that, in the previous week, people in Port Fairy had been complaining about the cold and saying that 'perhaps the fact that icebergs have been floating about in nearby waters has been responsible'. Two icebergs had been clearly visible in Bridgewater Bay near Portland, and ships leaving Portland had been told to keep an eye out for them. However, they had since disappeared and wiser heads suggested that they were, in fact, large pieces of plastic thrown overboard by a passing ship!

Nearly forty people attended a meeting on 19 September 1941 to discuss the establishment of a Life Saving Club. Under the Chairmanship of the Mayor, Councillor W. H. Goldsmith, D. Kemp of Warrnambool, a District Superintendent of the Surf Life Saving Association, explained that the Association was a separate body from the Royal Life Saving Society. If a Club was started in Port Fairy, it would, with the existing clubs at Portland and Warrnambool, constitute a branch which would facilitate, say, procuring equipment. The only qualification necessary for full membership of a Surf Life Saving Club was a Bronze Medallion .... and being male. Women were able only to become associate members, which enabled them to attend social events and to go on trips!

*The Gazette* reported that, on 20 December 1934, a troupe of Maori entertainers had arrived at the Southcombe Park camping ground and that, in no time at all, rumours were circulating to the effect that they were Gypsies. In fact the group consisted of both Maoris and Australians and one of their number, a Mrs. Toohey, placed an advertisement in the *Gazette* threatening with prosecution anyone who suggested that they were Gypsies.

Arthur Beauchamp and Mary Stanley were married in Belfast on 10 June 1854. They were the grandparents of author Katherine Mansfield - born Katherine Mansfield Beauchamp - the prominent New Zealand short story writer who died of tuberculosis in 1923 at the age of 34.

On 16 May 1901, James Egan, a boarder at the White Hart Hotel (now the Victoria Hotel), smelled gas in his room and, removing one of the floorboards, was unwise enough to light a match to help him trace the source. A quantity of leaking gas had accumulated between the ceiling of the ground floor and the hotel's upper storey. The resultant explosion burnt Egan's face and hands, and scattered the plaster of the ceiling of the bar parlour in all directions. Egan was taken to hospital and treated for his injuries.

Almost exactly ninety years ago, on 29 March 1930, the people of Victoria were given the opportunity of deciding by referendum whether liquor licences throughout the state should be abolished. Voting was compulsory and non-voters faced a £2 fine - the equivalent of \$158 today. The population had been subject to an intensive six-month campaign by both the 'Yes' and 'No' parties. The 'Yes' protagonists set out to persuade voters that a world without alcohol would be a safer, healthier and less violent place. The 'No' party pointed to the American experience of abolition and the violence, bootlegging and gangsterism it had bred. The voting in the Port Fairy - Glenelg Subdivision showed 4290 'Yes' votes and 5492 electors voting 'No'. In Port Fairy itself the result was 408 'Yes' but 609 'No'. In some areas, such as Portland, Heywood and Byaduk, the 'Yes' votes outnumbered the 'Noes', but across the State the 'No' votes exceeded the 'Yeses' by 507,775 to 384,328.

On 30 July 1893, the wife of Mr. A. V. Suter J.P. of Tara, Port Fairy, woke about half an hour after going to sleep to find that her jaw was dislocated on both sides. Two doctors were summoned but were unable to relocate the bone. The Suters' son-in-law, Dr. Thompson of Melbourne, was then telephoned and, on the following day, the three doctors successfully placed the jaw back in position after administering chloroform to Mrs. Suter.

At the Borough Council Meeting on 21 February 1912, Councillor Alfred Noar asked the Mayor for his views on a particular practice. The Mayor made it clear that he was opposed to it, believed the Council should not allow it and considered it a disgrace to any community that did. He knew that Portland Council did permit it but added that, to their credit, the population there did not take advantage of it. The subject under discussion was, of course, mixed bathing.



## CROSSWORD

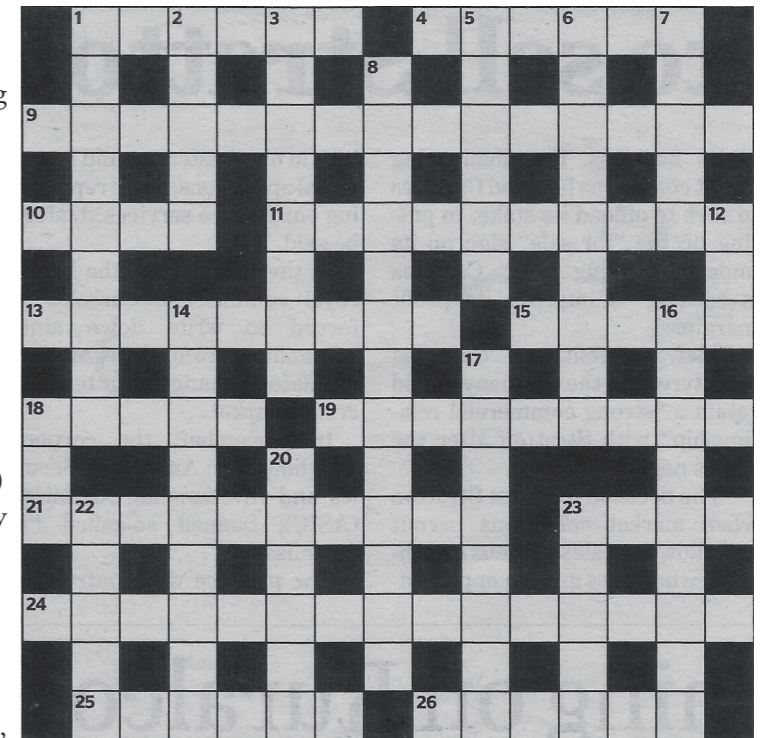
This cryptic crossword has 3 lights with a local flavour but the majority of the answers require no local or specialist knowledge. Solution in the next Newsletter. Before Christmas we shall be having a prize crossword, so practice now.

### Across

- 1 Mason 50 is an oily fish! (6)  
 4 Royal Academy chat about paper containing medicinal powder. (6)  
 9 Oliver St. John Gogarty went this way. (9, 6)  
 10 Alternative pose for Latin wealth. (4)  
 11 A goner sue UN? That's mean-spirited! (10)  
 13 Employee schedule indicates a fast fort. (5, 4)  
 15 Able to be a Western retinue, perhaps. (5)  
 18 Local flower. (5)  
 19 Tradeoff second Snipe? I was offended. (9)  
 21 Nautical link-up. (4-2-4)  
 23 Unaccompanied Napoleon? (4)  
 24 How Johnnie Ray went to the bank? (6,3,3,3)  
 25 Nat CGI taking up the post on a temporary basis. (6)  
 26 Moved like an ophidian. (6)

### Down

- 1 Cornwell's heroine loses her foot but, with love, becomes an Alpine climbing aid. (9)  
 2 Ask the French for the way to this beauty spot. (5)  
 3 Yuba riot causes death notice to be published. (8)  
 5 Transgression in the pig as a garden activity. (6)  
 6 On carrier at sea, I'm looking for a doubloon or something more obscure. (5,4)  
 7 One boyfriend gives another name to Trebbiano grape. (1,4)



- 8 Warning signal given to employees on the rise at local attraction. (9,4)  
 12 This girl may take you to court. (3)  
 14 Hairsplitter's concern. (4,5)  
 16 Group of drummers reported bargain prohibited. (5,4)  
 18 Short manuscripts. (3)  
 20 Pacific Islander will not nag. (6)  
 22 Hengist's brother said to be one who fools around. (5)  
 23 Talk and sound like a discoverer of the Nile's source. (5)

## Culinary Hints

'The want of cabbage, since the ravages of the *aphis brassica* destroyed the crops, has been partially supplied by the use of milk thistles, which, when boiled, are very good, and nearly similar in flavour to spinach. The young leaves of the salt bush have also been used, and when eaten, with the addition of a little vinegar, are not found to be altogether unpalatable. It has been proved by trial that the pink coloured pulpy fruit of the pig-face (*mesembryanthemum*) may be converted into a very good jelly or jam.'

*Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 November 1858  
 Quoted in *Select Documents in Australian History 1851 - 1900*. Selected and Edited by C.M.H. Clark

### USEFUL RECIPES

**A Good Plain Cake.** - Mix well together two breakfastcups of flour, two teaspoonfuls baking powder, a little salt and spice, and ¼ lb. sugar. Just warm ½ lb. butter, and whisk it to a cream, then mix in 6 ozs. sultanas, 2 ozs. currants, a few pieces sliced peel. Beat 3 eggs and half cupful milk together, and moisten the lot. Bake in quick oven thoroughly.

**Railway Pudding.** - One cup of flour, one cup suet, 1 teaspoonful baking powder, a little salt and sugar, 1 beaten egg in a cup of milk. Bake about half hour; serve with hot golden syrup; butter piedish.

*Port Fairy Gazette*, 5 June 1916

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