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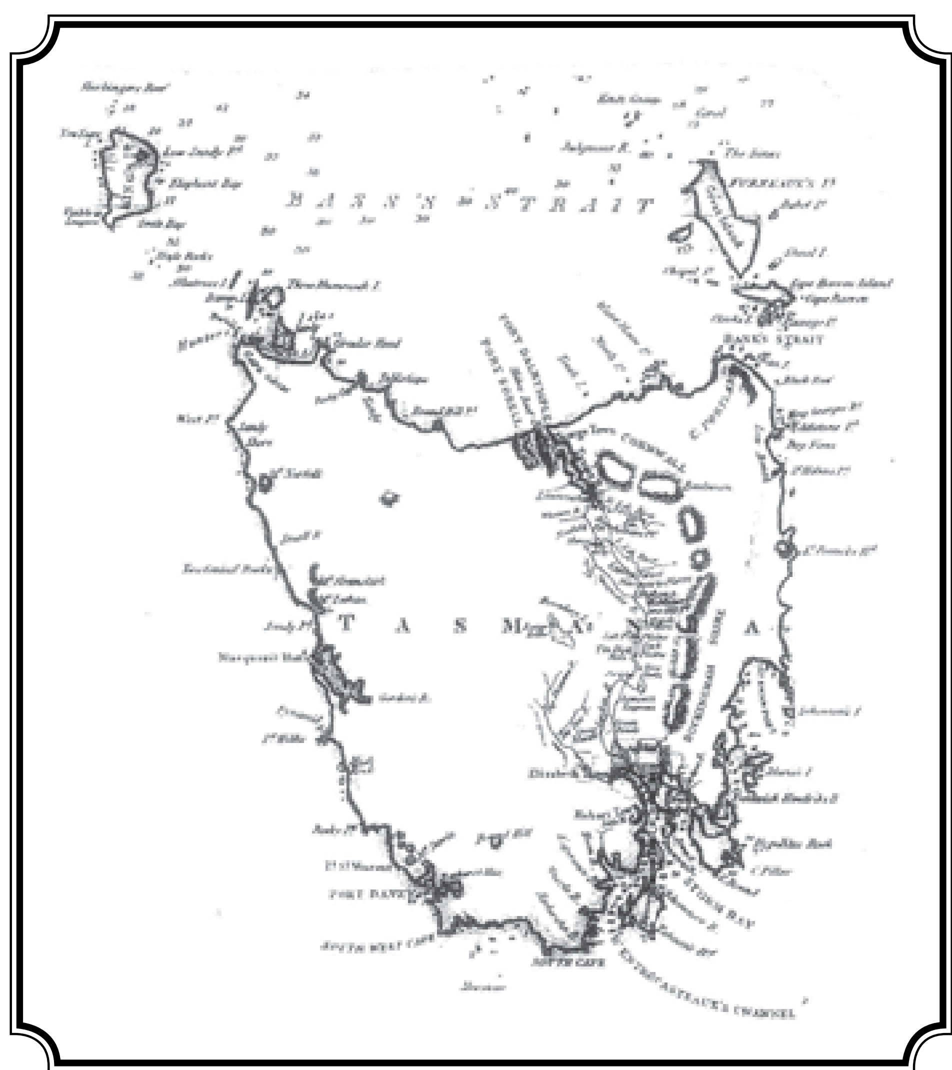

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Cover illustration: detail from the map in Godwin's
Emigrants' Guide to Van Diemen's Land … (1823)

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MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY ALPINE GRAZING STRUCTURES ON THE CENTRAL PLATEAU:

DOCUMENTING A NATIONAL HERITAGE

Simon Cubit, Kathryn Allen, David Parham and Ken Felton

Transhumant alpine grazing has been (and in some cases remains) a longstanding feature of Australian pastoralism. By definition, however, it is a very restricted land use. Only two percent of the Australian land mass rises above 1,000 metres and less than a third of one percent is alpine. It is restricted also in terms of ecological productivity. Shallow acidic soils and extremes of cold generate marginal grazing opportunities for sheep and cattle. Despite this, in New South Wales, Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania, grazing in the sub-alpine and alpine areas was keenly sought and at an early stage. In Victoria, for example, graziers reached the Omeo Plains in the 1830s, the Bogong High Plains in the 1850s and the East Gippsland area in the 1860s.[1] In Tasmania, graziers had sheep on the middle and upper reaches of the Central Plateau from as early as the late 1830s.[2]

The material heritage of high country grazing derives from the infrastructure graziers developed – typically, once security of tenure was obtained. In New South Wales, as the experienced observer Hueneke noted, homesteads that were occupied throughout the year were generally built at elevations below 1,600 metres while in Tasmania the equivalent level was around 1,000 metres.[3] Above these altitudes, in the highest and coldest regions, the graziers built shelter huts for use by stockmen during the warmer summer months while they tended their transhumant herds and flocks. Both types of structures have generally been well documented in popular texts and in the professional reports that began to emerge in the early 1980s. The focus of these studies, naturally enough, has tended to be extant structures, typically of relatively recent vintage. On the other hand, sites that relate to the very early period are absent from the record. There are a number of reasons for this. In relatively fertile and strategic locations (Coolamine Homestead in New South Wales is a good example) earlier structures have vanished, been overlain by later occupation or been incorporated into more recent buildings.[4] In other cases, typically the more ephemeral sites at high elevations, buildings have fallen prey to fire or the elements and in many cases, have been reduced to cryptic and ambiguous sites marked only by remnant stone chimneys or subtle changes in slope or soil profile. In these instances it is very difficult to identify pre–1850 sites with any certainty. While they may exist they are, to all intents and purposes, anonymous.

Recently, four mid-nineteenth century grazing sites have been identified in the alpine zone on Tasmanian's Central Plateau. Given their national rarity these sites have significant research potential. Their great value is in providing information about how European settlers, necessarily recent emigrants, perceived the landscape and responded to it. On a regional basis such information has the potential to provide the fine grained contextual detail that informs our understanding of the environmental, economic and political influences that shaped the pattern of high country grazing at that time.

1 H Stephenson, *Cattlemen and Huts of the High Plains*, Harry Stephenson, Victoria, 1980.
2 S Cubit, 'The Walls of Jerusalem: A Grazing History and an Alpine Heritage', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings*, vol. 45, no. 4, December 1998, pp. 203–14.
3 K Hueneke, *Huts of the High Country*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1983, p. xv.
4 Hueneke, p. 208.

Alpine grazing in Tasmania: the context

Grazing on the Central Plateau, according to Cubit, commenced in the mid–1820s.[5] It was prompted by a unique set of political and economic policies implemented prior to 1820 that rewarded enterprising British emigrants to Tasmania with free land grants and convict labour.[6] Up until 1820, land alienation in the new colony proceeded at a measured rate. New emigrants were offered small holdings, usually less than 100 acres with the land being used mainly for growing grain. In 1820, when the population of the colony was around 5,000, settlement was confined to relatively small tracts of land around the Derwent River in the south and around the head of the Tamar River in the north. Successful trial shipments of wool to England, however, triggered a demand for pastoral country and in 1820 and 1821 some 70,000 acres were alienated – an area greater than all land previously granted. In 1823, a massive 430,000 acres was alienated, the largest in a single year. Most grants were along the Macquarie, South Esk and Lake Rivers in the north, and the Clyde, Coal, Jordan and Derwent Rivers in the south. Parts of the east coast were also granted.

Driven by buoyant wool prices, and sheer opportunity, all the best land in the mild, low country areas of the midlands and the Derwent Valley was progressively occupied. In the early 1820s graziers began to look to the Central Plateau. By 1825, several settlers had located land on the southern and eastern edges. By the mid–1830s, when the European population was over 40,000, the pressure exerted was so great that the government surveyed and sold vast areas of the better country at lower and mid–plateau elevations. This process of alienation continued apace until around 1840, by which time much of the better sub-alpine country up to the 1,000 metre contour had been surveyed and purchased. Even then demand was not satisfied. While the 1,000 metre contour marked the effective limit of land alienation, graziers actively sought country above it for lease. In 1840 when the Government surveyor, James Calder, arrived at Nineteen Lagoons near Lake Augusta to divide the area into leasehold blocks, two graziers were already there: Pitt near Bull Hill at an altitude of 1,200 metres and Synnott near Double Lagoon at around 1,150 metres.[7]

It was in the 1840s that access to land on the Central Plateau began to have strategic value over and above simple land ownership and the opportunity to graze. The particular significance of the Central Plateau to graziers was not so much that it was, typically, well watered but that it provided green feed for stock long after unimproved native pastures at lower altitudes dried up over summer. Extensive land holdings on the Plateau, therefore, not only provided a relatively scarce grazing resource, but also provided that resource at a time when there was often no feed at lower altitudes. This was a critical piece of environmental learning and forced a shuffling of land holdings as graziers sought to obtain both high country and low country properties.[8] In this way a system of transhumance emerged where stock were routinely moved from the home pasture to the Plateau every summer and returned in autumn. In late 1847, for example, George Scott of Mt Morriston, near Ross, could report that he had sent his several thousand sheep to the Plateau, this 'being the usual plan now adopted by most of the settlers to save their home runs for lambing in the winter and spring'.[9]

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5 This section derives from Cubit, 1988.

6 These policies continued into the early 1830s.

7 J Calder, *Lots at Central Plains and Nineteen Lagoons*, Nomenclature Board of Tasmania, 1840, ref D7.

8 Transhumant grazing was a relatively common feature of rural life in Europe at the time. One could argue that the environmental learning described was simply a case of transference of an existing set of environmental understandings to a new setting.

9 G Crawford, 'The Scotts: Thomas, George and James', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings*, vol. 14, no. 1, March 1966, p. 12.

The push to the west

Some graziers failed to obtain the desired strategic access to high country runs and were forced further to the west into the alpine country in their search for unoccupied grazing areas. During the mid–1840s graziers began combing the areas around the Walls of Jerusalem, and further north to Lake Mackenzie, looking for suitable land.[10] These places were the highest, the most exposed and the most marginal parts of the Plateau. They were also effectively beyond the official frontier. While the Government began issuing leases and licences to graziers to occupy these areas from at least the mid–1840s, their locations were unknown to officials. The only knowledge they had of Lots 37 and 38 that were issued to Robert Officer in 1846, for instance, was that they were westward of the Nineteen Lagoons 'situated about 15 miles in a south–easterly direction from Barn Bluff'.[11] It was not until December 1848 that a surveyor, James Scott, was sent to map these areas. In discharging his commission, Scott mapped the Walls of Jerusalem, plotted the northward course of the Mersey River and then described the area around Lake Mackenzie in the north-west corner of the Plateau.[12] During this journey Scott documented the existence of two grazing runs on the far western side of the alpine Plateau. The first was in the Walls of Jerusalem and was represented by the hut of 'Mr Paterson' near Lake Sidon at a place Scott called Officers Marsh. The second was the hut and 'yard' of HM Howells near Lake Mackenzie.

Even as Scott was seeking to provide a cadastral basis for the management of these grazing leases, the demand was such that the Government continued issuing leases in these remote areas. The monthly returns of Crown land transactions published in the *Hobart Town Gazette* which, together with Scott's map, are the only official sources of information that shed any light on alpine grazing in this period, record the issue of a series of leases to Thomas Johnston, from 1848 to the early 1850s, at the River Mersey and in the vicinity of Lake Adelaide, all near the Walls of Jerusalem.[13]

For reasons that are currently unknown none of these graziers occupied their leases for very long. By the end of the 1850s the limited documentary evidence suggests that they all withdrew from the alpine zone, retreating to less elevated runs. While the leases remained available and the Government continued to advertise them in the *Gazette*, no one took them up. The alpine plains were, to all intents and purposes, abandoned. Of those who have written about grazing on the Central Plateau only Cubit has identified this rapid expansion and contraction.[14] Cubit, in what is to date the most detailed analysis of grazing in the alpine zone of the Central Plateau, in fact paints a picture of two waves of pastoralism – one commencing in the 1840s and finishing around 1860 and a second that began in the late 1880s and drew to a close in the 1970s.[15] Yet even he does not explain why this significant contraction took place prior to 1860. The explanation of this phenomenon is one of the objectives of this paper.

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10 Calder, for example, reported at least two groups that had travelled from the Nineteen Lagoons through to the Mersey and, possibly, the Forth River prior to 1845. Archives Office of Tasmania, CSO 24/24/579.

11 *Hobart Town Gazette*, 22 June 1847.

12 Lands and Surveys Department, Roll Plan 11F.

13 This, and subsequent information on leases and licences held within the Walls of Jerusalem and Lake Mackenzie area, is derived from a database developed by Simon Cubit which records leases and licences for the broader Upper Mersey area from the 1840s to the 1960s. Source data were the monthly returns published in the *Hobart Town* (later *Tasmanian Government) Gazette*.

14 The major works are: T Jetson, *The roof of Tasmania: a history of the Central Plateau*, Pelion Press, Launceston, 1989; D Collett, *Inventory of European historic structures on Tasmania's Central Plateau*, Occasional Paper No. 33, Parks and Wildlife Service, Tasmania, 1995; and RR Shepherd, 'The Central Plateau of Tasmania: a resource study and management plan', thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, University of Tasmania, Hobart, 1974.

15 Cubit, 1998.

The structures

Using Scott's map it has been possible to locate the sites of 'Paterson's Hut' near Lake Sidon and Howells' Hut and stockyard complex near Lake Mackenzie. The remains of both consist of standing stone chimneys. In the research and field work phase that led to the location of these particular sites, two other sites were also identified – a stone chimney several kilometres to the east of Howells' hut-site and another chimney not far from 'Paterson's Hut' at Wild Dog Creek in the Walls of Jerusalem. The former site, known to the local community as the Shepherd's Hut, is thought to be from the same era as Howells' Hut while the latter is assumed to have been built by, or for, Thomas Johnson, given the location of one of his leases in this area. There is, however, no documentary evidence to either identify the builders or confirm the dates of construction.

All four sites will be described and the information analysed with a view to gaining not only a better understanding of alpine grazing during the mid-nineteenth century but also of the origin and nature of the structures.

Patterson's Hut

'Paterson' was Frederick Patterson, the youngest son of Myles and Katherine Patterson. The Pattersons and six of their seven children arrived in Van Diemen's Land from Edinburgh in 1822. They were granted 2,000 acres on the River Shannon, north of the township of Bothwell, not long after and moved to the property which they named Hunterston in 1825. Despite Myles's death in 1828 the family prospered, establishing a considerable pastoral empire in Victoria.[16] During the 1840s when Frederick was managing *Hunterston* for his mother, he was forced to push his sheep as far west as the Walls of Jerusalem to locate unoccupied grazing land. That Scott mapped his hut in late 1848 is significant, in that Patterson's lease of Lot 95 of 500 acres did not begin officially until 1 May 1849. Patterson, it appears, had been occupying the land well before he had any legal right to do so. It is also interesting to note that Scott located Patterson's Hut at 'Officers Marsh', an area situated near the foot of Mount Jerusalem. Robert Officer, the grazier who in 1846 was granted a lease ambiguously located 'westward of the Nineteen Lagoons, situated about fifteen miles in a south-easterly direction from the Barn Bluff' was, in fact, Frederick Patterson's brother-in-law. Given the naming of the marsh and the relationship between the two men, it is highly likely that Officer had previously grazed the area. It is similarly conceivable that Patterson's Hut was originally built by Officer.

The appearance of Patterson's Hut on Scott's map in late 1848 is one of very few documented references to the structure from that time to the present. The only other reference, prior to its formal relocation and documentation in 2003, was a file note by a Parks and Wildlife Service ranger who identified some 'structural remains square in shape, low rock walls or foundations' while walking near Lake Sidon in 1990.[17] The remains of Patterson's Hut sit on a hillside shelf on the northern bank of a small glaciated valley about a kilometre north-west of Mount Jerusalem at an elevation of about 1,200 metres. The site consists of the remains of a freestone chimney around 1.5 metres high and 2.4 metres wide, with side walls extending at right angles from the back wall for a distance of around 1.5 metres (Figure 1). The chimney is built of local stone. Large rocks were used as a foundation on which progressively smaller rocks were placed to create a tapering effect from the ground upwards.

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16 JO Randall, *The pastoral Pattersons: the history of Myles Patterson and his descendants, 1822 to 1976*, Queensberry Hill Press, Carlton Victoria, 1977.

17 See correspondence from MR Garner to World Heritage Area Archaeologist, 6/8/1990 in Department of Tourism, Parks, Heritage and the Arts, Tasmanian Historic Archaeological Site Catalogue, Site number 8114: 045.

Figure 1: Patterson's Hut, 2003. Photo: David Parham

It is not possible to estimate the size of the hut footprint as the site is heavily vegetated. It is likely to have been a small, single roomed, timber structure although it must be said that there is no current evidence, physical or otherwise, to confirm the structural use of timber. It may, for example, have been a canvas structure. No tree stumps, particularly in the copse of pencil pine between Lakes Sidon and Thor, have yet been identified. No other related artifacts were located in the vicinity.

One of the striking features of this site is its location. While it offers commanding views up and down the valley it is exposed to the prevailing winds and has no convenient access to firewood and water. What is also remarkable about this location is that not more than a kilometre away in Jaffa Vale there is a much higher-quality site with more abundant grassland, significantly more firewood and much better shelter. That Patterson (or Officer before him) chose not to locate there, suggests that the Vale may already have been occupied by a currently unnamed and unknown individual. There may well, therefore, be another hut ruin that remains to be located.

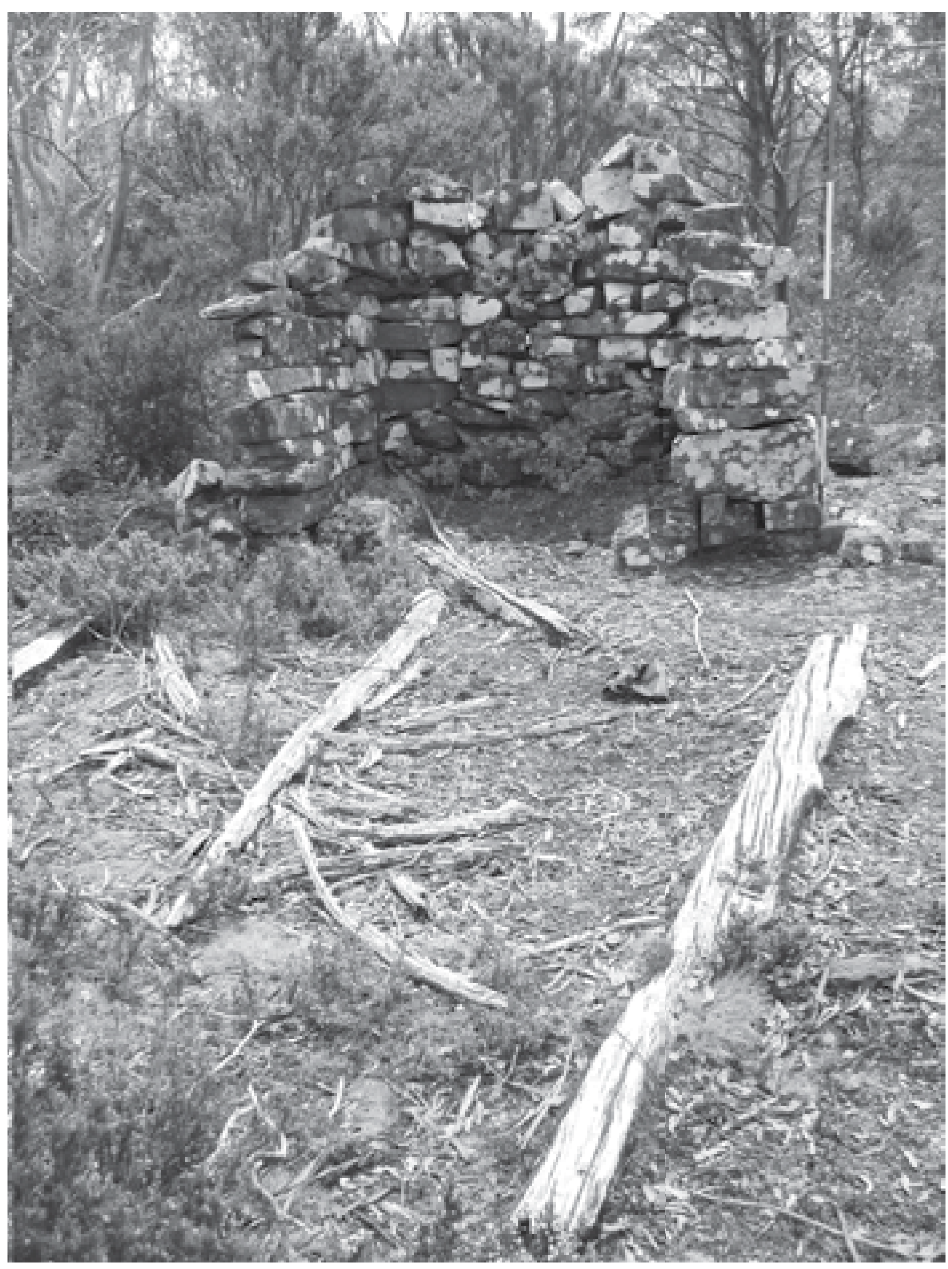

Figure 2: Thomas Johnston's Hut, 2003. Photo: David Parham.

Thomas Johnston's Hut

Little is known of Thomas Johnston. He is thought to be Thomas Johnston of Broadmarsh near Hobart, one of a number of people who, in the late 1830s, purchased land in the 'New Country' around the Great Pine Tier just north of present day Bronte Park. This was run country, a mixture of grassy woodlands, forest and open plains, around 800- to 900-metres in elevation. Over time Johnston acquired a considerable holding in the area. By 1860, for example, he owned 4,360 acres and leased 6,480 acres.[18] By the 1840s, at least, this land would have been used for summer grazing with stock being driven back to his lowland holding at Broadmarsh for the winter and spring. Johnston's holdings at the Great Pine Tier were bounded by the Pine River, a river rising in Lake Ball in the Walls of Jerusalem less than thirty kilometres away. The leases he formally acquired in the Mersey valley (Lot 102 in 1848 and Lot 238 in 1851) and Lot 194 around Lake Adelaide in 1851 were thus quite close and convenient to his existing operations.

The remains of what is thought to be Johnston's Hut are on an unnamed, north-facing hill at an elevation of about 1,150 metres with commanding views over Wild Dog Creek. It is a location that offers some protection from the predominant westerly winds, access to pencil pine (*Athrotaxis cupressoides*) for building purposes and firewood, and a source of drinking water. Built on an extensive sheet of dolerite, it consists of the ruins of a hut and an associated feature that may have served as a dog kennel (Figure 2).

The hut remains consist of a substantial lichen-encrusted, dry-stone chimney and some remnant structural timbers that are scattered on the ground within the footprint of the structure. An east–west trending line of stone discernible in leaf litter approximately 7.5 metres south of the outer edge of the chimney butt, appears to mark the position of the end wall indicating that the structure was rectangular with its long axis aligned from north to south. The internal living space (calculated by excluding the fireplace from the reckoning) is estimated to have measured somewhere in the vicinity of 5 metres x 2.65 metres, making it almost certainly a single roomed structure.

The most enduring feature is the chimney which survives to a height of 1.72 metres. This has been fashioned out of large, angular, dolerite rocks set in squared formation to 0.70 metre, at which point a curve has been introduced to the corners of the outer ends through use of smaller, rounded pieces of stone. This technique allowed clear definition of the internal fireplace and then a characteristic tapering to accommodate the chimney, probably resulting in a 'beehive' like appearance when viewed from the exterior. The size of the larger blocks forming the chimney would have required the strength of two people to collect and set in place. The position and dimensions of collapsed and decaying structural timbers – probably pencil pine – suggests something of their original function. Elements from the roof structure (including the ridge pole, rafters and purlins) and the side wall plates appear to be represented. A heavily corroded 'billy' was located near the hut fireplace. It is unlikely to have survived from the original phase of occupation (or even from its place of discard) given the passage of time. It is possible that the hut was maintained and used for an extended period by later visitors to the Walls of Jerusalem. This would also account for the survival of structural timbers.[19] A small, vaguely square stone structure with three sides intact to an average height of 0.50 metre is situated in a natural depression fifteen metres north-west of the hut. The construction uses a naturally occurring dolerite slab as its northern 'wall'. The size of the structure suggests it may have served as a dog kennel. However, this is by no means certain.

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18 Land in the Parish of Wainfleet and Gainsborough, County of Lincoln, Assessment Rolls, *Hobart Town Gazette*, 1860.

19 Structural timbers were located at only two huts: Johnston's and Shepherd's. In both cases, the timber appears to be pencil pine. Does the existence of these timbers at these locations suggest that different timbers, and those that decay more quickly, were used at Howells and/or Patterson's Huts? Evidence to explore this hypothesis is not currently available.

Around one hundred metres west-south-west of the hut is a copse of pencil pine with a significant number of axe-cut stumps.[20] The weathered appearance of these stumps and the remnant remains of pencil pine structural elements at the hut site suggest that this copse may have been a source of timber at some stage. A number of cores and sections were taken from these stumps, and other adjacent dead pencil pine stems, in an attempt to seek a date for when the trees may have been cut. The use of dendrochronology to date built structures is a much practiced technique in some parts of the world but has had little, if any, application in Australia. Unfortunately, in this instance the ultimate accuracy of the ring counts was compromised by the loss of the outer layers of wood through weathering. Nonetheless, the samples yielded some approximate dates not inconsistent with felling events in the 1850s.

Howells' Hut

In 1824 Humphrey Morgan Howells and his wife Anne arrived in Van Diemens Land from Wales and were given an initial grant of 600 acres that they located on the Shannon River, north of Bothwell. In the 1840s the Howells sought additional summer grazing for their stock. Presumably unable to obtain access to suitable areas close to their home property, the Howells were forced to go way to the west of the Plateau. The *Hobart Town Gazette* recorded the issue of leases for Lots 65, 81 and 91 beyond the western edge of the Plateau deep down in the valley of the Mersey River to Humphrey and his oldest son John from late 1847 to early 1850.[21]

The Howells appear to have abandoned the Mersey valley around 1850 in favour of another site high in the alpine zone at Lake Mackenzie in the north-west of the Plateau. In March 1850, for example, Humphrey Howells obtained leases for Lots 217 and 218 of 1,000 and 500 acres respectively. As with the Mersey site it is likely that he had been in occupation for some time previously for in May 1850, when Scott surveyed the site, Howells already had erected a hut and a yard. Scott also mapped Howells's stock route heading off to the east, and recorded some local names for a number of geographical features in the area. The hut itself, while labelled 'Mr Howells' by Scott was called the Balmoral Hut, as it sat on Balmoral Plains to the north of a lake called Lake Mackenzie, which in turn was downstream of a lake called Lake Balmoral. These Scottish rather than Welsh associations are interesting, suggesting either that the Howells were not the first Europeans on the site or perhaps that a Scottish stockman was in residence when Scott visited! On his map Scott also marked the general location of the two leases, with a lot of 1,000 acres (presumably Lot 217) west of the hut and another lot of 500 acres (presumably Lot 218) east of the hut. The *Gazette* records that Lot 217 was held by Humphrey Howells from the beginning of April 1850 through to the end of March 1851. He did not hold it long because from October 1853 to September 1855 it was held by JL Dowling. Dowling, in turn, was supplanted in 1856 by John Howells who held it until at least 1857. In the same year John Howells also took control of Lot 218, this time from his father, which he similarly held to at least 1857.

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20 Pencil pine, a Tasmanian endemic, is the obvious timber of choice for huts on the Central Plateau. Reasonably common in the alpine zone, it is strong, but light. Small trees provide straight poles for framing, while shingles for cladding and roofing can be split from suitable trees. The eucalypts found at such altitudes have far inferior properties for building and are rarely used for construction purposes, although those species that grow at lower altitudes are.

21 An interesting observation about these leases is that none of them coincided. The lease of Lot 65 was from 1/11/47 to 31/10/48; Lot 81 was from 1/2/48 to 30/4/49; and Lot 91 was from 1/4/49 to 31/5/50. This suggests that leases may only have been sought to provide minimum legal legitimacy for a wider occupation of Crown land, perhaps to deter competitors. Thomas Johnston, for example, had a lease (Lot 102) in the same area from 1/5/48 to 30/4/49, a lease which was taken over by Alex Clarke in December 1850. When Scott surveyed this area in December 1848 and January 1849, he found 'Mr Howells Hut' with a garden nearby on one of their leases together with a clearly marked stock route leading to it, suggesting perhaps that Howells had occupied this site for some time prior to applying for a lease.

After this Howells and JL Dowling, and all references to Lots 217 and 218, disappear from the lease records but not from local stories and traditions. In 1902 the remains of Howells' Hut were pointed out to photographer Steven Spurling by his local guide whilst enroute from Lake Mackenzie to Devils Gullet. The hut, he recounted, 'was a relic of the days, now many years ago, when this land was taken up by Messrs Howell of Bothwell, to run sheep on, but, owing to its cold and exposed condition, was afterwards abandoned'.[22] The location of the structure was known to the local community for generations and was first officially noted in 1992 when archaeologist David Collett inspected it and created a file on it for the Parks and Wildlife Service.[23]

The remains of Howells' Hut are located north-west of Lake Mackenzie near Yeates Lagoon, at an altitude of 1,140 metres. They sit on an elevated plain close to water and sheltered from the westerly airstream by a nearby low cliff-line about two metres high, topped with eucalypt woodland. Compared with the other structures considered in this review it is a complex site, consisting of a substantial, partly intact fireplace and chimney, five small stone features that are assumed to have been used as dog kennels and other stone features that are likely to have been associated with sheep pens. The hut-site consists of a lichen-encrusted dolerite rubble chimney (2.2 metres high, 3.9 metres wide and 2.7 metres deep) sitting at one end of an area of approximately 6.8 metres by 2.8 metres, covered in dolerite flagstones (Figure 3). A low dry-stone wall extending along one edge of the building platform adds to the definition of the site. Other than stone, there is no evidence to suggest other materials that might have been used in the construction of the hut. Local timber is presumed to have been used, with pencil pine the species of

Figure 3: Howells' Hut, 2003. Photo: David Parham.

22 *Weekly Courier*, March 12 1902, p. 2005.

23 Department of Tourism, Parks, Heritage and the Arts, Tasmanian Historic Archaeological Site Catalogue, Site number 8114: 148. See also Collett, 1995, p. 34.

obvious choice. Yet no obvious source of this timber has been located close to the hut site.

A corroded tin dish (possibly once enamelled), a tin riddled with shot holes and a fragment of a cast iron cooking pot had been collected and placed near the chimney by previous visitors. These artifacts have a typically broad date-range and may or may not be associated with the Howells's occupation of the site. Five small stone features, either completely free-standing or opportunistically incorporating natural boulders or outcrops, appear to have provided shelter for working dogs. Three out of five structures have collapsed. Opportunistic use also appears to have been made of the long, low cliff-line flanking the hut and extending for a considerable distance in a northerly direction. In one location it appears that use has been made of a naturally occurring enclosure within the cliff-line and in another a low indentation in the cliff has been purposefully filled with rocks to raise its height. Given that Scott mapped a yard in this location in 1850 it is presumed that these features were part of a stockyard complex where the cliff-line was used as a natural fence. The other components of the stockyard, presumably wooden, were not seen although traces may survive in the soil. The presence of dog kennels is of interest. Found at this, and possibly at Thomas Johnston's hut, they suggest the employment of working dogs although their use as companion animals cannot be ruled out. The 'kennels', however, are quite small pointing to the use of a dog of slight stature, much smaller, for example, than a kelpie.

The Shepherd's Hut

The Shepherd's Hut has no recorded history. It did not appear on Scott's 1850 map (although its site is within the area covered by the map) suggesting a construction date after that time. It is located on a south-westerly-facing slope, on exposed and open

Figure 4: Shepherd's Hut, 2003. Photo: David Parham.

moorland at an elevation of around 1,170 metres above sea level. While it is a site that affords expansive views it is also open to the full fury of the westerly winds.

The remains of the hut, well known to the local community, were first recorded officially by archaeologist David Collett in 1992.[24] They comprise a large stone chimney and some structural timbers with an apparent footprint somewhere in the vicinity of 7.8 metres by 3.8 metres (Figure 4). The site is poorly drained, slopes from north to south and, judging from the surviving evidence, minimal site preparation was carried out prior to construction. When recorded in spring 2003, water was running across it. The chimney has partially collapsed. However, the *in situ* remains suggest that it was a rounded structure with large stones used to create a foundation for the fireplace and thin sheets of dolerite used in corbelling to create the taper for the chimney. Along with the partially extant chimney, some pencil pine structural timbers have survived the passage of time, notably the bottom plate to the rear wall and a large, 3.5 metre long, timber spar on the southern side of the structure. The orientation of the spar, the presence of a circular depression (probably a post hole) beside the chimney and notches cut into the spar suggest that the spar was a post that once braced the chimney on the lower side, with the notches allowing a closer bond with the stone forming the chimney. If this was the case, the 3.5 metre length of the post is probably indicative of the full height of the hut on the lower southern side.

In the design and construction of the Shepherd's Hut fireplace and chimney, there are some significant similarities to that of Howells' Hut. Both consist of an elevated oven-like fireplace over which a corbelled chimney has been built. These similarities, together with the lease history of the Balmoral Plains, suggest that the Shepherd's Hut may well have been built by the Howells during the period, 1853 to 1855, when they lost control of Lot 217 and their Balmoral Hut to JL Dowling. Such an explanation would account for the fact that the Shepherd's Hut does not appear on Scott's 1850 map yet Howells' Hut does.

The pencil pine groves that occur in bands a short distance from the hut site, contain many live trees and a great number of stumps indicative of the value of this tree as the only significant construction and firewood resource. The pine also had value as fencing material. Two-hundred metres to the west of the hut are the remains of a long wooden fence currently around 600 metres in length.[25] Close inspection of the fence reveals a probable original length of closer to 800 metres, extending from Balmoral Creek in a north-westerly direction to a rocky outcrop. It was constructed from pencil pine cut in the nearby groves and dragged to the site, where branches and trunks were presumably laid on top of one another forming a barrier for sheep. Generally speaking three metres of pencil pine were cut for every metre of fence, suggesting a very significant harvesting of some hundreds of trees with a total length of around 2.4 kilometres.

Like the Shepherd's Hut, this fence has no documented history. It did not appear on Scott's map despite the fact that Howells' stock-route, which was mapped, passes through it. Its location on the eastern edge of the Balmoral Plains suggests that it was a boundary fence and thus had a relationship to the use of the Plains as a grazing resource. If it was built to separate the Dowling and Howells' flocks why was the Shepherd's Hut built on the Dowling lease? The most likely explanation is that the fence was the external boundary of Lot 218 and that another fence, yet unknown and to the west, existed to separate the two flocks.

Given the significant evidence of the use of pencil pine for building the hut and for the construction of the deadwood fence, core and sections were taken from stumps

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24 Department of Tourism, Parks, Heritage and the Arts, Tasmanian Historic Archaeological Site Catalogue, Site number 8114:123.

25 Department of Tourism, Parks, Heritage and the Arts, Tasmanian Historic Archaeological Site Catalogue, Site number 8114: 124. The fence was also first recorded by Collett in 1992, again after being directed to it by local people.

and from logs associated with the fence in an effort to date the structures. Again, this use of dendrochronology failed to yield conclusive data because of the significant abrasion of the outside layer of the dead timbers by ice and wind over many decades. While estimated date sequences from the seventeenth through to the nineteenth centuries were obtained, it was not possible to obtain reliable dates for when the timber was harvested.

Conclusions

Two key questions were posed in framing this paper. One related to an analysis of the structures themselves. What information might they provide about the environmental, economic and political influences that shaped the pattern of high country grazing when they were constructed? The other was why the alpine plains were apparently abandoned from around 1860 until the 1890s.

The evidence suggests that, with the possible exception of Howells' Hut, the sites were rudimentary structures that could be built in a few days by a couple of people. Site selection appeared to favour visibility across the surrounding countryside more than access to shelter, firewood and water. The result was that most were built in poor locations, especially in respect of shelter. Half-a-century later the stockmen who once again put stock back on the alpine plains chose much more sheltered locations for their huts. What prompted the change? It may be that earlier graziers wanted visual contact at all times with their sheep, fearful perhaps of predation by the thylacine or 'wild dogs' that the naming of Wild Dog Creek in the Walls of Jerusalem by 1848 suggests. Could flocks then have been penned at night? The evidence at this stage is equivocal. There were certainly yards at Howells' Hut and there may have been some associated with the deadwood fence near the Shepherd's Hut. None, however, have been identified near Patterson's or Thomas Johnston's huts.

The areas in which the huts are situated provided marginal grazing opportunities, by today's standard. Even allowing for some environmental variability over time, these were places of low ecological productivity determined by a cold and wet climate and skeletal soils. They were also remote and access required long supply routes across difficult and rocky country. For the Howells, a movement of stock from Lake Mackenzie to their home property north of Bothwell may have taken a week to complete. For the last couple of days of this journey it is highly unlikely that wheeled vehicles such as bullock drays or horse drawn carts could have been used.

Why then did graziers choose to lease such country? In asking this question it must first be understood that 'low country' home properties at the time were almost completely undeveloped, with stock feeding almost exclusively on native grasslands and in grassy woodlands. In summer, in particular, these pastures provided limited nutrition. In this context it is undoubtedly the case that graziers maintained their alpine runs because they provided a scarce resource that was highly valued. The fact that such great effort was expended to access such a marginal resource, and that there was active competition for this resource, suggests either that graziers desperately needed the resource to maintain their flocks through the summer or that very high prices were being obtained for wool.

Why were the alpine pastures of the Walls of Jerusalem and Lake Mackenzie abandoned by the late 1850s, not to be re-occupied for some decades? Three factors may have some relevance. The first is economic. Given the marginal nature of transhumant grazing in the alpine zone it is possible that the clearance of the runs was due to economic factors. There is significant evidence to support such a view. Gold was discovered in Victoria in the 1850s, leading to a significant population shift from Tasmania. Transportation to Tasmania also ceased in the 1850s closing off what had traditionally been a cheap source of labour. Beginning in the 1860s Tasmania entered a long economic depression that was only relieved, toward the end of the century, with

the discovery and exploitation of the mineral wealth on Tasmania's west coast. In this context, it is perhaps unremarkable that graziers pulled back from their most marginal operations to concentrate on the more profitable.

A second possible cause is climate change. While Tasmania is currently in a relatively stable interglacial period, subtle climatic fluctuations are not uncommon. Tree-ring records from 900 to 1988, for example, reveal oscillations in temperature on 20 to 50 year cycles and point to an especially cold period between 1880 and 1920.[26] Could there have been a climatic event, regional in scope, in the early 1850s that singularly, or in concert with other forces, forced graziers from the alpine area? A severe frost, for example, killed thousands of hectares of forest on low-lying land on the southern edge of the Central Plateau near Bronte Park in 1837.[27] The chronology that was developed from the pencil pine cores and sections taken from Wild Dog Creek and Lake Mackenzie – while confirming the existence of a series of hard years from the 1890s to about 1915 – did not, however, reveal any significant adverse climatic events in the 1850s.

A third factor for consideration is liver-fluke disease or fasciolosis. The liver fluke *Fasciola hepatica* is an introduced parasite to which sheep have a particularly low level of resistance. Sheep get fluke from grazing in marshy wet areas where freshwater snails are present to act as intermediate hosts. The sheep ingest the juvenile fluke whereupon they migrate to the liver, destroying liver tissue and blocking bile ducts. Typical symptoms are weight loss, anaemia and sudden death, particularly in summer and autumn.[28] With its extensive marshy areas and populations of freshwater snails, the Central Plateau has a history of active fluke infestations that have caused significant mortality in sheep. Prior to 1916 in Tasmania there were no means of treating sheep for fluke. After that time carbon tetrachloride was used as a drench, with qualified success. The dominant control measure employed by graziers was fencing off lagoons and marshes.[29] As late as the early 1970s, fluke remained the major source of stock loss reported by graziers with sheep on the Plateau. In 1971, a particularly bad year for fluke, one grazier lost nearly twenty per cent of one flock sent to the Plateau for summer grazing.[30] The prevalence of liver fluke, then, may have played an important role in prompting the abandonment of the alpine runs in the 1850s. Certainly, when stock were reintroduced to these areas in the 1890s they tended to be the more fluke-resistant cattle.

Consideration of these various factors, points to the probable contributory influence of economic factors and fluke in forcing a desertion of the mountain plains in the 1850s. Further research, especially in relation to economic conditions in Tasmania in the mid– to late–1850s, is needed to further test these hypotheses. While the reasons for the abandonment may remain to be fully explored, it is clear that the four sites documented in this study are of considerable cultural significance. Their rarity is an obvious factor contributing to this significance, but what is perhaps of equal importance is the relative integrity of the sites. They remain fundamentally undisturbed in a landscape that for all intents and purposes is a very close analogue of the one the stockmen faced a century-and-a-half ago. The continued remoteness of these sites, the harsh climate of the alpine plateau and the marginal nature of the grazing, then and now, provide an enduring point of comparison between the economic conditions of the 1840s and 1850s and those of today.

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26 WD Jackson, 'The Tasmanian Environment', in JB Reid, RS Hill, MJ Brown and MJ Hovenden, eds, *Vegetation of Tasmania*, Flora of Australia Supplementary Series Number 8, Australian Biological Resources Study, 1999, p. 19.

27 JE Calder, 'Some account of the country between Hamilton and the Frenchman's Cap', *Hobart Town Courier*, 21 September, 1850.

28 J Fyffe, 'A review of Liver Fluke Disease', http://www.bloodlines.undaware.com.au/vetdoc5.html, 10 August 2004.

29 Personal communication with grazier Ian Downie, 5 June 1995.

30 Shepherd, 1974, p. 63.

HORSEMAN OR NO HORSEMAN: CIRCUS IN VAN DIEMEN'S LAND, 1847 TO 1851

Mark St Leon

Circus was one of the many manifestations of contemporary British culture transplanted to the new Australian colonies. Individual ropewalkers, gymnasts and equestrians appeared in New South Wales as early as the 1830s while complete circus programs were given as early as 1847 in Launceston. In Australia, as in most countries, circus has been an element, at times an important element, in the mosaic of its popular culture. The history of Ashton's, one of the world's oldest circuses – and certainly Australia's oldest – can be traced to the frenetic equestrian activity in Van Diemen's Land in the late 1840s.[1]

In this paper, I will explain the origins of circus in Australia during the period 1847 to 1851; outline the career of its main protagonist, Robert Avis Radford; and illuminate the origins of Ashton's Circus.

Oral history

Despite the oral traditions of the Australian circus, documented sources are few. The London and Launceston origins of Australian circus, as well as names and dates, had largely passed from living memory by the 1970s when the first interviews were conducted with elderly circus people, already two or three generations removed from the people and events of its formative period. When questioned over the circus origins of their respective families, members of the Perry, Sole and St Leon families gave similar responses.

> No, I wouldn't know. That's as far back as I can remember. My father used to tell me about starting from the Northampton Downs Hotel [but nothing else].[2]
>
> There were a lot of arguments as to who had the first circus in Australia but it never worried us actually. We been [*sic*] in the business long enough. We were born in it.[3]
>
> [Dad] never talked to us boys much. Mum never even told us ... No, never used to tell us anything.[4]

In fact, the origins of each of these circus families can be traced to the equestrian activity taking place in and around Launceston in the late 1840s.

The Ashton family can also trace its involvement in Australian circus to Launceston, and as far back as 1848. Interviewed in 1976, the proprietor of Ashton's Circus, Douglas Ashton, a great-grandson of the founder of this famous Australian company, felt it was 'good to know that Ashton's Circus has been going ... between 130 and 140 years'.[5] However, a firm account of the origins of his family's circus in Australia at that time was lacking. The casual claims made in the Ashtons' promotional material during the 1960s and 1970s that the circus was 'founded in 1832' and was 'the oldest' in Australia defy substantiation. Nevertheless, writers have uncritically accepted these assertions as facts.[6] The first circus under the name of Ashton came into existence, albeit briefly, in Launceston in 1851. Ashton's Circus was thus not the first circus in Australia

1 Following the proclamation of responsible government in October 1855, on 1 January 1856 the name of Van Diemen's Land was changed to Tasmania.
2 M Perry, in M St Leon, *Australian circus reminiscences*, the author, Sydney, 1984, p. 192.
3 M Lindsay, in St Leon, 1984, p. 117.
4 A St Leon, in St Leon, 1984, p. 91.
5 D Ashton, in St Leon, 1984, p. 311.
6 C Higham, 'Death of the circus?' in *The Bulletin*, 27 July 1963, p. 18.

but it was among the earliest. The two Ashton family circuses that are operational in 2008 carry some 157 years of almost continuous history behind them. It would be fair to say that today they are the oldest circuses in the English-speaking world and among the oldest in the world.

Golden Ashton

According to his 1889 death certificate, 'James Henry Ashton' – the founder of Ashton's Circus – was born about the year 1819 at a place called 'Catchutn' in Essex. The document further states that he was the son of Golding [*sic*] Ashton, a circus proprietor.[7] A descendant described James Henry as coming from a family of 'English gypsies', a term that is considered to refer to itinerant tinkers rather than gypsies in the ethnic sense.[8] Other sources tell us that James Henry is supposed to have performed in his father's circus 'as a clog dancer' and that he spent a period as a stable boy at Greensted Hall, Essex.[9] An obituary states that he served an equestrian apprenticeship from the time he was able to 'cross a horse' in the circuses of Bell and Batty which travelled the English counties.[10]

We know now that the true name of James Henry Ashton was Golden Ashton, and that he was baptised at St Andrew's Church of England at Rochford, near Colchester, on 19 March 1820, the eldest son of the six children of Golden [*sic*] Ashton and his wife Charlotte, nee Hardy.[11] The senior Golden's occupation is given as 'tinker' or 'travelling tinker' in the baptismal entries of each of his children. Since each was baptised at Rochford, the family, although a 'travelling' one, does not appear to have moved beyond the vicinity of this town.

Golding Ashton, later known as James Ashton (Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, PIC ACC 5250, Mark St Leon Collection.)

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7 Registrar-General, Queensland, Deaths, 1889/#407: James Henry Ashton, at Gladstone. As the name 'Catchutn' does not appear in contemporary maps or other records, it is possible that the spelling is a mistranscription of either Latchingdon, a village near Rochford, or Colchester, both in Essex.

8 F Perry, notes from conversation, c. 1976.

9 N Fernandez, *Circus saga*, Ashton's Circus, Sydney, 1971, p. 15; J Cannon with M St Leon, *Take a drum and beat it: the story of the astonishing Ashtons, 1848–1990s*, Tytherleigh Press, Sydney, 1997, p. 59.

10 *Queenslander*, 26 January 1889.

11 Essex Record Office, Rochford Baptismal Register, D/P 129/1/7. Variations on the spelling of 'Golden' have been noted in various records, such as 'Golding', 'Goulding', 'Guldon' and 'Goulder'.

What was a tinker?

> 'Tinker' is a title of baffling vagueness that could be applied to any mender of pots and pans but actually referred to a particular class of nomad ... Typically tinkers were gypsy-like in their habits and, while not necessarily dark-skinned, were gypsy-like in appearance, though their manner of life was more squalid ... In addition to their aptitude for rough metal work they had their own lore and customs ... There is one strong clue as to where the tinkers came from. Their characteristic talk among themselves was Shelta, a complex jargon that took in a number of Irish Gaelic words and corruptions ... Some of these ... nomads crossed into England ... Fairly clearly in Victorian times, these people of Irish origin formed at least the hard core of vagrant tinkers ... [They were] among the very lowest and roughest of the wanderers.[12]

The junior Golden would have grown up tending the horses of a tinker's wagon and was probably riding at a very early age. The senior Golden died at Rochford on 11 April 1833, probably leaving the junior Golden as the family's primary breadwinner. In 1836, the younger Golden was tried and convicted at the Essex Assizes for stealing a brooch and sentenced to transportation to Van Diemen's Land for 14 years.[13] On 14 May 1837 he was landed from the *Frances Charlotte* at Point Puer, near Port Arthur, along with other boy convicts. These were 'bewildered tykes, many of them hardened in theft and flashness'.[14] The boy convicts received instruction on the voyage to the extent that 'each boy could read when he disembarked at Point Puer, although very few had been able to [read] at the beginning of the voyage'.[15] Golden's occupation on arrival was described as 'sweep, tin man and brazier'.[16] Some years after his death, Ashton's speaking style was remembered as 'brigandish' that featured 'a little Romany articulation and etymology a la St Giles', descriptions not inconsistent with tinker and boy convict associations.[17]

Early in 1840, Golden was placed with Mr Thomas Reiby, the owner of a landholding named *Entally*[18]. If already a good rider, he may have worked for Reiby as a drover.[19] He was released from servitude in 1844, well before the expiry of his 14-year sentence, and was recommended for conditional pardon in 1846. In Hobart Town at this time, 'numerous gaffs flourished on the Derwent'.[20] In any of these 'gaffs' Ashton could have further developed and refined his equestrian skills, and found new friends and mentors. In December 1848, Ashton first comes to our attention in the context of circus, when Robert Avis Radford presented him as the 'British horseman, Mr Ashton' in his Royal Amphitheatre in Hobart.[21] From the foregoing, we may deduce that: Golden Ashton was imbued with the elements of horsemanship before departing England; as a boy convict, he may have been given the opportunity to work with horses or even improve his

12 K Chesney, *The Victorian underworld*, Penguin Books, Melbourne, 1972, pp. 92–93. Shelta was a 'complex jargon' that embraced Irish Gaelic words and corruptions and 'inversions and cryptic devices typical of the jargons of outcast, oppressed and delinquent groups'.

13 *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 1 July 1836.

14 R Hughes, *The fatal shore: a history of the transportation of convicts to Australia, 1788–1868*, The Folio Society, London, 1998, p. 377.

15 J Slee, 'Every child', *Magazine of the Australian Early Childhood Association*, vol. 9 no. 2, 2003, p. 16.

16 Archives Office of Van Diemen's Land, CON 18/8, 31/2, Golden Ashton, convict. Some Ashton descendants and some researchers disdain the thought of a convict as an Ashton ancestor but an impartial reading of the available records cannot suggest otherwise.

17 *Bulletin*, 26 December 1891.

18 Entally Estate is at Hadspen, to the west of Launceston; nowadays a 15 minute journey by car.

19 K Tybell, personal communication, 2008. Mr Tybell is a descendant of James Henry Ashton.

20 *Sydney Spectator*, 5 February 1908, 10 September 1913. A 'gaff' or 'pennygaff' was London slang for any low place of amusement such as the open-air equestrian shows that could be seen on the city's outskirts. A showman was called a 'gaffer'.

21 AOT, CON 31/2; *Hobart Town Courier*, 6 December 1848.

riding capabilities; and, freed from servitude, he began to find outlets for his equestrian prowess.

Links with Astley's Amphitheatre, London

To understand the origins of circus in Australia, and of Ashton's Circus, it is necessary to unravel the origins of 'modern' circus.[22] Philip Astley, a former cavalryman, gave open-air displays of trick riding in 1768 in a field at Lambeth on the south side of the Thames. These displays were eventually enclosed, roofed over and given in a building he called Astley's Amphitheatre. The establishment was popularly referred to as 'the circus', a word used to describe the open-air circular recreational riding tracks in and around London at the time. In 1807, the first *hippodramas* were produced at Astley's, staged equestrianised dramatic spectacles that combined circus and theatre as one. Among the more famous were *Richard III*, *Mazeppa* and *The Battle of Waterloo*.[23] These, and others, were produced by Robert Avis Radford in Van Diemen's Land during 1848 and 1849, although presumably on a reduced scale of extravagance.[24] Astley's remained the international fountainhead of circus well into the nineteenth century. Its programs were mimicked by peripatetic circus companies throughout the British Isles, continental Europe, the United States of America and eventually in the new colonies of Australia. Also mimicked were the exquisite equestrian pantomimes of Andrew Ducrow (1798–1842), the principal equestrian, lessee and manager of Astley's from 1825 until his death.

Philip Astley, a former cavalryman, gave open-air displays of trick riding in 1768 in a field at Lambeth on the south side of the Thames. By 1772 the field had been enclosed and a grandstand erected for the comfort of the audience. The establishment was then called Astley's New British Riding School.

By 1779, Astley's exhibitions at Lambeth took place in a permanent building. His new establishment was named Astley's Amphitheatre.

A bizarre twist linked the American and Australian branches of modern circus well before the first visits took place in the 1850s, a twist that co-incidentally found brief expression in the early history of Ashton's Circus. In 1822, the New York theatrical entrepreneurs, Price and Simpson, purchased the circus of the visiting Englishman James West as a going concern. They strengthened the company by the addition from Astley's

22 The term 'modern' circus is employed to distinguish the circus of Astley, his successors and imitators, from the circus of ancient times as exemplified by Rome's Circus Maximus.

23 A Hippisley Coxe, *A seat at the circus*, Macmillan, London, 1980, pp. 32–33.

24 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 15 January 1848; *Hobart Town Courier*, 28 October 1848; *Cornwall Chronicle*, 20 June 1849.

of the 'Yorkshire phenomenon' James Hunter, the pre-eminent equestrian of the day. Hunter astonished 'the new world with dazzling bareback feats never dreamed of'.[25] He was the first *bareback* rider to appear in the United States, performing on 'a horse in the rude state of nature' according to contemporary advertisements.[26] Hunter eschewed the saddle or pad used by lesser circus riders of the day upon which to stand, pose and perform acrobatic tricks.[27] In 1829 Hunter returned to England and continued his circus career as an equestrian and tightrope dancer. In 1834 he even performed at Astley's in 'his laughable scene on a barebacked horse called *The Drunken Hussar*', 'extraordinary feats on *The Corde Elastique*' and 'his astonishing performance on the rope with his feet in baskets'.[28]

When Hunter stole some bedding from furnished lodgings, an earlier, minor offence counted against him and in the Surrey Assizes on 28 March 1842 he was sentenced to twelve years transportation to Van Diemen's Land. A nefarious period as a convict in the penal colony ensued, during which he absconded from custody, was placed in solitary confinement for insolence, and served several brief periods of hard labour for other misdemeanours. The available records show that James Hunter and Golden Ashton were in the same part of Van Diemen's Land in 1843 and again from 1845 to 1848. On 8 October 1850, Hunter was granted a ticket-of-leave, which allowed him his freedom within the colony. Hunter's brief and only known association with the circus in Australia took place in 1851, when he appeared in Ashton's Royal Amphitheatre in Launceston. While we have no corroborative evidence, it seems reasonable to presume that Hunter imparted his skills to the small but growing number of equestrians, ropewalkers and other performers evident in Van Diemen's Land at this time, among them, Golden Ashton.[29]

Radford's Royal Circus

If Astley's Amphitheatre in London was the international fountainhead of modern circus, Radford's Royal Circus – later called Radford's Royal Amphitheatre – was its first important wellspring in the Australian colonies.

Robert Avis Radford was born in Devon, the son of George and Elizabeth Radford, née Avis, whose marriage had been solemnised in the parish of Broad Clyst near Exeter on 29 December 1814. George's occupation was noted as 'gardener'. The infant Robert was christened in St Peter's Cathedral, Exeter, on 2 July 1817. Specimens of the young Radford's handwriting suggest that he received a formal education, but nothing else of his Devonshire past has come to light.[30] Presumably, he had the opportunity to work with horses and to learn to ride at a young age. A small announcement that appeared in an Adelaide newspaper in 1841 is the earliest signpost to Radford's presence and early professional activities in Australia:

> Robt Radford begs to inform the gentlemen of South Australia that he intends practising as a veterinary surgeon and also to undertake the breaking in of colts. The experience RR has had in these matters at the principal studs in England, as well as in France, entitles him to claim the fullest confidence of the public of South Australia.[31]

25 GC Odell, *Annals of the New York stage*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1894, p. 83.
26 S Thayer, *The performers: a history of circus acts*, Dauven and Thayer, Seattle, Washington, 2005, pp. 68–9.
27 S Thayer, 'James Hunter, the bareback rider', in *Bandwagon*, September–October, 1989, vol. 23, no. 5, pp. 36–7.
28 British Library, Playbills File, BL 172.
29 AOT, CON 33/31, James Hunter, convict; S Thayer, *Annals of the American circus, volume 1, 1793–1829*, Dauven & Thayer, Seattle, Washington, 1976, pp. 112–3, 172; G Speaight, *A history of the circus*, The Tantivy Press, London, 1980, p. 118; Thayer, 1989, p. 37; RWG Vail, *Random notes on the history of the early American circus*, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts, 1934, pp. 87–8.
30 AOT, CSO 24/4/58, correspondence between Colonial Secretary's Office and Robert Avis Radford.
31 *South Australian Register*, 24 April 1841.

Only a few weeks earlier, on the morning of 3 March 1841, Radford had disembarked in Port Adelaide from the *Corsair,* a 450-ton (459-tonne) steamer that had sailed from Deal the previous October and arrived via the Cape.[32] The *Corsair*'s diverse cargo included the thoroughbred *Acteon* and several other fine horses imported by a Mr Whittington for his breeding stable. Radford was evidently charged with the care of these valuable horses during the long voyage to South Australia.[33]

Within a year or two, Radford had moved on to Launceston. There the illiterate Louisa Stone bore him a son, christened on 8 February 1844.[34] By that time Radford was a horse-breaker and livery stablekeeper in the town:

> Robert Radford begs to acknowledge the liberal support he has received from the public since he commenced this business and informs that he breaks horses into saddle and harness with the greatest care and at moderate charges ... York Street.[35]

Throughout 1845 and 1846 Radford was known on the Launceston and Port Phillip racetracks, training and even jockeying several horses to success. His business and racing activities prospered sufficiently for him to marry Amelia Cannon at the Baptist Church in York Street, Launceston on 19 July 1845, when he gave his occupation as a 'training groom'.[36] With the earnings from his racetrack and livery-stable activities he successfully applied – in September 1845 – for a licence for the aptly named Horse & Jockey Inn, a drinking house also located in York Street.[37]

A town of about 10,100 people, with men comprising about two-thirds of the population according to the colony's 1848 census, Launceston saw only intermittent and usually unsuccessful theatrical exhibitions in the 1840s. Two theatres, the Royal Victoria and the Royal Olympic, sustained only brief seasons of 'legitimate' drama from year to year, among them productions by the colonial impresario, George Selth Coppin. A penal settlement, with a significant ex-convict and a transient military population, Launceston and its district supported numerous drinking houses and sponsored regular race meetings. Popular entertainments, such as the ubiquitous fire-eater John Powell Courtier, the balloonist and ventriloquist Professor Rea, and the visiting gymnastic troupe of Luigi Dalle Case, entertained the town at one time or another. An 'American rope dancer', probably the colonial born John Quinn, appeared at the Royal Olympic Theatre in 1847.[38] Street performances by regimental military bands were appreciated.[39] Despite these diversions, the degree of Launceston's cultural progress may be gauged by brief reports of theatrical activity that sometimes appeared in the 'sporting' columns of the *Cornwall Chronicle*.[40] Indeed, contemporary observers expressed alarm at the island's cultural proclivities. Vandemonians preferred melodrama to the 'higher order of dramatic representations' and resembled the Americans in their 'presumption, ignorance, arrogance and conceit'.[41] Apart from those who had recently arrived from 'home', the colonials appeared to be 'rough and coarse' with little to offer in terms of conversation.[42]

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32 *Adelaide Chronicle*, 3 March 1841.
33 *Adelaide Chronicle*, 24 April 1841.
34 Van Diemen's Land, Baptisms, 1844/#225: unnamed son, at Launceston.
35 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 16 March 1844.
36 Van Diemen's Land, Marriages, 1845/#2238: Robert Avis Radford and Amelia Cannon, at Baptist Church, York Street, Launceston.
37 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 3 September 1845.
38 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 13 November 1847.
39 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 6 February 1847.
40 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 2 February 1848.
41 LA Meredith, *My home in Van Diemen's Land, during a residence of nine years*, London, 1852, cited in H Love (ed.), *The Australian stage: a documentary history*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 1984, pp.45–6; J Morris, *The Pax Britannica Trilogy, volume 1: Heaven's command, an imperial progress*, The Folio Society, London, 1973, p. 115.
42 CMH Clark, *A history of Australia, volume III: the beginning of an Australian civilisation*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1973, p. 363.

Radford's interests lay mainly with horses and racing, rather than hotel keeping. He publicly challenged the owner of *Paganini* to race his *Van Dyke* for £50 over 'three miles and a distance'.[43] He shipped his thoroughbred racehorse, *Paul Jones,* to Port Phillip to run at the ensuing Melbourne Races.[44] In January 1847, Radford rode *Coronet*, 'the best horse in the colony', to victory in the New Norfolk races.[45] In March 1847, Radford's *Van Dyke*, a previously untrained 'hack', won the Launceston Town Plate.[46]

By the 1840s, Van Diemen's Land was the home of more free persons than convicts, yet at its base its society continued to be organised around its penal purpose.[47] Possibly three-quarters of the population were convicts, ex-convicts or had some convict ancestry.[48] A small bourgeoisie of shopkeepers, publicans, tradesmen and farmers developed during the 1840s reflecting increased emigration to the colony. Launceston was probably as representative a microcosm of Australian colonial society as any town in the pre-gold rush era. It was 'more energetic' yet less class-conscious than the colony's capital, Hobart Town.[49]

An equestrian-based theatrical entertainment could appeal to both the 'lower orders' as well as the more 'exceptionable' of the town's population.[50] An 'amphitheatre' modelled on Astley's Amphitheatre could bring together both equestrian and dramatic spectacles, not to mention exhibitions of acrobatics, ropewalking, singing and other forms of popular entertainment. It could also satisfy the moralists of the day. In England, civil, religious and moral leaders promoted 'rational' amusements to wean the labouring classes and the lower orders from idleness, drinking, gambling and fornication.[51] Radford's proposed entertainments were 'rational'.[52]

On 22 November 1847, Radford wrote to the Colonial Secretary in Hobart Town, James Bicheno, to request a twelve-month licence for 'the public exhibition of horsemanship in an arena ... situate in York Street, Launceston adjacent to my licenced house known by the sign of The Horse & Jockey'.[53] Within a week of receiving Bicheno's permission, this 'Astley's Amphitheatre on a limited scale' was under construction, as Radford intended to open his 'equestrian circus' by Christmas. The Horse & Jockey Inn was located in 'a central part' of Launceston.[54] Times were 'dull' in Launceston and cash was scarce, yet the townspeople managed to enjoy the Christmas festivities. 'Innocent recreations' were allowed at most of the houses in the town, the Royal Olympic Theatre opened with a dramatic performance, races were held at Evandale, while popular amusements such as greasy poling were also on offer at other places.[55]

In the midst of this clamour, Radford announced that 'at considerable expense he has secured the services of Theatrical Equestrians, formerly attached to the London stage'.[56] It might be inferred that Radford had gone to the trouble and expense of importing a performing company from London. In fact Radford's initial *corps* consisted of locally-recruited 'artistes' at least one of whom, the acrobat John Jones, was a former convict who was once 'a tumbler at the Westminster Theatre' (most probably referring

43 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 17 January 1846.
44 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 18 March 1846.
45 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 30 January 1847.
46 *Port Phillip Herald*, 18 March 1847.
47 Morris, p. 381.
48 Clark, p. 199.
49 LL Robson, *A history of Van Diemen's Land, volume 1: Van Diemen's Land from the earliest times to 1855*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1983, p. 176.
50 *Hobart Town Advertiser*, 8 September 1848.
51 JM Golby and AW Purdue, *The civilisation of the crowd: popular culture in England, 1750–1900*, Sutton Publishing Ltd, Stroud,1999, pp. 91–2.
52 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 29 December 1847.
53 AOT, CSO 24/4/58.
54 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 1 December1847.
55 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 25 December 1847.
56 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 22 December 1847.

to Astley's Amphitheatre) prior to his conviction for a petty crime and transportation.[57] Jones received his ticket-of-leave on 13 July 1847, a few months before the opening of the Royal Circus.[58] He appeared in Radford's Royal Circus, first as a dancer and an acrobat but later as an equestrian, presumably because of Radford's mentorship.[59]

The Royal Circus, as it was called, opened on the evening of Boxing Day, Monday 27 December 1847.[60] For the next two years Radford's audiences were entertained for up to three evenings a week with a remarkable *savoir-faire* of contemporary British circus, popular theatre and music hall. The programs presented by Radford extended over a period of 25 months until 29 January 1850, when his company gave its last performance.

Advertisement for Radford's Royal Circus in the *Cornwall Chronicle* of 29 December 1847. (Archives Office of Tasmania)

It has been speculated that James Hunter, the famous British performer transported to Van Diemen's Land, may have played a role in the establishment of Radford's Royal Circus.[61] Although Hunter spent some of his servitude in or near Launceston in this period, there is nothing to suggest that Hunter performed in Radford's under his own or any other name. In any case, Hunter's convict record was embellished with the notation that he was 'not to be hired in Launceston by any publican'. This entry, dated 18 December 1847 nine days before the opening of the Royal Circus, effectively precluded Radford, a publican, from employing him.[62]

The layout and construction of Radford's Royal Circus in Launceston is now a matter of conjecture. No illustrations, architectural plans or detailed descriptions are known to survive.[63] We do know that seating arrangements were divided into pit, gallery and boxes. Radford charged prices of one, two and three shillings, to these parts of the

57 H Buckler, *Central Criminal Court Session Papers. Twelfth Session*, George Herbert, Cheapside, London, 1842, pp. 1293–4; AOT, CON 14/23, John Jones, convict; Public Records Office, London, CRIM 4/208, John Jones, indictment.

58 AOT, CON 33/44, John Jones, ticket-of-leave.

59 Dancing and tumbling were fundamental to a career as a circus performer. (The author of this paper is John Jones's great-great-grandson.)

60 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 25 December 1847.

61 Speaight, p. 55.

62 AOT, CON 33/31, James Hunter, convict.

63 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 12 April 1851; 21 June 1848.

house, respectively.[64] The circus building was only a few weeks in the course of erection. It was described as 'a wooden building' when it was used by Ashton's company in 1851.[65] The structure may have been modelled on the portable amphitheatres or 'booths' erected by itinerant circus troupes in English provincial towns.

The Royal Circus was a 'hit' with the people of Launceston from the start.[66] To the native-born and bred, who 'thought nothing of England and could not bear the thought of going there', the equestrian-based theatrical entertainment was a novelty.[67] Radford's equestrian performances were 'bold and masterly'.[68] Despite Launceston's depressed state and the discouraging expectations of many, the Royal Circus attracted large audiences.[69] Although Radford catered for all tastes and classes, he wanted to attract 'the more respectable portion of society'. He 'sedulously' endeavoured to enforce good order to induce these 'portions' to witness his exhibitions.[70]

Radford's entertainments followed a steady pattern throughout this first Launceston season. His program was changed weekly. It usually consisted of between six and ten items, invariably opening with a dramatic, equestrian or hippodramatic spectacle and inevitably closing with a farce or extravaganza. Interspersed were acts as diverse as a highland fling, naval hornpipe, clog or maypole dance by members of the company; the singing of a popular song of the day such as *Larry O'Gaff* or *Tippitywitchet*; gymnastic feats or vaulting by the four 'wonderful' acrobats; tightrope and slackrope performances; a comic act of horsemanship or gymnastic exercises on horseback; the feats of a diminutive trick pony; and *tableaux vivant* by one or more members of the company. Equestrian performances were usually accompanied by the antics of a clown in the ring. All contributed to the program of 'histrionic, comic and equestrian genius' presented in the ensuing months.[71]

Whether an attempt to set the Royal Circus on fire was the reason or not, Radford decided to remove his company to Hobart Town. On 3 March 1848 he wrote to Bicheno requesting that he be granted a licence to establish a circus on a large piece of ground at the rear of the Bath Arms, a public house in Murray Street, later the site of Tattersall's Hotel.[72] Despite objections from the local acting community, Bicheno was unmoved. He considered that 'equestrian performances are less objectionable than some of the performances at the [Royal] Victoria [Theatre]' and that 'the more innocent amusements the people have the better'. On 14 March the Lieutenant Governor approved a licence for Radford's equestrian performances.[73] Radford had already confidently entered into 'extensive preparations' to capitalise on extra business during and after the Hobart Town race week.[74] The *Hobart Town Courier* alluded to 'a circus in humble imitation of Ducrow's Arena or Batty's Amphitheatre ... erected near the Bath Arms'.[75] Its ring was dressed with sawdust.[76] Improvements had been carried out to this unpretentious wooden structure by the time of a second Hobart Town season later in 1848.[77]

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64 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 29 December 1847.
65 Hodgkinson, in Cannon with St Leon, p. 1.
66 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 29 December 1847.
67 Robson, p. 177.
68 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 30 December 1848.
69 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 2 February 1848.
70 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 26 January 1848.
71 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 15 March 1848.
72 AOT, CSO 24/4/58; *Sydney Sportsman*, 5 February 1908.
73 AOT, CSO 24/4/58.
74 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 11 March 1848.
75 *Hobart Town Courier*, 29 March 1848.
76 *Sydney Sportsman*, 29 February 1911.
77 This building remained standing for several years. Known locally as 'The Amphitheatre', it was used by other circus troupes, such as those of John Sullivan Noble in 1853 and Henry Burton in 1855, both of which reached the colony from the mainland. *Tasmanian Colonist*, 17 October 1853; *Hobart Mercury*, 7 May 1855. In 1859 the building was demolished and the 'enormous quantity of seasoned timber in great variety' of which it was built was auctioned. *Hobart Mercury*, 14 February 1859.

Towards the end of March Radford and his stud of horses, his corps of equestrians, acrobats, actors and singers trundled overland from Launceston to Hobart Town. A fine convict-made road connected these main centres of population, along which many free settlers lived in gentlemanly style in substantial country houses.[78] Quite possibly, Radford's company may have given performances at townships along the way. As in England, burgeoning road systems were vital to the activities of itinerant colonial showmen.[79]

Although the fit-out of the Bath Arms circus was not quite complete, the company opened to a crowded house on the evening of Thursday, 30 March 1848, many visitors having to occupy standing positions near the arena. The performances were 'very creditable' and 'a novelty in this colony', but a few more performances for both stud and corps were necessary to settle into the new surroundings.[80] Radford and his principal equestrian, Edmunds, performed an equestrian duet one evening to much applause, while Master Baldwin was showered with coins the night he gave his benefit.[81] Favourite acts of horsemanship were introduced, such as *Shaw, The Life Guardsman*, which depicted a hero of Waterloo, leaving his country village to join the regiment, drilling, marching, firing his rifle in combat and, in the last moment of his life, throwing away his broken sword and fighting with his bare fists; *The Flying Zephyr*, an elaboration of one of Ducrow's characters; *The Fox Hunter*; and *The Shipwrecked Sailor*. A series of *tableaux vivants* from *The Brigands* was produced, as was a *Sir Roger de Coverley*, a country dance featuring eight horses.[82] The last performance of the Hobart Town season was given on 17 May 1848 and the following week Radford and his troupe returned to Launceston. The company re-opened in its familiar Launceston venue, renovated during its absence, on the evening of the Queen's Birthday 1848 to an appreciative audience.[83]

In the ensuing evenings the whole company presented the dramatic spectacles ofl *The Knight of the Brazen Shield* and *The Rescue*. The equestrian Mills performed *Punchinello* and *The Merry Swiss Boy*. Radford's introduction of four horses, two of which he stood astride while driving the other two, suggest the first Australian rendition of Ducrow's most popular equestrian piece, *The Courier of St Petersburg*.[84] Despite plans to visit Port Phillip, Radford and his company remained in Launceston for the winter.[85] The series of benefits given towards the end of the season resulted in a 'bumper' house each night.[86] Early in August, Radford presented another of Ducrow's famous equestrian pantomimes, *The Roman Gladiator*.[87] Soon after, Radford and his 'valuable stud and efficient company' again took to the road for Hobart Town.[88]

Almost entirely rebuilt for a second Hobart Town season, the Bath Arms amphitheatre was 'as good a building as any of those erected by Batty, Adams, Cooke and other equestrian managers who had exhibited in English provincial towns'.[89] The new building was securely constructed of wood, properly roofed, and enclosed an immense space of ground. It could accommodate 1,500 people.[90] The performance of 25 September 1848 featured 'the Australian Tight Rope Dancer' Quinn, exhibiting a 'basket dance' in which he danced on his tightrope with his feet tied in baskets, an act he later

78 Morris, 1973, p. 381; M Salmon, 'An old time circus', in *Australian Town & Country Journal*, 3 August 1904, p. 34.
79 Golby, p. 37.
80 *Hobart Town Courier*, 1, 5, 19 April 1848.
81 *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 May 1848. A 'benefit' was an evening's performance dedicated to an outstanding performer in whose favour the financial proceeds of the performance accrued.
82 Speaight, pp. 57, 58; *Hobart Town Courier*, 15 April 1848.
83 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 24 May 1848.
84 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 31 May 1848.
85 *Melbourne Argus*, 20 June 1848; *Cornwall Chronicle*, 15 July 1848.
86 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 26 July 1848.
87 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 9 August 1848.
88 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 9 September 1848.
89 *Hobart Town Courier*, 26 August 1848.
90 *Hobart Town Courier*, 13 September 1848.

Ducrow's popular equestrian spectacle, *The Courier of St Petersburg.* (Courtesy V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum, London, CT1604)

Ducrow's famous equestrian pantomime, *The Roman Gladiator*. (Mark St Leon personal collection)

performed with the clown upon his shoulders.[91] The basket dance on the tightrope is precisely the type of act that James Hunter had performed in the 1820s and 1830s. We may speculate that Quinn, who is not known to have exhibited this act before, had learnt it from James Hunter, the veteran British performer serving periods of assigned labour to various masters in and around Launceston at this time.[92]

Radford's intention to 'bring out' (from London, presumably) the famous equestrian spectacle *Mazeppa; or The Wild Horse of Tartary* may account for his company moving to Hobart Town's Victoria Theatre, apparently better configured for an elaborate production.[93] The 'British horseman', Mr Ashton, made his first appearance in Radford's on the evening of 7 December 1848. This was the first documented appearance in the colonies of the equestrian whose circus dynasty survives to this day. Master Gill, Ashton's *protégé*, appeared with him.[94] Ashton's equestrian appearances were of 'a superior order', his 'bold and fearless style of riding' surpassing anything seen in the colony.[95] Yet, Ashton's name, like Radford's, does not appear in British circus bills of the day. Radford's production of *Mazeppa* was presented not long after Ashton's first appearance. Indeed, Ashton may well have played the title role, in which the miscreant was 'lashed' to the back of a white charger that was then set forth galloping over the steppes.[96]

Radford and his troupe, with Ashton and Gill, returned to Launceston for the Christmas holidays of 1848.[97] Radford did not again present equestrian entertainments

91 *Hobart Town Courier*, 21 October 1848.
92 AOT, CON 33/31.
93 *Hobart Town Courier*, 28 October 1848. The equestrian spectacle *Mazeppa* was loosely based on Byron's epic poem of the same name.
94 *Hobart Town Courier*, 6 December 1848.
95 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 17 January 1849.
96 *Hobart Town Courier*, 20 December 1848.
97 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 13 December 1848.

A playbill for Astley's production of *Mazeppa and the Wild Horse*, Monday 5 August 1833. (Courtesy of V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum, London, CT10107)

in Hobart Town. It would be several years before a circus company of any consequence would again entertain the capital, while several years passed before touring circus companies began to visit Van Diemen's Land from the mainland.[98]

On Boxing Day 1848, almost a year to the day since its inauguration, Radford's Royal Amphitheatre, as it was now called, was re-opened in Launceston, evidently in Radford's original venue. For a while this was almost the only venue for relaxation, fun, and frolic in the town and large attendances were generated.[99] Ashton made his last known appearance with Radford on the evening of Wednesday 14 February 1849, a benefit performance for Alfred Howson Senior, leader of the orchestra. On 17 March 1849, Ashton departed Launceston for Port Phillip by the *Shamrock,* accompanied by his girlfriend – probably his common law wife, Mary Byrne – for Ashton had been enticed there with a new offer of engagement.[100]

At Port Phillip

In the years before the onset of the great gold rush, this colony-to-be underwent dramatic economic expansion. In 1846 Melbourne's population was 10,954, not much bigger than Launceston's. Five years later, in 1851, its population had grown to 23,143, an increase of some 111 per cent.[101] During 1848, there had been talk of Radford's company visiting Melbourne.[102] Although the plan did not materialise, Radford's early successes in presenting circus entertainments in Van Diemen's Land had evidently aroused interest on the mainland.

Thomas Henry Hayes was a 'respectable man' and an expert equestrian.[103] In April 1849, this Port Phillip entrepreneur made application to Superintendent Charles La Trobe 'for permission to open a circus in Little Bourke Street for the exhibition of feats of horsemanship and rope dancing.'[104] Hayes outlayed some £600 to erect a suitable building, purchase his stud of twelve horses and retain on full pay some 'long experienced parties from neighbouring colonies'.[105] The 'long experienced parties' comprised Ashton from Van Diemen's Land and his little troupe of performers that included Master Gill and Mr 'Risley' (actually Riley), a tightrope dancer and clown.[106] Ashton had by this time replaced his given name of 'Golden' with 'John' and then later 'James' (co-incidentally or not, the names of his younger brothers baptised at Rochford, Essex, in 1824 and 1826 respectively). These alterations were evidently made to distance himself from his convict origins as Golden Ashton. Furthermore, Ashton's career was suitably embellished for Port Philip, for he was now 'Mr Ashton, formerly of Astley's and is very highly spoken of'.[107]

Hayes's location was near Melbourne's 'notorious' Horse & Jockey Inn. There were complaints that the proposed circus would 'attract a crowd of disreputable characters to that locality'.[108] Hayes also had to contend with competition from at least two sources.[109]

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98 *Tasmanian Colonist*, 17 October 1853.
99 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 30 December 1848.
100 AOT, POL 220/1, p. 90; CON 44/5, Mary Byrne, convict; CON 52/2, p. 8, application for permission to marry, Golden Ashton and Mary Bryan [*sic*].
101 M Cannon, *Old Melbourne town before the gold rush*, Loch Haven Books, Main Ridge, Victoria, 1991, pp. 10–11.
102 *Melbourne Argus*, 20 June 1848.
103 *Port Phillip Gazette*, 17 May 1849.
104 *Argus*, 13 April 1849.
105 *Melbourne Daily News*, 28 April 1849.
106 The name of 'Risley' actually belonged to Richard Risley Carlisle who introduced the sensational act of juggling other performers on his feet, an act later known as a Risley act. Some of Golden Ashton's descendants, billed as 'The Seven Ashtons' were famous for their Risley act in the 1950s. Thayer, 2005, p. 134. A Hippisley Coxe, *A seat at the circus*, Macmillan, London, 1980, p. 194.
107 *Melbourne Daily News*, 4 May 1849. As far as the record shows, no-one by the name of Ashton ever appeared in Astley's.
108 *Melbourne Daily News*, 23 April 1849.
109 *Port Phillip Gazette*, 17 April 1849.

At the corner of Queen and Little Bourke Streets stood the Queen's Theatre and its proprietor, John Thomas Smith, voiced his opposition to Hayes's application. At the same time the fire-eater, John Powell Courtier, once active in Launceston and Hobart but since late 1846 domiciled in Melbourne, made application to open a venue in Lonsdale Street.[110] La Trobe referred the applications to the Town Magistracy which refused both on the grounds that the proposed exhibitions would spread 'crime and immorality ... by congregating depraved and abandoned characters'.[111] The Mayor agreed to allow Hayes and his company to give a single exhibition to a paying audience. An immense crowd attended the circus on the evening of Wednesday 9 May 1849 and the performance was 'well worth seeing'.[112] Encouraged by his reception, Hayes ignored the restriction and continued to exhibit into June. He opened his circus 'free' but each person attending had to purchase a cigar for two shillings and sixpence, light it and commence puffing before entering.[113]

Ashton appeared with his 'beautiful horse' *Gazelle*, leaping over four five-barred gates in the ring, posing, and jumping through hoops on the horse's back while at full speed. Master Gill performed acts of horsemanship entitled *The Mountain Sylph* and *The Highland Laddie.* The several feats that 'Risley' executed on the tightrope had 'never been witnessed in Port Phillip'. In *The Sailor's Farewell*, Ashton danced a sailor's hornpipe on the back of his horse. Ashton, Hayes and Gill appeared together in a triple horse act entitled *The African Hunters*.[114] The Port Phillip press was as impressed by Ashton's riding as had been the press in Van Diemen's Land, for it 'surpasses anything of the sort seen in the Australian colonies. The ease and grace with which he performs ... astonish all the good folks of this city.'[115]

Although this unauthorised place of amusement flourished for a short time, and although only 'respectable persons' were admitted, the circus soon became as disreputable as the neighborhood, 'the most malignant ulcer of Melbourne's back slumtown'.[116] On 18 June 1849 Ashton gave his second and farewell benefit.[117] Before the authorities could close the circus, Hayes was bankrupted.[118] The auction of Hayes's stud, organised for 19 June, was to be preceded by a bazaar at which the animals were to go through some of their extraordinary feats.[119] At this point, it appears that Ashton left Port Phillip to push 'through unexplored scrub' to Sydney

> … with a tiny, motley troupe, packhorses and an Aboriginal tracker. The going was primitive indeed. They slept out, used a ring of hewn logs and lit the show with lamps made of old socks burning in tins of fat ... brush corrals made a good ring.[120]

Settlements along the way were starved for entertainment. The 'road' northwards was but a 'well defined track ... that meandered through the bush ... from water stop to water stop'.[121] Oral tradition said that Ashton's first performances in Sydney were given in a ring made of brambles near where the city's Central Station now stands. Given the

110 *Melbourne Argus*, 7 August 1846.
111 *Melbourne Daily News*, 23 April 1849.
112 *Melbourne Daily News*, 11 May 1849.
113 E Finn ['Garryowen'], *The chronicles of early Melbourne, 1835–1852: historical, anecdotal and personal*, 1888, Fergusson & Mitchell, Melbourne, p. 490.
114 *Port Phillip Gazette*, 24, 29 May 1849.
115 *Port Phillip Gazette*, 5 June 1849.
116 Finn, p. 490.
117 *Port Phillip Gazette*, 16 June 1849.
118 Cannon, p. 420.
119 *Melbourne Daily News*, 19 June 1849.
120 Fernandez, p. 15.
121 Morris, p. 29.

apparent lack of a suitable indoor circus venue in Sydney at the time, and the knack for improvisation of Australia's early circus men, the scene is by no means implausible. In the years to follow, the vicinity – now known as the Haymarket – became Sydney's customary site for visiting circuses and petty showmen.[122] Somewhat curiously, in view of its size and colonial pre-eminence, Sydney was not yet blessed with its own permanent circus establishment. Ashton inevitably spread word in the city of the circus activities taking place in Van Diemen's Land and Port Phillip. By the spring of 1850, some twelve months after Ashton's visit, Sydney's first amphitheatre opened at the rear of John Malcom's Adelphi Hotel in York Street as the Royal Australian Equestrian Circus.[123]

Radford's decline

In Launceston, with Ashton and most of the other equestrian and acrobatic performers gone, the circus-based portions of Radford's entertainments assumed a less conspicuous role with each evening's program. Some of Radford's mounting financial problems during 1849 could be attributed to the departure of the 96th Regiment from the town earlier in the year, when it was relocated to India. The loss of officers and 500 rank and file soldiers, together with wives and children, removed an estimated £200,000 of annual expenditure from the town's economy. The small detachment that replaced the 96th hardly made up for this loss to the economy.[124] The remonstrances of the *Cornwall Chronicle* on Radford's behalf during 1849 became desperate by September.

> Radford is a townsman and expends his money [that] he makes in the town; he does not come a stranger among us, for a month or two, to take away with him his profits – he therefore deserves patronage, and we hope he may realise his best expectations during the season.[125]

An attractive and diverse program, a dedicated corps of professional and guest amateur actors, equestrians and singers, and the occasional reductions in prices could not save the Royal Amphitheatre, even when renamed the 'Royal Circus'. Nor could additional attractions in the ring, ranging from a grand balloon ascent to an exhibition of boxing by the celebrated black pugilist Perry, prior to his departure for England to compete for the national championship.[126]

By November 1849, Ashton had returned to Launceston. He appeared with Radford again, now unostentatiously billed as 'Mr Goulder'.[127] When he gave a benefit at the Royal Circus on Tuesday evening, 29 January 1850, Ashton was inexplicably less coy about his identity and even boasted of the 'considerable fame' he had won in Port Phillip and Sydney.[128] It was the last performance given at the Royal Circus under Radford's management. Soon, Radford's numerous creditors foreclosed. His resources at an end, he could resurrect neither his amphitheatrical enterprise nor his racecourse activities. For a man accustomed to being his own master, Van Diemen's Land offered no future for Robert Avis Radford. Seeking a fresh start, he sailed for Adelaide by the *Queenstown* on 29 August 1850.[129]

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122 Fernandez, p. 15; S Fitzgerald, *Sydney, 1842–1992*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1992, pp. 26–7, 62.
123 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 October 1850.
124 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 10 January 1849.
125 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 1 September 1849.
126 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 23 January 1850.
127 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 17 November 1849.
128 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 26 January 1850.
129 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 31 August 1850.

Ashton's Royal Amphitheatre

In the twelve months following his brief re-appearance at Radford's Royal Circus during the summer of 1849–50, the activities of James Ashton do not come to the attention of the colonial press. However, in this 'missing year' he took Mary Ann Riley as a wife.[130] The identity of Mary Ann remains uncertain. Possibly she was the sister or daughter of the John Riley with whom Ashton had performed in Van Diemen's Land and Port Phillip. Another possibility is the Mary Ann Riley, a 16-year-old girl from Enniskillen in County Fermanagh who arrived at Port Melbourne on 11 January 1850 by the *Diadem*. A nursemaid, she served a twelve-month apprenticeship in a Melbourne household but may have become Ashton's wife, legal or common law, during this period.[131] Although Ashton's movements during 1850 are uncertain there is at least a record of a 'J [John? James?] Ashton' voyaging by the *Shamrock* from Launceston to Melbourne on 18 November 1850.[132] Whoever she was, the new 'Mrs Ashton' was sufficiently imbued with equestrian skills to make her debut about six weeks after her husband opened his Royal Amphitheatre in Launceston the following February.[133]

An advertisement for Ashton's Royal Amphitheatre in Elizabeth Street, Launceston, that appeared in the *Cornwall Chronicle* on 1 February 1851. (Archives Office of Tasmania)

In January 1851 Ashton applied to the Colonial-Secretary for a licence to conduct exhibitions of horsemanship at premises situated in Elizabeth Street, Launceston. This was described as a wooden building located near the stables of what would later be known as the Sydney Hotel.[134] Despite the different street address, these premises appear to be the ones in which Radford had conducted his Royal Circus during 1847–50, but with access from Elizabeth Street, a street that runs parallel to York Street. Granted permission by the Colonial Secretary, Ashton opened his 'Royal Amphitheatre' on the evening of 13 February 1851.[135]

An early advertisement listed the following members of Ashton's company: Mr and Mrs Ashton, Master Lapittite [*sic*; La Petite?] Polaski, J Hunter, H Mills, A Palmer, H Felix, J Risley, Mr Rosetta, and Mr J Hudson and a 'grand orchestra'.[136] Later advertisements mention the acrobat Carter; a Mr Wilcocks

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130 Registrar-General, New South Wales, Burials, 1852, vol. 118, no. 1494: Mary Ann Ashton, at Maitland.

131 Kevin Tybell, personal communication, 2008.

132 AOT, POL 220/1, p. 295. The relevant shipping list notes that J Ashton, 'free by servitude', arrived by the convict transport *Navarino*. However, a check of the *Navarino's* list of convicts on arrival in Hobart Town in November 1840 shows no one of the name 'Ashton'. This leaves open the possibility that the *Shamrock's* 1850 passenger was, in fact, Golden Ashton and he was using the assumed name of 'John' or 'James' Ashton, as he had used elsewhere, in order to expedite his departure from the colony.

133 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 1 February, 29 March 1851.

134 Hodgkinson, in Cannon with St Leon, p. 1.

135 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 12 February 1851.

136 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 1 February 1851.

who danced a sailor's hornpipe; Templeton, a singer; and HB Jones as the ringmaster. Apart from the Ashtons, some of these names are immediately recognisable in the context of colonial circus. 'J Hunter', who had only received his ticket-of-leave in October 1850, was the 'Yorkshire phenomenon' mentioned earlier.[137] Mills was 'the oldest equestrian performer in Launceston' whose earlier acts of horsemanship in Radford's Royal Amphitheatre in 1849 'would not have disgraced Astley's'.[138] Alfred Palmer was an early, if passing, identity in colonial circus annals. He soon parted from Ashton as he was in Parramatta to act as ringmaster for the opening of Burton's New Equestrian Circus on 1 March 1851.[139] 'Risley' was evidently the John Riley who had been a member of Ashton's troupe in 1849. It is possible that 'Mr Rosetta' was the Irish rope and stilt-walker, Edward Hughes, known better by the *nom d'arena* of Edward La Rosiere and who had recently departed the Royal Australian Equestrian Circus in Sydney.[140] HB Jones was an actor in Radford's company during the summer of 1848–49. H Felix may have been the German musician Harry Frahlig who died at Dapto (NSW) in July 1856, while travelling the Illawarra with Ashton's Circus. The other names – Polaski, Hudson, Wilcocks and Templeton – do not elsewhere appear in colonial circus annals.

Ashton's new wife made her debut at the Royal Amphitheatre on 31 March 1851. She was announced as 'the first female equestrian of the day', the term 'first' meaning 'premier' in the contemporary vernacular.[141] As no other equestriennes are known to have been professionally active in Van Diemen's Land at that time, the claim cannot be disputed. With her husband and mentor as her equestrian partner, she provided the principal attraction for the evening's entertainment, the traditional equestrian scene of *Jocky* [*sic*] *and Jenny, or The Road to Edinburgh Fair* – the only known rendition of the piece in a colonial circus. This scene had been presented at Astley's in London by two juvenile riders in 1828.[142]

The earliest advertisements for Ashton's Royal Amphitheatre announce James Hunter as 'the American tight rope dancer'. His benefit was announced for the evening of 7 April 1851.[143] The *Cornwall Chronicle* lauded this fallen star of Astley's in their midst: 'Hunter, the favourite horseman of Ducrow, admired in England by nobility and even royalty, presented in England and in America with numberless marks of admiration, takes a benefit.'[144] Hunter performed 'some wonderful feats in baskets ... also the Wooden Shoe Dance, [the] first time ever attempted in this colony'.[145] One of Hunter's performances was to 'throw a summersault [*sic*] over a garter 10 feet high over 40 men's heads, concluding by throwing a summersault through 6 balloons', in fact hoops wrapped in tissue paper. For Hunter's benefit performance, Ashton and his wife presented *The Tyrolean Peasants*, their rendition of Ducrow's 1830 equestrian pantomime *The Swiss Milkmaid and Tyrolean Shepherd*.[146]

Ashton's acrobat, Carter, threw out a 'novel challenge' to the celebrated tumbler Wang-Chang Pe-ki to tumble against him for the sum of £5 or £10, 'the choice of ground to be tossed for'. The identity of Wang-Chang Pe-ki remains a mystery but, if the text of the challenge is to be believed, he had 'just arrived from Hong Kong via Port Phillip'. In truth, Wang-Chang Pe-ki may have been an acrobat made up for the part.[147]

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137 AOT, CON 33/31.
138 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 18 July 1849.
139 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 March 1851.
140 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 January, 17 March1851; *Goulburn Herald*, 22 February 1851.
141 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 29 March 1851.
142 AH Saxon, *The life and art of Andrew Ducrow and the romantic age of the English circus*, Archon Books, Hamden, Connecticut, 1978, p. 162.
143 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 2 April 1851.
144 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 5 April 1851.
145 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 12 April 1851.
146 Saxon, p. 220.
147 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 9 April 1851.

On the evening of 7 April 1851, Ashton and his wife presented *The Tyrolean Peasants*, This was their rendition of Ducrow's 1830 equestrian pantomime, *The Swiss Milkmaid and Tyrolean Shepherd* as depicted (above) in a contemporary theatrical portrait painted by R Lloyd in London.

On 12 April 1851, an illustrated advertisement announced the benefit for Mrs Ashton. The woodcut illustration showed a female equestrian (reputedly Mrs Ashton but in fact a stock woodcut) balancing on one foot atop her padded horse attired in a flowing knee-length gown, the customary attire for equestriennes of the day. A few lines of poetry accompanied the announcement.

Ladies of Launceston, your favour I sue
For next Monday evening when I make my debut
As the first female equestrian who's appeared in the land
And if your kind patronage that night I command
I will no other favor ask, nor none other court
And acknowledge, with gratitude, your aid and support.

A varied program was produced in support of Mrs Ashton. Mills appeared in an act of horsemanship entitled the *Jumper of Antwerp.* This was followed by Ashton's double act of horsemanship on a pair of barebacked steeds, entitled *Horseman or No Horseman*. Hunter performed the *Wooden Shoe Dance* upon the tightrope and, with his feet encased in baskets, other tricks on the tightrope. Ashton, 'the Monarch Horseman', appeared in an equestrian spectacle entitled *The Hearts of Oak; or The Perils of a British Tar*, during which he danced a hornpipe on his bareback steed. Ashton and his wife appeared on their 'two highly trained steeds' as *Mercury and Pandora*. Then Mrs Ashton appeared in a solo equestrian act as *The Bavarian Broom Girl*. A grand 'equestrian and pedestrian' act entitled *Yankee Doodle's Come to Town Upon his Little Pony* featured other members of the company in the earliest known colonial rendition of commedia dell'arte. In this piece, Ashton, Carter, Mills and Mrs Ashton assumed the traditional 'commedia' roles

A poster for Ashton's circus and zoo. (State Library of New South Wales.)

of harlequin, clown, pantaloon and columbine, respectively. The performance within the amphitheatre concluded with a mock Spanish bullfight by members of the company but – as patrons took their leave – they saw Hunter 'walking the ascension rope from Elizabeth Street over the top of the circus into York Street'.[148]

Despite unfavourable weather, Mrs Ashton's benefit was well-attended and she astonished her audience in the performance of *Mercury and Pandora*.

> Her graceful attitudes and the confidence she displayed, while the well-trained steeds were performing their evolutions, elicited much applause and were creditable alike to herself and her instructor, Mr Ashton.[149]

Ashton's *The Hearts of Oak; or The Perils of a British Tar* appears to have been the same as, or at least similar to, *The Vicissitudes of a Tar*, one of Ducrow's most famous equestrian pantomimes. A representation of nautical life first presented at Astley's in 1824, the piece had its genesis some years earlier during Ducrow's tour of Europe.[150] As *The Sailor's Return,* it was produced in Radford's Royal Circus in January 1848 and in Sydney at the Royal Australian Equestrian Circus by the equestrian John Jones in October 1850.[151] Another, *The Jumper of Antwerp*, appears to have been a modification of *The Post Boy of Antwerp*, an equestrian piece based on Ducrow's most famous equestrian pantomime, *The Courier of St Petersburg*.[152] It is possible that the Ashtons' equestrian duet of *Mercury and Pandora* was an elaboration of the equestrian solo of *The Flight of Mercury,* one of Ducrow's *poses plastique*.[153] The *Bavarian Broom Girl* may have corresponded to the piece, *Buy a Broom*, a 'laughable act of horsemanship' presented by Radford in 1848.[154] The other equestrian items presented by Ashton in Launceston in 1851, *Horseman or No Horseman* and *Yankee Doodle's Come to Town Upon his Little Pony*, appear to be of American origin and do not elsewhere appear in colonial circus programs of the period. We may speculate that James Hunter learned these acts of horsemanship during his American sojourn of 1822 to 1829 and taught them to Ashton.

During the Launceston season, Ashton performed a special stunt – riding into the town standing astride two horses, one foot on the back of each horse. When a dispute arose with a member of the public over whether or not he had performed a particular feat within the stipulated time to win a wager, Ashton undertook to perform an even more arduous feat for the same amount of money. This was to ride seven horses at once from Hobler's Bridge to an undisclosed destination at one o'clock on the afternoon of Monday 14 April.[155] However, there is no account extant of the spectacle probably because, despite the wager, the Ashtons suddenly took their leave of Launceston.

> [He] decamped...without beat of drum, leaving numerous creditors to deplore his exit. He had taken his and his wife's passage in the *Shamrock* for Port Phillip and when she was passing down river attempted to come on board from a boat but Captain Gilmore, who had been informed of his flight, would not allow him. He had been traced on the road to George Town and will, no doubt, hang about there until some vessel is going to Port Phillip, when he will elude the vigilance of that eagle-eyed magistrate, Mr Davis, and his notable constables as easily as many have done before.[156]

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148 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 12 April 1851.
149 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 16 April 1851.
150 Saxon, pp. 87, 97, 99.
151 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 1 January 1848; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 October 1850.
152 Speaight, p. 59.
153 Saxon, pp. 110, 123.
154 *Hobart Town Courier*, 24 May 1848.
155 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 12 April 1851.
156 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 19 April 1851.

SCENE IN CLERMONT, PEAK DOWNS,—ASHTON'S CIRCUS.

Ashton's British–American Circus at Clermont, Queensland, from *Australian Town & Country Journal,* 3 May 1873. (Courtesy State Library of New South Wales).

Not long after Ashton left the Amphitheatre and his company 'in such a disgraceful manner', the establishment was re-opened under the management of James Hunter but after a short season closed again.[157] By August the Ashtons had arrived in Sydney.[158] Ashton never returned to Van Diemen's Land. Although short-lived, Ashton's Royal Amphitheatre in Launceston in 1851 marks the origins of the present day Ashton's Circus.

It is recorded that Ashton opened a circus in Bourke Street East during 1851.[159] If correct, this must have taken place some time after his arrival from Launceston that April but prior to him sailing from Port Phillip to Sydney in August. Ashton and his wife arrived in Sydney by the *Shamrock* from Port Philip on 23 August 1851.[160] On that day, John Malcom re-opened the Royal Australian Circus after a period of renovations. Conveniently overlooking their surreptitious departure from Launceston, and Ashton's convict past, Malcom touted

> the arrival of Mr and Mrs Ashton from the amphitheatres of Dublin and Liverpool ... The feats of horsemanship achieved by Mr Ashton on bareback steeds must be seen to be appreciated, the great perfection to which the noble animals are brought must be, by everyholder, admired.[161]

By July 1852 Ashton had commenced his travels with his own peripatetic circus, named at first Ashton's Olympic Circus.[162] Despite changes in proprietorship over succeeding generations, and periods of enforced inactivity, Ashton's Circus, in its various guises, remains in operation and in the hands of Ashton family descendants to the present day.[163]

Radford's demise

Despite the end to his pioneering entrepreneurial ventures in Van Diemen's Land, Radford's business acumen was undiminished. He found a new outlet for his entrepreneurial energies in Adelaide and would play a key role in introducing circus entertainments there. Describing himself as a 'veterinary surgeon', and forty years of age, Robert Radford married a widow, Letitia Baird, at Kapunda in July 1858.[164] Seven years later, after a brief illness, Radford died at his residence at Waterloo Plains near Kapunda on 30 March 1865 at the age of forty-eight years. He was buried the following day in a grave that remains unmarked.[165]

Coincidentally, on the eve of Radford's death two former members of his former equestrian company were in Adelaide. Golden Ashton, now calling himself 'James Henry' Ashton, was there with his own circus – Ashton's Circus – which had travelled overland from Victoria.[166] At the Victoria Theatre, John Jones and his three young sons appeared as 'The St Leon Troupe'. Their acrobatics and other entertainments formed the basis of the later St Leon's Circus, founded in 1875, and the name by which this family eventually became known.[167]

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157 As far as gathered, Hunter had no further association with circus, either in Van Diemen's Land or on the mainland. He may have been the 'John' Hunter [*sic*] who died at a pauper's establishment in Hobart in 1873, aged 70 years.
158 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 August 1851.
159 *Benalla Standard*, 14 November 1879.
160 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 August 1851.
161 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 August 1851.
162 *Maitland Mercury*, 8 July 1852.
163 The two 'Ashton' circuses of today – Ashton's Circus and the recently-organised Circus Joseph Ashton – are conducted by fifth and sixth generations of the family, respectively.
164 Registrar-General, South Australia, Marriages, 1858/#94: Robert Avis Radford and Letitia Baird, at Kapunda.
165 *South Australian Advertiser*, 5 April 1865.
166 Golden Ashton appears to have settled on the alternative name of 'James Henry' Ashton by late 1852. At that time he was travelling in New South Wales with his circus.
167 *South Australian Advertiser*, 27 March 1865.

THE MAKING OF AN ENGINEER: THE EARLY LIFE OF ALEXANDER CHEYNE

Meg Probyn

One cold afternoon sometime in May 1858, Captain Alexander Cheyne set out from his home at 136 Bathurst Street, Hobart Town, with his three King Charles spaniels. In former times, an upright bearing would have announced his military past, but in 1858 his gait was somewhat inelegant: he leant heavily on a cane. A carriage accident fourteen years earlier had resulted in a badly fractured left leg, now increasingly stiff with age and rheumatism. In his soft Scottish burr he bade his neighbours and acquaintances good afternoon, occasionally stopping for a few words. Everyone knew him: wealthy merchants, shopkeepers, cab-drivers, whether they were free settlers or emancipists. It must have amused him that even those he considered old enemies would shout friendly greetings to him, their animosity tempered by his (and their) advancing age. Used to his dogs snuffling along behind him, he barely gave them a glance until he arrived back home and found that one of them was missing – a young puppy of whom he was particularly fond. Locking the other dogs in his house, he retraced his steps and for more than three hours he searched. Disheartened, he returned to Bathurst Street, only to find a wet bundle whimpering on his doorstep. He never left his home again. When Cheyne was too weak to rise from his bed the next day, the doctor was summoned. Lungs and heart were badly affected, and it was soon obvious to all his friends that death was the only possible outcome. Alexander Cheyne, retired Captain of the Royal Engineers, died at his home on 6 July 1858.

The details of Alex's last foray into Hobart and his subsequent illness were recorded in a letter written by his sister-in-law, Lucinda Cheyne, to her son, Walter Lindesay Richardson, in Ballarat.[1] We know little about Alex Cheyne's early life from his own hand. He left a diary but the only entries to survive were some that were written between 1833, when he was already in his forty-eighth year, and 1855, three years before his death. There are other sources: church records; family wills; a history of the Cheyne family;[2] a few family letters; a brother's short autobiography;[3] testimonials; and official letters.[4]

Cheyne spent his childhood in Scotland at Leith, the port for Edinburgh, and he died on the other side of the world in Hobart, a picturesque port and the capital of the British colony of Tasmania. During the last few years of his life he was prone to reflect on his roller-coaster career in Van Diemen's Land since December 1835 – a career that had began very promisingly when Sir George Arthur appointed him Director-General of Roads and Bridges, a position he took up in January 1836. With the creation of the Public Works Department in 1838, Cheyne became its Director and held that position until 1841 when he was dismissed by the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir John Franklin, through the calumny of the Colonial Secretary, John Montagu. Montagu blamed Cheyne for commencing an expensive tower at St George's Church, Battery Point, and Franklin had dismissed him without a hearing, despite Cheyne stating that Montagu had instructed

1 Lucinda Richardson née Sirée (1796–1866) married Dr Bayne Cheyne (1788–1868) on 8 April 1828. M Probyn, (ed)., 'Letter 28', *Marriage Lines: the Richardson Family Letters 1854–1877*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2000, p. 114.

2 AY Cheyne, *The Cheyne Family in Scotland*, VV Sumfield, Eastbourne, 1931.

3 J Cheyne, *Essays on partial derangement of the mind in supposed connexion with religion,* William Curry, Dublin, 1843; includes a short autobiography.

4 Nor does Alexander Cheyne's entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* explain sufficiently his character or career choice.

him to proceed. A note verifying Cheyne's claim was discovered in 1843 just before Franklin left Van Diemen's Land.[5]

After his dismissal, Cheyne had been contracted by Franklin to supply water to Launceston. He invested his own money in the scheme but was forced into bankruptcy when Franklin's successor, Sir John Eardly Eardly-Wilmot, reneged on the contract.[6] Eardley-Wilmot had earlier taken up Cheyne's case against wrongful dismissal, and in March 1844 he was exonerated. In November that year, Eardly-Wilmot appointed him to supervise the draining of Launceston swamp. However, eight months later Cheyne suffered serious leg injuries when the stage coach he was travelling in from Launceston to Hobart overturned. In the years following the many months he spent recovering from this accident, he was variously employed: in 1845 as warehouse-keeper of the bonded warehouse in Launceston; in 1846 as acting Hobart Town surveyor, and in 1847 as director of the waterworks in Hobart, an appointment he held for a year. In 1852, at the age of seventy-two, Lieutenant-Governor Sir William Dennison appointed him assistant superintendent of road building at Ross. The following year he became the surveyor for the main road between Hobart and Launceston and held this position until it was discontinued. In January 1858 he was elected alderman of the city of Hobart, obtaining the highest number of votes. He had always fought for the riparian rights of the residents of Hobart and firmly believed that only he understood critical questions about the water works.[7]

Roads, bridges and an uncompleted but magnificently conceived water scheme[8] for Launceston are witness to his engineering prowess. However, his personal story is a poignant tale of a life set in the turbulent times of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries and overshadowed by war, betrayals and litigiousness. As he wrote to his niece, Cecilia Graham, in October 1852:

> I have been treated with great injustice by the Government of this Colony, but it would take many sheets of paper fully to explain all of my grievances. My correspondence with the Government has consumed not quires only but reams of paper. I have been completely ruined in my pecuniary circumstances.[9]

In this paper I will focus on Alexander Cheyne's early life and on his experiences during the Peninsular War, rather than on his time in Van Diemen's Land. My interest in the Cheyne family began while I was researching the family of author, Henry Handel Richardson. Her grandmother's second husband was Dr Bayne Cheyne, Alex's brother. I have always been fascinated by the lives of settlers and convicts as these people came from such diverse backgrounds and from this emerged a new society and social structure. My work on Alexander Cheyne's biography is in progress.

Alexander Cheyne's family

Alexander Cheyne was born in Leith on 8 October, 1785, the tenth child of John and Peggy Cheyne.[10] His healthy appearance was greeted with relief by his parents and siblings. His father was a doctor of some repute whose practice included not only families of rich

5 CO 280/144, 157, Franklin to Stanley, 1 March, 13 June 1841.
6 Cheyne finally received £3,000 compensation in 1853.
7 University of Tasmania archives, Letter to Cecilia Graham, 9 October 1852, Graham Papers, item 6.
8 S Harris, 'Magnificent failure – the Evandale-Launceston Water Scheme 1835–37', unpublished thesis, State Library of Tasmania, Hobart.
9 Letter to Cecilia Graham, 9 October 1852.
10 Dr John Cheyne (c1746–1821) married Margaret (Peggy) Cheyne née Edmonstone (christened 3 April 1752, date of death unknown.) on 23 March 1742, Episcopalian Congregational Church, South Leith. Nine children were born prior to 1785: John 23 Jan 1773 (d. 23 Jun 1775), William 22 Mar 1774, Cecilia 5 Jul 1775, John 2 Feb 1777, Elisabeth 1 Jun 1778; Robert, 1 Feb 1780 and Margaret, ch. 2 Jun 2 1781, d. as infants); Robert, born 20 Nov 1782 d. 15 Oct 1783; Alexander Bayne ch. 18 Sep 1784 d. infant.

merchants and professionals but also many of the poor who lived in the winding cobbled lanes and alleys of Leith's slums. Many babies in Leith died from croup, bronchitis, enteritis and other infectious diseases. Not even the doctor's family was spared – five of his eventual sixteen children died in infancy.[11]

Of Alex's mother Peggy we know that she was 'an ambitious woman of honourable principles, constantly stimulating her children to exertion and intently occupied with their advancement in life.'[12] She was the daughter of William Edmonstone, surgeon apothecary and fellow of the College of Surgeons,[13] and his wife, Cecilia Bayne.[14] The Edmonstone family could be traced to 1379 and to Sir John Edmonstone of Ednam. Peggy's branch of the family had settled in the Shetland Islands, north-east of the Scottish mainland, on the island of Hascosay where her father had been born. John Cheyne, Alexander's father, could trace his ancestors back to the eleventh century.[15] He had followed both his grandfather, John Cheyne, and his uncle, also John Cheyne, into the medical profession.[16] Alexander's father was described as:

> a man of great cheerfulness, benevolence, good sense, and singleness of mind. He would visit the poor as promptly as the rich, and his half-crown was as freely given to those who had no means of procuring food, as was his prescription.[17]

Alexander, who was called Alex by his family, was thus born into a family with a distinguished heritage. At the time of his birth in 1785, the Cheyne family lived at New Quay in Leith. However, during Alexander's first year both parents came into property. Peggy Cheyne inherited half her father's estate in the Shetland Islands, while John Cheyne inherited one of the oldest and largest houses in Leith – Lamb House in Water's Close. John Cheyne had been recognised as the legal heir to his great-great-great-great-grandfather, Andrew Lamb (1564–1634), Bishop of Galloway. The original house on the site was built in the sixteenth century, and had been owned by Bishop Lamb's father, also Andrew Lamb, who attended the first General Assembly in December 1560. A contemporary record claims that Mary Queen of Scots 'remainit in Andro Lamb's hours be the space of ane hour'.[18] Bishop Lamb, with David Lindsay, Bishop of Ross, and the Secretary of State, the first Lord Balmerino, accompanied Mary Queen of Scots's son, King James, on his journey from Edinburgh to London when he succeeded Elizabeth I.[19] Built in the mid-seventeenth century, Lamb House is a grand and rambling building,

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11 The children born after Alexander were: Charles 5 Nov 1786, Bayne 22 Apr 1788, Matilda 11 Apr 1789 (d. Apr 1808, aged 19), George 8 Apr 1790, Margaret 17 Mar 1792 (d. 16 Aug 1794), and Bruce 27 Jun 1793. All were christened in the Episcopal Congregational Church, Leith; six were buried in its graveyard.

12 Cheyne, pp. 1, 3.

13 William Edmonstone (d. 16 March 1786) and Alex's great-uncle Dr John Cheyne were both elected Fellows of the Royal College of Surgeons on 21 November 1753. Three other members of the Cheyne family were also elected Fellows: Alex's great-grandfather Dr John Cheyne, 14 May 1696; his father Dr John Cheyne, 30 May 1770; and his brother Dr John Cheyne, 1 August 1799. Register, Royal College of Surgeons, 18 Nicholson St, Edinburgh.

14 FJ Grant, 'Zetland county families', T and J Edmonston of Buness in the Parish of Unst-Manson, Lerwick, 1893, p. 72, MS 1099972, ff. 19–23, National Library of Scotland; the author's annotated copy. On his maternal side, Alex had two distinguished relatives. Peggy's uncle, naval commander Captain William Bayne (1732–1782), killed on 12 April 1782 fighting against the French in the American Revolutionary War (1775–83). Peggy's grandfather (Cecilia's father) was Alexander Bayne, Professor of Scots Law, University of Edinburgh. J Cheyne, p. 2.

15 It was in the 1600s that the family name began being written as 'Cheyne' and pronounced 'chain'. It had gone through many changes including: del Chene, le Chen, del Chaunay, and Chene. After the eleventh century four branches of the family were each linked to a barony – Inverugie, Straloch, Essilmont and Arnage – with the Edinburgh Cheynes descended from the Arnage branch. See AY Cheyne, *The Cheyne family in Scotland*, VV Sumfield, Eastbourne, 1931.

16 A portrait of Alex's great grandfather Dr John Cheyne (1655–1712) by Sir John Baptist de Medina (1659–1710) hangs in the hall of the College of Surgeons of Edinburgh.

17 Cheyne, p. 2.

18 National Trust for Scotland's booklet on Lamb House. This perhaps explains the Cheyne family's early devotion to the Stuart cause.

19 Cheyne, 'Autobiographical Preface', p. 2. Alex's paternal great-grandfather Dr John Cheyne (1655–1712) and his family lent considerable funds for the Stuart cause. The Cheyne heirs later withdrew their support, having no hope of recovering the loans.

with massive fireplaces, a turnpike stair, tall chimneys and crow-stepped gables topping its many storeys – six in some parts. It was to this house with its historical connections that the family moved in 1786, and it was there that Alex Cheyne grew up. Lamb House remained the family home until Dr John Cheyne retired to the country near Leith.[20]

Although there is documentary evidence for only two of the Cheyne sons – John and Charles – having attended the High School in Edinburgh, it is highly likely that Alex spent at least part of his secondary schooling at that illustrious establishment. It was an influential and remarkably egalitarian school, catering for bright sons at all levels of society. Irrespective of their social class, the pupils were instilled with confidence in their ability. The sons of noblemen, shopkeepers and servants sat:

> side by side, giving and taking places from each other, without the slightest impression on the part of my noble friends of any superiority on their parts to the other boys, or any ideas of inferiority on the part of the other boys to them.[21]

The Rector at the High School, Dr Alexander Adam, who had been in charge since 1768, was a teacher of Latin and Greek and a first class scholar. Notwithstanding his many virtues, his regime of corporal punishment was excessive and barbaric. John, Alex's second eldest brother, hated the Rector and the school made him so deeply unhappy that he frequently feigned illness to avoid having to attend classes. His father removed him to the tutelage of an Episcopalian clergyman but John later wrote that Dr Adam had haunted his 'uneasy dreams' for the rest of his life.[22] Whether Alex had such a traumatic experience at the school is not known. In a letter written in June 1837 to Captain Alexander Maconochie, Sir John Franklin's Private Secretary, Alex expressed his particular dislike of corporal punishment and commented, 'I have in consequence never awarded it as a sentence'.[23]

All through Alex's early years, the troubles with France loomed over the nation and over the Cheyne family. After France declared war on England on 1 February 1793, militia units were organised and regiments raised for home defence. Alex's father, then nearing fifty, was drawn into the war effort and became medical officer for the Leith Volunteers in December 1794, a position he held until July 1803. Alex's eldest brother, William, was twenty-three when he joined the 76th Regiment of Foot (Hindoostan) at the end of July 1797 and sailed to India. There William Cheyne's path crossed that of the most successful soldier in English history – Arthur Wesley (changed to Wellesley in 1798), the future Duke of Wellington.[24]

An apprenticeship at Wilsontown

Whether Alex completed his education at the High School or with a private tutor is not known but in October 1799 when he was fourteen, he had to make a decision about his future. He may well have thought of a career in the army like his eldest brother William

20 In October 1858, the National Trust for Scotland accepted the offer of Lamb House from Lord David Stuart, the son of the Marquess of Bute, and it is now used as a day centre for retirees. According to the National Trust, Lamb House is of major importance as an example of a combined dwelling and warehouse.

21 Henry, Lord Brougham and Vaux (1778–1868), quoted in J Murray, *A history of the Royal High School*, High School, Edinburgh, 1997, p. 40.

22 Cheyne, p. 4.

23 State Archives of Tasmania, Letter dated 9 June 1837. Maconochie was at that time preparing a report for the British Parliamentary Select Committee on Transportation in Van Diemen's Land. Interestingly, after Dr Adam died in 1809, the new rector of the Edinburgh High School James Pillans (1778–1864), one of Adam's former pupils, decided to prohibit corporal punishment, an innovation in both Scottish and English schools. Pillans believed that corporal punishment was degrading both to the boy who suffered it and to the master who inflicted it. His view was one that Alex shared.

24 Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington (1769–1852), third son of the first Earl of Mornington, was born in Dublin and educated at Chelsea, Eton and a French military school at Angers. Wellesley had arrived in Calcutta in February 1797 as Colonel in the 33rd Regiment. He was created Duke of Wellington in 1814. See *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. William Cheyne was to serve with him in the Peninsular War.

who had just been promoted to Lieutenant at Fort William in Calcutta, or of becoming a doctor like his father and brother John, but that is all speculation. What we do know from documentary evidence is that his particular strength was mathematics. In late 1799 Alex was sent to Wilsontown in Lanarkshire to be apprenticed in the ironworks and learn the business-side of running an industrial firm. It was not unusual for boys from prosperous homes to be apprenticed. Indeed, Alex's father had been apprenticed to his uncle in April 1770 and his brothers Charles and Bruce were both apprenticed to their father – Charles as a surgeon in 1808 and Bruce as a druggist in 1817.

Wilsontown was the earliest ironworks in Lanarkshire and had been established in about 1779 by three brothers, Robert, John and William Wilson.[25] By 1799 it was Scotland's second largest coke-smelting ironworks after Carron in Stirlingshire. Wilsontown was well known to the Cheyne family through their friends James Pillans, an iron merchant who had married John Wilson's daughter, and John Haldane, an Edinburgh lawyer. Haldane had been sent to Wilsontown in 1793 by the Court of Sessions to take possession of the books during one of many disputes between William Wilson and his brother John.[26]

Wilsontown, covering nearly one thousand acres, had been built on a moorland floodplain, forty kilometres from both Glasgow and Leith, and close enough for Alex to have reached comfortably in a day on horseback. The company also possessed – 'in absolute property' – the right to the minerals in nearly 4,000 acres of the surrounding area, where there were deposits of coal, ironstone, limestone and other material required for an ironworks.[27] The ironworks had two blast furnaces, the first built in 1779 and the second during the post-war boom of the 1780s.[28] A large forge was added in the 1790s. There were ten 'fineries' for the production of 'blooms', kilns for calcining iron and limestone, coke ovens, and a foundry with air furnaces and cupolas. There was a limekiln, a brick-mill, a wright's shop, houses for several blowing engines, a large square blast-furnace, a three-arched wagon-way bridge, and banks of coke, coal and ironstone. An extensive wagon-way encircled the furnaces and connected the works with the limestone, ironstone and coal workings. Underground wagon-ways were constructed in the coalmines.[29]

The counting house, where Alex was based during his apprenticeship, and the weigh-house were both erected on a huge culvert over a stream. Two weirs controlled the stream's flow and water was piped from the stream into a very large water cistern which held the reserves for the steam boilers. The forge hammer was probably driven by waterpower. A village around the ironworks provided over 400 stone houses for the workers, a school for their children, a bakery and a company shop for their daily needs.

While there to study accounting and financial management, Alex soon found his interest was drawn to the engineering aspects of Wilsontown – particularly mining and tunnelling, but also water flow and drainage systems. He became fascinated by the engineering intricacies associated with every aspect of the ironworks. It is at Wilsontown that he first learnt about the practical application of hydraulic principles.[30] Drainage

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25 IL Donacchie and J Butt, 'The Wilsons of Wilsontown Ironworks (1779–1813): a study in entrepreneurial failure', *Explorations in Entrepreneurial History*, vol. 4, 2nd series, pp. 150–1.

26 When Alex arrived in Hobart Town some thirty years later, Haldane's son was the first person he sought out.

27 'Particular description of the lands, minerals, iron-works, and village at Wilsontown, in the County of Lanark, in Scotland', an eight page prospectus published by J Wilson, 6 Crosby Square, London, post-1808.

28 The first Peace of Paris between England and the United States of America was signed on 30 November 1782. The second, concluding the wars between Britain and both France and Spain, was signed on 20 January 1783.

29 JR Hume, *The industrial archaeology of Scotland: I. The lowlands and borders,* BT Batsford, London, 1976, p. 160. The Wilsontown ironworks were demolished in June 1974. All that remained in 2007 were the broken walls of the old storehouse and company shop and the ruins of a few brick buildings (possibly houses). The vast area of the old works had reverted to nature and was covered by grassy banks, moss and heather.

30 Evidence for his expertise is apparent in his diary entry for 11 October 1847 where he annotated his calculations on water delivered from the springs on Mount Wellington to the Hobart Town Rivulet. Professor Russell Mein and Associate Professor Bob Keller of Monash University confirmed both the accuracy and the expertise of Cheyne's calculations on the velocity of flow using the contraction coefficient of 0.62. Sir Isaac Newton used a value of 0.71. Nowadays the contraction coefficient has been refined to 0.61.

of the Wilsontown mineral field was a serious problem. To prevent flooding in the company's mines, extensive underground drains had been constructed, stretching over four kilometres to a tributary of the River Clyde.

In November 1803, Alex travelled to Leith to be a witness at his sister Elisabeth's marriage to Commander William Wilkinson 'of His Majesty's Ship *Gorgon*', a seventy-four gun ship.[31] Elisabeth's bridegroom had served his country with distinction at the Battle of the Nile in August 1798 and also during the bombardment of Copenhagen in April 1801. The Cheynes, who took great pride in the exploits of their relative, Captain William Bayne, were delighted to welcome such a gallant officer to their midst.[32] The celebrations for the wedding were overshadowed by war for, although Britain and France had signed the Peace of Amiens in March 1802, by May 1803 the truce was over. Both the bridegroom and the bride's brother, William, were facing uncertain futures. After a brief honeymoon Wilkinson was back at sea.[33] William Cheyne, who had returned from India at the end of 1803, was stationed in southern England with his new regiment, the 2nd Battalion of the 47th Foot (Lancashire Regiment), anticipating overseas service. John Cheyne, William and Alex's brother, was safely back in Scotland after completing a tour of duty in Ireland as surgeon in the 7th Regiment (the Queen's Own Light Dragoons). He had been involved in several military actions against the Irish rebels, including at Ross and Vinegar Hill in 1798. At Leith he was in charge of the Ordnance hospital at the Fort and also worked in his father's busy practice.

Alex completed his apprenticeship at the Wilsontown ironworks in 1804 but by then a different career path beckoned – engineering and hydrology had drawn him away from the counting house. He returned to Leith and, to complement his practical skills and understanding of engineering, attended a course of lectures given by Professor John Playfair at the University of Edinburgh.[34] Professor Playfair taught geometry, trigonometry and applied mathematics, including astronomy, gunnery, fortifications, geography and navigation. According to the Bishop of Glasgow and Galloway, the Reverend Michael Russell (who may have tutored the Cheyne boys early in his career), Alex excelled at mathematics. Some years later, in 1823, Russell wrote:

> If an extensive professional knowledge, as well as a minute acquaintance with Mathematical Science and Practical Mechanics, be regarded as a qualification for the appointment [as Superintendent of the Union Canal], there is no man who can possess higher recommendations than you could produce: for of the numerous class of Students who attended the last course of Lectures given by Professor Playfair – and some of them were men distinguished by their scientific acquirements – there was

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31 Alex signed the pre-wedding agreement 'Alex. Cheyne, of Wilsontown'. Register of Marriages, Leith South 692/002 0110 0290, 11 November 1803.

32 University of Tasmania, Hobart, Graham Papers. William Wilkinson was promoted to Lieutenant on 29 April 1797, Commander on 27 April 1801, and Captain on 21 October 1810. D Syrett and RL DiNardo, *The Commissioned Sea Officers of the Royal Navy 1660–1815,* Scholar Press, Aldershot, 1994. During the Battle of the Nile on 1 August 1798 Wilkinson had been wounded, and was later awarded a Gold Medal for bravery under action. In 1801 he served on the *Elephant* under Captain Thomas Foley (1757–1833). After the bombardment of Copenhagen on 2 April 1801, he was appointed captain of the Danish ship of war, the *Holstein*, one of two important captured vessels. The Cheynes carefully preserved a letter from William Wilkinson to his brother, Jack, 4 April 1801, describing his elevation.

33 Despite the frequent absences of her husband, Bess produced six children. Two daughters survived into adulthood: Elizabeth (1810–86) who married Lieutenant (later Major-General) Frederick Augustus Yorke of the Royal Engineers on 10 February 1842; and Cecilia (born 1814) whose first husband was Dr Henry Graham, and second, Henry Sheppard. Cecilia's son, William Henry Graham, settled in Albany WA, and later went to Tasmania.

34 Professor John Playfair (1748–1819), an outstanding mathematician and geologist, was born near Dundee, and educated at the University of St Andrews. He began his career as a licensed minister but was introduced to scientific society in London through Nevil Maskelyne, Astronomer Royal. In 1785 Playfair became joint professor of mathematics with Adam Ferguson at the University of Edinburgh. See *Dictionary of National Biography.*

> not one, as I had the best reason to be assured, who stood higher in the estimation of that very learned and discerning Teacher than Captain Cheyne.[35]

Alex Cheyne was set on a new course. In 1805, with his father's blessing and financial support, he embarked on the Leith packet for Dover in the south of England to join the Royal Engineers and play his part in the war against France.

With the Royal Engineers

Alex would have felt at home in Dover, a garrison town during the Napoleonic Wars, for in those days it was similar to Leith and other British sea-ports, the crucial difference being that on a clear day the French coastline could be seen across the Strait of Dover. The officers of Royal Engineers were stationed at Dover Castle under the command of Captain William Henry Ford.[36] They were an elite, highly trained group of professional officers who enjoyed a reputation for great courage but were regarded by many military personnel as serious-minded and pompous.[37] When Alex joined in 1805, they numbered only 160. By November 1807, the Corps of the Royal Engineers had been augmented to bring its strength equal to that of the three Battalions of the Royal Artillery. Alex was then one of sixty lieutenants among 172 officers. By 1809 there were 179 officers.[38]

Along with the officers, gunners and drivers of the Royal Artillery, the Royal Engineers were part of the Ordnance Department under the control of the Master-General of the Ordnance.[39] The British Engineer Corps consisted of the officers of the Royal Engineers; the non-commissioned officers and privates of the Corps of Military Artificers (from 1812 the Royal Sappers and Miners); the Royal Staff Corps that had been formed in 1800 as part of the Quartermaster-General's Department; and the Barrack Artificer Corps set up in 1805. Ordnance was responsible for supplying to the army proper maps and all military stores – from muskets to camp kettles – and for manufacturing and supplying cannon for the navy, as well as the army.[40] With its rather chaotic administrative structure, Ordnance was a confusing organisation, but it possessed at least one redeeming feature. Since 1741, it had the only establishment for military education in Great Britain – the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich – where the formal curriculum included mathematics to underpin the principles of surveying, building, trenching and ordnance. Alex Cheyne's engineering skills and experience evidently impressed the authorities for he was permitted to study for a commission without having to attend the Royal Military Academy. We know from a testimonial written by the Deputy Inspector-General of Fortifications that, 'while studying for his commission in that Corps, he acquitted himself with considerable credit'.[41]

The engineers were stationed at Dover to supervise construction work at the castle, strengthen fortifications on the cliffs above the town and add new Martello towers along the coast. The alterations to the castle included reducing the size of its massive

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35 T/EG 271 Telford papers, Institute of Civil Engineers, Londo., Reverend Michael Russell (1781–1848) became minister at St James' Chapel, Leith, in 1809 and ordained Bishop of Glasgow and Galloway on 8 October 1837. His testimony was written on 3 February 1823 and printed for the Proprietors of the Edinburgh Glasgow Union Canal.

36 Ford later became Lieutenant-Governor of the Royal Military Academy.

37 Alex's enemies in Van Diemen's Land may well have used these same epithets to describe him, occasionally with some justification.

38 The Royal Engineers had two mottoes – *Ubique* [Everywhere] and *Quo Fas et Gloria Ducunt* [Whither right and glory lead] – that together sum up their role in any war, always at the forefront of conflict.

39 Between 1801 and 1827, the position of Master-General of Ordnance was held by four people: John Pitt, Earl of Chatham 1801 to 1806 and 1807 to 1810; Francis, Earl of Moira 1806 to 1807; Henry, Earl Mulgrave 1810 to 1819; and Arthur, Duke of Wellington, KG, 1819 to 1827. FG Guggisberg, '*The shop': the story of the Royal Military Academy*, 2nd edn, Cassell and Co, London, 1902, p. 261.

40 The Ordnance Department was not part of the army, which consisted of the cavalry and infantry only. In 1805, the Duke of York was Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, a position he'd held since 1798.

41 T/EG 270 Telford papers; testimonial written for Cheyne by Major-General John Rowley, Deputy Inspector-General of Fortifications, Ordnance Office, Pall Mall, April 15, 1822.

walls to accommodate heavy-gun platforms and extending a network of tunnels to create a honeycomb of caverns under the white cliffs. Dover must have been an exciting place to be stationed when the fear of invasion from France was ever-present. Newspapers were filled with the news of Napoleon and his campaigns. Nearly half the male adult population of Britain was formed into volunteer corps, the gentlemen busying themselves with parades and training. With rumours abounding that Napoleon was about to invade, troops were located at strategic points along the southern coast of England.

Alex was commissioned Second Lieutenant on 21 May 1806. Within three months – and two months before his twenty-first birthday – he was promoted to Lieutenant, his pay increasing from five shillings to six shillings a day.[42] This promotion came soon after the British defeat of the French in Italy at the battle of Maida in July 1806, and was probably due to the death of more senior engineers during action.[43] Alex remained at Dover until 1808 when he was called into foreign service and sent to Spain.[44] His commanding officer later wrote a glowing testimonial to his early career.

> This is to certify that Captain Alexander Cheyne of the Royal Engineers, served under my command at Dover, during the construction of the fortifications, and other considerable works at that post, where he had constant employment in surveying, levelling, making plans and sections, removing and disposing extensive excavations, driving shafts and galleries at various angles, building tanks and reservoirs, making roads and drains, and a multitude of other works, that were required in his profession; in all of which he displayed the utmost zeal and intelligence, a clearness of perception, a regularity in the prosecution, and a promptitude in the execution, which did him great credit, and entitled him to my entire confidence in the superintendence of many delicate and difficult operations.[45]

The lead-up to the Peninsular War

By March 1807, the British government was becoming increasingly concerned about the intentions of France and Spain. France was pressuring various European governments to deny the British access to their ports, and in this way intensify the Continental System. Through this boycott of British exports Napoleon intended to bring the 'nation of shopkeepers' to its knees and force Britain to make peace. Although Britain had destroyed the French and Spanish navies at Trafalgar fifteen months earlier, the British were convinced that Napoleon had access to sufficient men-of-war to give him command of the sea. Both Russia and Denmark had large fleets and, if they were to come under the influence of Napoleon, Britain was likely to lose naval supremacy. For a few months Britain watched and waited. Then, in June 1807, Britain's long-standing allies Prussia and Russia were decisively beaten by Napoleon. The Russians were forced to agree not to let British ships into their ports. Denmark then came under greater French pressure to also ban British trade. When the Danes refused to give up their ships to the British, diplomatic discussions failed. Britain was compelled for the second time in seven years to attack a nation that had been an ally for many generations. The British bombarded Copenhagen for two days and three nights, setting fire to much of the town, and the

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42 His uniform was black breeches with a broad scarlet stripe down each side, a short-skirted jacket with scarlet and black velvet facings. Yellow cord decorated the shoulders, collar and cuffs, and there was black piping along the edge of the jacket. His formal headgear was a helmet with a spike and his forage cap was black with red piping. R Money Barnes, *A history of the regiments & uniforms of the British Army*, Seeley Service & Co., London, 5th edn, 1962, p. 326.

43 Napoleon had defeated the combined armies of Austria and Russia at Austerlitz on 2 December 1805, seven months before the battle of Maida (Calabria). Despite claims in an obituary published on page 2 of the *Hobart Town Courier* of 7 July 1858, Alex did not take part in the Italian campaign.

44 Only seventeen officers of the Royal Engineers went to the Iberian Peninsula. They performed sterling service throughout what is called by the British, 'the Peninsular War', and by the Spanish, 'the War of Independence'.

45 T/EG 270 Telford papers, William Henry Ford, Lieutenant-Governor, Royal Military Academy, 31 March 1822.

The Iberian Peninsula
Bay of Biscay
FRANCE
Atlantic Ocean
Mediterranean Sea
Strait of Gibraltar
GALICIA
ASTURIAS
SANTANDER
NAVARRE
Pyrenees
ARAGON
CATALONIA
LEON
OLD CASTILE
NEW CASTILE
VALENCIA
MURCIA
EXTREMADURA
ANDALUCIA
MINHO
TRAS OS MONTES
BEIRA
ALEMTEJO
ALGARVE
PORTUGAL
La Coruña
Lugo
Santiago
Vigo
Oviedo
Villafranca
Astorga
León
Mansilla
Sahagún
Santander
Bilbao
San Sebastián
Bayonne
Vitoria
Pamplona
Roncesvalles
Burgos
Logroño
Tudela
Zaragoza
Belchite
Alcañiz
Tortosa
Lérida
Vich
Gerona
Hostalrich
Barcelona
Molins de Rey
Tarragona
Valls
Rosas
Figueras
Benavente
Medina de Rio Seco
Valladolid
Aranda
Soria
Chaves
Braga
Oporto
Rio Duero
Salamanca
Alba de Tormes
Ciudad Rodrigo
Almeida
Guarda
Busaco
Coimbra
Sabugal
Avila
Madrid
Rio Tajo
Sierra de Guadarrama
Sierra de Gredos
Castelo Branco
Almaraz
Talavera
Toledo
Ocaña
Uclés
Almonacid
Alcántara
Abrantes
Santarem
Lisbon
Campo Mayor
Elvas
Badajoz
Albuera
Olivenza
Albuquerque
Arroyomolinos
Medellín
Rio Guadiana
Ciudad Real
Sierra Morena
Andújar
Bailén
Córdoba
Jaén
Rio Guadalquivir
Seville
Niebla
Ayamonte
Granada
Baza
Sierra Nevada
Almería
Málaga
Ronda
Cádiz
Barrosa
Gibraltar
Sagunto
Valencia
Rio Turia
Alicante
Murcia
Cartagena
N

Danish fleet finally surrendered on 7 September 1807. While Britain was distracted by the Copenhagen campaign, Spain signed a treaty with France in which the two countries agreed to partition Portugal. France and Spain delivered a joint ultimatum to the Portuguese demanding that they declare war on Britain and close their ports. In October 1807, on the pretext of compelling Portugal to join the Continental System, Napoleon moved thousands of troops into Spain.

From its inception, the Franco-Spanish alliance had been fraught with problems. When it collapsed at the end of March 1808, the French took over the government and Napoleon declared his brother, Joseph Buonaparte, King of Spain. Stunned at this turn of events, on 2 May 1808 the people of Madrid rose up against the occupying French forces, an event known as the *Dos de Mayo* rising. The next day the French army took revenge, executing hundreds of people, both rebels and bystanders, and triggering a national revolt. This was the beginning of the Peninsular War.

The Portuguese formed a 'Supreme *Junta* of the Kingdom' under the Bishop of Oporto and appealed to Britain and Galicia, a province of Spain, for aid. Although Spain officially was still at war with Britain, Spanish diplomats from Asturias followed by those from Galicia and other provinces, also sought help from the British Government, requesting money and arms but not military intervention. On 5 July 1808, Spain and Britain signed a peace treaty. The British Government began planning the defence of the Iberian Peninsula despite the various Spanish envoys insisting that they did not want Britain to send troops.

The Corunna campaign

In September 1808, Lieutenant Alex Cheyne, Captain Charles Pasley, Lieutenant Frederick Augustus Yorke and Lieutenant Richard Davey (all officers of the Royal Engineers) were ordered to Falmouth, in Cornwall, where a large contingent of infantry and cavalry was being assembled. Alex had been appointed Adjutant to the senior engineer, Captain James Carmichael Smyth, who later wrote that the young Lieutenant 'showed himself, upon all occasions, a most intelligent and active officer ... I have the highest opinion of his integrity and honour'.[46] Falmouth was crammed with 10,000 infantry, five cavalry regiments and an artillery regiment, all awaiting the arrival of the Scottish General, Sir David Baird. As second-in-command of the expedition, Baird's orders were to sail to Corunna in northern Spain, to join General Sir John Moore in the defence of Portugal.[47]

Sir John Moore had taken over command of the British forces in Portugal in August 1808, after three Generals – Dalrymple, Burrard and Wellesley – had been recalled following the Convention of Cintra.[48] Moore's orders were to leave a garrison in Portugal and advance with his army of 20,000 men into Spain to assist the Spanish forces rid their country of the French. On 11 October the first of Moore's regiments started their long march northward from Lisbon to Salamanca, where they were to meet Baird's

46 T/EG 270 Telford papers, testimonial written for Cheyne by Colonel James Carmichael Smyth (1779–1838), Aide-de-Camp to his Majesty (King George IV), Nutwood, Ryegate, 11 April 1822. Smyth received a baronetcy and later became the first Governor of British Guiana.

47 Sir John Moore (1761–1809) was born in the Trongate, Glasgow on 13 November 1761, the eldest surviving son of the physician and writer John Moore MD (1729–1802) and his wife, Jean (1735–1820), daughter of the Reverend Professor John Simson of Glasgow University. Like Cheyne, Moore was a straight-talking Scot. George Canning, the Foreign Secretary, and Lord Castlereagh, the War Secretary, hated one another, but despite this were united by their even more intense dislike of Moore, stemming from his biting criticism of some of the ludicrous expeditions on which they sent the military.

48 The Convention of Cintra was a treaty the British signed with the French after the British victory at Vimeira on 21 August 1808. The terms of the treaty shocked the Portuguese and enraged the British, from the King down. The French were not held as prisoners of war but were free to return to France with their property, which the French interpreted as including Portuguese State carriages, royal linen and church plate. Dalrymple, Burrard and Wellesley, the three British Generals involved in negotiating the treaty were recalled to London to face an enquiry. Only Wellesley was exonerated. Dalrymple and Burrard were never re-employed.

troops.[49] Moore remained in Lisbon to mobilise the remainder of his troops for their northward trek. Such were his difficulties that he had to resort to using hackney carriages to transport supplies. While still in Lisbon, Moore received a disturbing letter from Lord William Cavendish Bentinck, the British Military representative to the Spanish Government in Madrid.[50] The Spanish had intercepted a letter from the French indicating that reinforcements of 66,000 infantry and approximately 7,000 cavalry were due to arrive between 16 October and 15 November. In a dispatch to Castlereagh on 18 October, Moore wrote, 'It is impossible to be more anxious than I am to get forward, but it is useless to take forward troops without the means to enable them to act … I have received no report yet of the arrival of Sir David Baird. I expect it daily.' He wrote a much angrier letter to Bentinck.

> The arrangement for supplies should have been made and the information respecting roads should have been got before the march began – but when I got the command nothing of this sort had been done. They talk of going into Spain as if going into Hyde Park.[51]

Moore arrived in Almeida, on the frontier of Portugal and Spain, on 8 November and by 13 November the first of his regiments had reached Salamanca. This was a gruelling march and took a huge toll on the soldiers, many of whom were reduced to walking without shoes. At the beginning of November Baird's troops were still at Corunna in the north-west of Spain and had before them a hazardous journey through the mountainous regions of Galicia and Asturias before they could join Moore. Baird sent a small party of engineers and sappers – Alex Cheyne among them – to reconnoitre the 225 kilometre route to Astorga, a town half way to Salamanca. With the roads in an atrocious condition, and winter setting in, the advance was pitifully slow and the troops were soon spread along the road from Corunna to Astorga.

Napoleon, infuriated by Spanish military successes during June and July, and concerned that the Peninsula was perilously close to slipping from his grasp, redirected 30,000 troops from Germany to Spain.[52] By this stage, Napoleon's brother Joseph had withdrawn in alarm to Vitoria, leaving Madrid to be reoccupied by the Spanish under General Casaños. Having achieved what were in reality very limited successes, most of the Spanish generals became complacent, convincing themselves that the French had already been defeated. However, rivalry and lack of co-operation among the various *juntas* made the Spanish forces extremely vulnerable. Napoleon arrived at the border between France and Spain on 3 November 1808, after having reaffirmed his alliance with Russia.[53]

Baird's forces eventually reached Astorga on 22 November. By then the French had defeated the Spanish at three battles – at Gamonal on 10 November, Espinosa on 11 November and Tudela on 23 November. When this news reached Moore in Salamanca, he realised that he could expect little help from the Spanish. There he was, stuck in Spain, sent on an under-prepared mission by a British Government disastrously ill-informed about the real situation, both military and political. Accounts of the number of troops, the prowess of the Spanish army and the enthusiasm and support that the British would

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49 Moore had split his infantry among three divisional commanders – Major-General Alexander Mackenzie Fraser, Major-General William Carr Beresford and General the Hon. Edward Paget. The heavy artillery and cavalry were placed under Lieutenant-General, the Hon. John Hope.

50 Bentinck (1774–1839) was the second son of the 3rd Duke of Portland, a key figure in the Whig party. Bentinck served in the Iberian Peninsula and in Italy from 1808 to 1814.

51 R Parkinson, *Moore of Corunna*, Granada Publishing Ltd, London, 1976, p. 179.

52 At Gerona the French General, Duhesme, had been beaten back on 20 June 1808. At Valencia the French Marshal, Moncey, lost 1,000 men in two attacks and retreated on 28 June. Between 16 and 19 July, the French force under General Dupont was defeated by the Andalusian army commanded by General Casaños and 18,000 French troops were captured.

53 This was the only time Napoleon was in Spain during the Peninsular War.

receive from the Spanish population had all proved baseless. With Baird at least five days from Salamanca, Moore was dismayed to learn that the French had taken Burgos and were advancing south to Valladolid, only seventy miles, or a three- or four-day march from Salamanca.[54] He realised that to continue would be suicidal and reluctantly decided his only recourse was a tactical retreat to Portugal.

In Madrid, with the French encircling the city, the inhabitants barricaded their streets and seemed determined to defend their homes to the death. John Hooker Frere, the newly appointed (and unfortunately naïve) British plenipotentiary in Madrid, conferred with the Spanish *junta.* They wrote to Moore urging him not to retreat, saying it was 'impolite' and 'uncalled for', and that he should join the uprising as 'the enemy was never so near his ruin at that moment'.[55] Completely underestimating the number of French troops now in Spain, they claimed that if Moore and the Spanish army united, they would be able to free the Peninsula.

It had been extraordinarily difficult for Moore to untangle fact from fiction. An order from Napoleon to Soult was intercepted by Spanish guerrillas and sold to the British.[56] From this Moore learnt that Soult was advancing into north-west Spain with a small detachment. In order to disrupt French communications, Moore decided to attack Soult with assistance from the Spanish army under General La Romana. This action would also have the advantage of drawing the French away from Madrid. On 9 December, news reached Moore that Napoleon and his troops had captured Madrid and that, despite the bravado in their messages to Moore, at the sight of the French troops the Spanish *junta* had fled to Badajos.

Throughout the Peninsular War, the Spanish guerrillas worked brilliantly. Apart from killing any small parties of French soldiers who strayed from their lines, the guerrillas had such a stranglehold over French communications that no letters were safe. Another intercepted letter from Napoleon to Soult informed the British that Napoleon and his army were about to march to Badajos; that Soult had been ordered to clear the country between the Galicia and the Duero; that the Spanish had no army to oppose him; and that the British had retreated to Portugal. Moore realised that as soon as Napoleon became aware of the actual whereabouts and movements of the British, he would change direction and pursue them.

After the fall of Madrid, Moore had urged Baird to remain in Astorga for a few days to keep the enemy occupied and allow time for Hope, who was bringing the heavy guns and cavalry into Spain from Elvas, to be reunited with Moore's troops. The plan was for the British to join forces at nearby Benavente, before retreating to either Corunna or the port of Vigo, from where they could travel by sea to Lisbon. Baird's dealings with the Spanish army officers, and their unfulfilled promises of assistance, led him to believe that Moore's assessment was correct: retreat was the only possible action. On 17 December 1808 an advance guard under Moore arrived at Villalpando and was joined soon after by Baird and his three brigades. It was the first opportunity for the two men to confer face-to-face and Moore's welcome to Baird was extremely warm.

The final push to confront the French at Sahagun was a grim ordeal. The weather had turned cold and wet; the snow became slush and the roads a muddy swamp, a hazard for the artillery who were frequently bogged. In front were the cavalry – the Hussars – led by Lord Henry Paget. The Hussars were the first to go into action – a surprise night attack in the streets of Sahagun. The British defeated the 700-strong French cavalry,

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54 MS 236 Gurwood Papers, Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra, Letter dated 10 December 1808 from Henry Okey to Richard Gurwood, reporting on a letter from Lieutenant John Gurwood (1790–1845), of the 52nd Regiment, to his mother.

55 W Napier, introduction by C Stuart, *History of the War in the Peninsula*, abridged, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1979, p. 53.

56 Marshal Nicholas Jean-de-Dieu Soult, Duc de Dalmatia (1769–1851) was probably Napoleon's most talented Marshal; he had enlisted in 1785 and was commissioned in 1792. The British knew him as the 'Duke of Damnation'.

capturing thirteen officers and 140 men. On 23 December Moore was in the midst of planning a night march from Sahagun to Carrion, where he believed Soult's army to be, when a Spanish peasant brought a message from General La Romana, warning Moore that Napoleon was on his way north with 50,000 of his troops. He'd left 10,000 men behind to secure Madrid. Moore's objective of drawing the French army away from the south had worked, but his army was now in a perilous situation. He ordered an immediate retreat.

On Christmas Eve 1808, the British troops began the long walk back to the coast, filing out of Sahagun along icy roads and through worsening weather. Napoleon arrived at Valderas twelve hours too late to catch the British. However, Soult was in hot pursuit and the discipline of the British army began to break down. Despite this the generals kept up a furious pace. In the meantime, the engineers had been busy. One group was in front of the retreating columns, reconnoitring the roads and repairing the bridges with the aim of ensuring a safe and speedy passage for the British. The engineers at the rear were in a more perilous situation. Their job was to destroy the bridges and delay the enemy. When wagons carrying stores became bogged, threatening to delay the British retreat, they were blown up where they lay. The journey through the mountains to the barren Lugo plateau was a nightmare. Blasts of icy wind decimated the column – men collapsed on the road in excruciating pain from bleeding feet and from exhaustion. Generals Hope and Fraser led the way and reached Astorga by 29 December. Moore followed with the reserves. Baird, who had crossed the Esla River using the ford at Valencia de San Juan, also arrived at Astorga on 29 December. Lord Paget and the 10th Hussars remained at the Esla to guard the ford. Their charge against the French Imperial troops was a brilliant success. The French turned on their heels and fled, the British capturing seventy prisoners, including General Charles Lefebre-Desnouettes, Colonel of the *Chasseurs à Cheval* of the Imperial Guard.[57] That the 'flower' of the French army could be routed by such a small number of the British was a blow to Napoleon's pride. On 1 January 1809, the exhausted French, led by Napoleon, took possession of Astorga, but had missed the opportunity to surround and destroy the British army. Napoleon, by then tired of the chase, left General Soult in command and departed for France with the bulk of the army. He never returned to the Peninsula.

The British continued their retreat through the torrential rain and freezing winds that blew from the snow-covered ridges. In two days they marched nearly 100 kilometres, reaching Villafranca on 2 January 1809. West of Villafranca, the road wended its way across the Cantabrian mountains and up the spur of Monte Cebrero to the bleak upland plain of Lugo. One soldier wrote:

> As we looked round on gaining the highest point of these slippery precipices and observed the rear of the army winding along the narrow road, we could see the whole track marked out by our wretched people, who lay expiring from fatigue and the severity of the cold.[58]

The French harassed the rearguard, picking off stragglers. The British soldiers were in a deplorable state – barefoot, with tattered clothes, weakened by lack of food and too much of the wine that had been stolen from ransacked villages. Their condition was pitiful. Men dropped to the rear by the hundreds, and broken carts, dead animals and people lay abandoned in the snow. The sight of a turnip field caused regiments to break ranks in a rush for the food. Arriving at Lugo on 6 January, Moore decided to defend the hills around the town, anticipating that the prospect of battle would rouse and unite

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57 Marshal Charles Lefebre-Desnouettes, Comte (1773–1822), was the son of a Parisian draper, and was commissioned in the 5th Dragoons in 1793. He married Napoleon's second cousin and was ennobled as a Comte in March 1808.

58 A Neale, quoted in W Verner, *History and campaigns of the Rifle Brigade, Part I 1800–1809*, John Bale, Sons & Danielsson, London, 1912, p. 193.

his remaining men, and thus restore discipline. Soult had assumed that only cavalry remained in the hills and so was not expecting the town to be well defended. The British were able to blast the French artillery positions and drive them back. Under cover of night, they then began the last leg of the retreat to Corunna. The appalling weather continued, with howling winds blowing sleet and rain on the men. In the winding lanes on the westerly slopes of the mountain, many of the officers became disoriented and took their men in the wrong direction. It was only at daybreak that the commanders were able to find their bearings. By then the soldiers were starving. At the small village of Guitiriz the remaining commissariat stores were plundered. Casks of wine and a cartload of raw fish and rum were consumed by the ravenous troops – a combination that proved fatal for many. Over 2,600 men perished between Lugo and Betanzos, a village in the hills above Corunna.

Moore ordered the destruction of several bridges en route but it appeared that at every attempt the engineers had failed.[59] Most of the bridges were solidly-built stone structures with narrow arches, so that even when the arches had been destroyed the bridge could either be repaired or rendered passable in a fairly short time. Near Corunna the engineers succeeded in blowing up the bridge of El Burgo, and also that of Cambria, a few kilometres up the Mero River. Alex Cheyne's friend, Lieutenant Richard Davey, had been in charge of destroying the bridge at Cambria but following the setting of the mine, he remained too close and was killed by flying chunks of masonry.

Nearly thirty years later, an anonymous correspondent to the Hobart Town *Colonial Times* referred to Alex Cheyne derogatively as 'Captain Lugo'.[60]

> 'Who blew up the Bridge at Lugo?' is on everybody's mouth. Pray, Mr Editor, do tell us who <u>did</u> blow up the bridge, and cut off the baggage waggons, with some £80,000 worth of dollars. You may recollect the circumstances. There were two mines, one small one to set as a decoy, and a well charged one to destroy the bridge and cut off the advanced troops of the French that were then closely pursuing the English towards Corunna. The stupid engineer lighted the wrong <u>fuse</u>, and away went our own troops baggage, waggons, &c in the air. Pray Mr Editor, who blew up the bridge?[61]

The joke continued for a couple of months but then stopped. Perhaps the correspondent had found out that he had been misinformed about the deliberate destruction of the silver wagon at Nogales on 5 January 1809. When the bullocks drawing the cart collapsed through exhaustion, Moore had been forced to abandon silver dollars amounting to £25,000. To the horror of many of the men, the casks of silver had been rolled over a precipice. This 'joke' in the newspaper must have been an unwelcome reminder to Alex of the privations of the retreat to Corunna and it no doubt appalled him that there were people who could find such events laughable.

Leaving the reserve troops posted between the village of El Burgo and the road to Santiago de Compostella, Moore and three divisions marched from Betanzos to Corunna on 11 January 1809. However, to Moore's consternation, the transport ships he had requested had not arrived. Had the ships reached Corunna before the troops, embarkation could have been completed well before the French caught up with them. Some senior officers urged Moore to ask Soult for terms to permit the British army to embark unmolested. Moore rejected this and set about planning how best to defend the town.

While the soldiers worked on the town's defences the engineers, who included

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59 Mentioned by Dr James Moore, brother of John Moore, in his book based on official documents and dispatches. The failure to blow up bridges was quoted in Napier, p. 76.

60 Two professional military historians have recently searched the records in London to see if there was any incident at Lugo that could explain the 'joke'. None has been found.

61 *Colonial Times*, Hobart Town, 25 July 1837.

Alex Cheyne and his friends Captain Charles Pasley and Lieutenant Frederick Yorke, were given the task of destroying the two magazines – arms, ammunition and 1,500 barrels of gunpowder – that had arrived with Baird. The British did not want the French to benefit from their munitions. On the evening of 14 January the lookouts signalled the arrival of the transport ships: twelve Royal Navy vessels and 100 chartered merchantmen. About forty-nine per cent of Moore's original force survived the twelve-day retreat, a remarkable achievement.[62] In that time, they had covered 130 kilometres through snow-covered mountains and engaged the enemy seven times. Embarkation began as soon as the vessels anchored, and it continued throughout the following day. The question was, 'had the fleet arrived too late to avert a battle?'

Meanwhile the French had managed to repair the bridge at El Burgo and had moved into position along the Heights of Palavea and Penasquedo, about three miles south of the town of Corunna above the village of Elvina. The French had more heavy guns at their disposal than did the British but the two sides had a similar number of men – about 15,000 – until Laborde arrived with 5,000 more. At two o'clock in the afternoon of 16 January 1809, Soult's principal battery opened fire on Elvina. The British infantry were positioned to the right of the village, and Soult's intention was to send the French cavalry around behind them to cut off their lines of communication with Corunna. During the fighting, General Sir David Baird's arm was mangled by grape-shot, and he had to leave the battlefield. Not long after, Sir John Moore's shoulder was shattered by a cannon-shot. Six Highlanders carried him from the battlefield and he died shortly after. By then the Battle of Corunna was all but over. The French withdrew. They had been beaten back from Elvina and were unable to crush the British into submission on any other battle-front.

General Hope, who had taken command of the British, embarked his troops as quickly as possible. All through the night the ragged soldiers, covered in blood and filth, boarded the ships. Although the French made a feeble attempt to bombard the fleet at eight o'clock in the evening, the military action was over. Sir John Moore's body, wrapped in his bloody cloak, was buried in the citadel and the last of the troops boarded the ships on 17 January 1809.[63] The British claimed victory at Corunna. Even though it was clear that Moore's strategy had disrupted Napoleon's plans for the conquest of the Peninsula, it was a long time before the British Government and the British populace appreciated the significance of his campaign. General Soult did. He acknowledged Moore's skill and understood his strength of will and valour. After the British troops had departed, and the French had occupied Corunna, Soult mounted a guard of honour at Moore's grave and fired an artillery salute in his honour.[64] And so the first episode of Alex Cheyne's foreign service ended. No doubt he was relieved to be alive and glad to be bound for England.

The fighting force that reached England's shores from Corunna was a sorry sight. After having been cooped up in small sailing ships for over a week, the men arrived still filthy from the battle – lousy, ragged, and with untended wounds – an alarming sight when the ships appeared at every port, from Falmouth to Dover, in southern England. The retreat and the battle of Corunna were probably the worst experiences of Alex's life. There are no letters or contemporary accounts that tell how Alex fared immediately after the campaign. We can only surmise that he had probably coped as well as anyone could under those trying circumstances. He was young, strong and having been brought up a doctor's son, was no doubt armed with more medical knowledge than most of his colleagues.

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62 The original force was about 30,000 with Moore and approximately 15,000 with Baird. There were about 20,000 survivors at Corunna and another 3,500 at Vigo with General Craufurd.

63 Moore's tomb can be found in the tranquil Jardin de San Carlos.

64 Many years later, on Thursday 28 June 1838, Soult, by then 69, entered Westminster Abbey for the coronation of Queen Victoria as the special envoy for France. He was moved to tears by the generosity of the reception given to him, as the guests cheered him the whole way down the nave of the Abbey. C Woodham-Smith, *Queen Victoria: her life and times, volume I, 1819–1861*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1972, p. 157.

From Dublin to Lisbon and Alicante

The muster records inform us that Alex remained in the south of England until March 1809 when he went to Scotland and, from there, to Ireland. On 12 June 1811, four months before his twenty-sixth birthday and while stationed at Dublin Castle, he received his commission as Second Captain. Nine months later, he was to set sail once again for the Iberian Peninsula, to serve first in Portugal and then in eastern Spain where the French were in control.[65]

Between June 1811 and January 1812, troops under the command of the French Governor, Marshal Louis-Gabriel Suchet, had defeated the Spanish at both Tarragona and Valencia.[66] Suchet's campaigns were wonderful military achievements, compelled as he was to carry on both a guerrilla war and a regular campaign. However, soon after his success at Valencia, Suchet contracted fever and, bedridden for weeks, was unable to continue the advance on the Spanish-held port of Alicante. Making the most of this lull the Spanish began rebuilding their forces. In the meantime Wellington, whose Anglo-Portuguese army faced the French on four fronts,[67] urged Lord William Bentinck, the British commander in Sicily, to mount an Anglo-Sicilian seaborne attack on the east coast of Spain. This was planned as a diversionary action to keep Suchet's troops tied down in that region.

Alex Cheyne had arrived in Lisbon on 5 April 1812, the day before the end of the siege at Badajoz. Out of twenty-four engineers involved in the siege, four were killed and nine seriously wounded. Wellesley reported, 'We have such an expenditure of Engineers that I can hardly wish for any body lest the same fate befall him that has befallen so many.'[68] Until June 1812, Alex Cheyne was employed around the Lines of Torres Vedras, a series of fortified positions across the Lisbon Peninsula that had been built by the Portuguese under the direction of the Royal Engineers.[69] Alex's commanding officer was Captain Richard Boteler with whom he had previously served. Boteler later wrote:

> I have great pleasure in offering my testimony as to your zeal, abilities, and general knowledge of those duties, which I am enabled to do, from having served with you for some time at Dover, where there were very extensive works going on, and having, subsequently, been under me on the Lines, near Lisbon. At both places I had repeatedly occasion to remark the precise and systematic manner in which you conducted the duty particularly entrusted to you, and the minute attention you paid to the detail, both in drawing out the plans and estimates, as well as in arranging and carrying them into effect. Were I employed myself on any great work, I do not know any officer whose assistance I would more desire than your own ….[70]

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65 After the retreat from Corunna in January 1809, Wellington was sent to Portugal with an expeditionary force. Wellington's plan to ensure the defence of Portugal and the safe embarkation of the British army should the need eventuate, is celebrated as the Lines of Torres Vedras.

66 Louis-Gabriel Suchet, Duc d'Albuféra, Marshal (1770–1826), was born in Lyon. Rather than going into the family silk business, he enlisted in the cavalry of the National Guard in 1793. He joined Napoleon Bonaparte in 1796 for the Italian campaign and was severely wounded at Cerea. He fought in the short Swiss campaign and was promoted to brigadier general, then major general in 1799. In 1802, Suchet became inspector general of the infantry; in 1808 he received the title of count, married the niece of Joseph Bonaparte's wife, and then joined the campaign in Spain. After the siege of Saragossa in April 1809, he was appointed head of the Army of Aragon and subjugated the area. Napoleon promoted him to marshal on 8 July 1811. In January 1812, he received the title of Duc d'Albuféra and became governor of the Valencia region.

67 As well as Suchet's force at Valencia, there was Soult's 'Army of the South', based outside Cadiz, the so-called 'Army of Portugal' commanded by Marmont, at Salamanca, and the 'Army of the North' commanded by General Louis Marc Caffarell.

68 WD ix 142 to Malcolm, 13 May 1812.

69 The work on these fortifications took about three years and was carried out by 310,000 Portuguese – mainly home guard (Ordenança) – and supervised by seventeen Royal Engineers under William Fletcher's direction. It cost about £100,000 but gave the British and Portuguese troops a strong defensive position for the rest of the war.

70 T/EG 270 Telford papers, ICE, London; from a printed certificate of a letter written to Cheyne by Captain Richard Boteler RE, from Spike Island, April 27, 1822.

The Battle of Salamanca began on 22 June 1812, coincidentally the day that Napoleon declared war on Russia. Salamanca is considered to be one of the finest of Wellington's Peninsular War victories. With only twenty-eight battalions against the seventy-eight of the French, he was able to send the French 'reeling eastwards into Castile'.[71] The victory at Salamanca was followed by the siege of Burgos – one of Wellington's very few failures.[72]

Bentinck had acted on Wellington's suggestion of diversionary action. In June 1812 Alex Cheyne was one of the men sent from Lisbon to the island of Majorca to join the Anglo-Sicilian force of 7,000 British, Sicilian and Spanish troops under the command of Lieutenant-General Frederick Maitland.[73] In August 1812, this relatively small force sailed to the port of Alicante on the south-east coast of Spain. Once again Alex found himself working with Captain Frederick Rennell Thackery of the Royal Engineers. Thackery wrote of Cheyne:

> From our being constantly occupied in constructing works, I had ample means of judging as to his intelligence and assiduity; and I can truly assert, that although I have been nearly forty years in the service, I never met with any officer of Engineers, who, in my judgement, would be capable of making himself so useful as Captain Cheyne, if employed as a Civil Engineer.[74]

Alexander was engaged at the fortifications of Alicante for the remainder of 1812.[75] For most of 1813 the Anglo-Sicilian force, with Cheyne as one of their very few engineers, was involved in Lieutenant-General Sir John Murray's campaign against Suchet's army. In March 1813 they advanced from Alicante towards Valencia. When they reached Castalla, only a few miles north of Alicante, Murray received disturbing news about civil unrest in Sicily. He dithered, uncertain whether they should return to Alicante, and was reluctant to engage the enemy. Despite this the British, with crucial support from the Spanish, won a victory at the Battle of Castalla on 13 April 1813. Suchet was forced to retreat. However Murray failed to take advantage of this victory, and returned to the safety of Alicante with his troops.

To Tarragona

To prevent Suchet and his 68,000 men from joining the other French generals, Wellington ordered Murray to start a fresh offensive. On 31 May, Alex Cheyne was one of the men at Alicante who embarked on the troop ships transporting the Anglo-Sicilian force to Tarragona. Murray's 15,000 foot, 800 horse and twenty-four field guns were to join the Catalan Division that was causing endless problems for the French occupying force. Murray's mission was to take control of the fortress at Tarragona.

On the surface it seemed a simple task, but General Bertoletti, the French Governor of Tarragona, was a tough campaigner and would not surrender. When Murray's force landed on 3 June he found that not only was his force far larger than the French but also that the fortifications round the Tarragona garrison were in an extremely poor

71 P Guedalla, *The Duke*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1931, p. 221.

72 This the last time Wellington and his troops had to retreat to the safety of the Lines of Torres Vedras. However, the retreat of Burgos was nothing compared to the retreat of Napoleon's *Grande Armée* from Moscow and his subsequent defeat at the Battle of Leipzig in October 1812.

73 Maitland was second-in-command in the Mediterranean.

74 T/EG 270 Telford papers, Institute of Civil Engineers, London; from a printed certificate of a testimonial written for Cheyne by Lieutenant Colonel Frederick R. Thackery, Commanding Royal Engineer, Northern District, Edinburgh, dated 4 April 1822.

75 As historians tend to concentrate on Wellington's activities, with perhaps only brief references to the hapless General Murray and his failed siege of Tarragona, much less has been written about the campaigns in the east of Spain. David Gates makes this point in his preface to *The Spanish ulcer: a history of the Peninsular War,* Guild Publishing, London, 1986, p. xii. He partly rectified this by producing a relatively short and eminently readable history of the whole war.

state of repair. The engineers advised Murray that on 7 June after only four days of heavy bombardment, an assault would be practicable. Nine days later they were seemingly no closer to success. When Murray received news that the French forces were on the move to the west and north, despite the French being too far away to pose an immediate threat to his campaign, he panicked. He abandoned his siege train and ordered a retreat to the ships, fleeing from an army that didn't appear. The embarkation on 12 June 1813 was confused and disorderly, with guns and stores left behind. Murray had been ordered to proceed to Valencia to assist the Spanish but instead landed his troops at the Col de Balaguer. Fortunately for the British, four days later Lord William Bentinck arrived and took command.[76]

In the meantime, to ensure that there would be adequate forage for his horses, Wellington remained in Portugal waiting for sufficient grass to grow on the Spanish plains. It was not until the second week of May 1813 that his army could begin its northward march.[77] By the end of May, the troops had crossed the Esla River and the great corn plain of Old Castile, forcing the French to beat a retreat. Valladolid (where King Joseph had set up his court), Palencia, Burgos – all were evacuated.[78] A demoralised French army, outnumbered by Wellington's forces, was soundly beaten at the battle of Vittoria on 21 June 1813. The tide had turned against the French. Under pressure from the Spanish guerrillas, French troops were forced to abandon the town of Sargasso and retreat across the frontier. Troops that had been fighting the relentless Catalan regulars retreated to Barcelona. On hearing that the French were in new positions further east, along the border with France, Suchet decided his only option was to evacuate his troops from Aragon and Valencia, and consolidate at Tarragona.

Alex Cheyne was with Bentinck's forces at the height of the summer of 1813 when they marched north from Alicante to Tarragona in pursuit of the French under Suchet.[79] After destroying the main fortifications at Tarragona, Suchet moved his troops further north. By 5 September, the Anglo-Sicilian troops had arrived at Villafranca del Panades, between Tarragona and Barcelona. This was where Bentinck made his headquarters. Having ascertained from a cavalry patrol that there was no sign of Suchet's troops, Bentinck ordered Colonel Frederic Adam and the Advanced Guard Brigade of 1,500 men to occupy the heights of the Ordal Cross, on the road to Barcelona. Convinced that Suchet was in full retreat, Bentinck personally led his vanguard to its position on 12 September and then returned to Villafranca to join the remainder of his force – about 10,500 men – leaving Colonel Adam in charge at Ordal Cross. That night Adam did not post any pickets. Unbeknown to the dozing troops, the French were to make a surprise attack on Villafranca, their first assignment being to occupy the Ordal heights.

After three hours of bloody fighting, Adam had been killed along with many of the British and Spanish troops. At daylight on 13 September Suchet started his advance on Villafranca. Bentinck managed to evacuate the town and, to cover the retreat, took command of a cavalry force. The clash between the French and British cavalries was

76 Murray's incompetence led to him being court martialled at Winchester in January 1815, where he demonstrated his dishonourable character, lying about every point of the case. Murray was cleared of two charges: of unmilitary conduct and of neglect of proper preparations and arrangements for re-embarking his troops. Of the third charge (abandoning the guns and stores), the court decided that it amounted to only an error of judgement and that he should be admonished, a punishment which the Prince Regent, a close friend of Murray's, chose to ignore. Instead he awarded Murray a GCH (Knight Grand Cross of the Royal Guelphic Order) the following year.

77 Alex's brother, Major William Cheyne, was with Wellington. His regiment, the 2nd Battalion of the 47th, had joined the 5th Division.

78 On 15 April 1813 Napoleon left Paris to join his army on the Rhine where he started preparations to fight the Russian and Prussian armies.

79 While Alexander Cheyne was marching to Tarragona, his brother William was involved in the battle of San Sebastian (31 August). It was a miracle that Major William Cheyne survived that battle, for his division (the 5th) under the command of General Leith, was given the task of scaling the breach in the city walls.

a costly French victory. Suchet decided against pursuing Bentinck any further, as he realised that the British navy was well-positioned off the coast and could cause extensive damage to his force. Suchet's success at Ordal Cross and the cavalry clash at Villafranca del Panades were the last French victories on Spanish soil. In the aftermath of this double defeat, Bentinck resigned as commander of the Anglo-Sicilian force and returned to Sicily. General William Clinton took charge and the Anglo-Sicilian force returned to Tarragona.

For the next seven months Alex was based at Tarragona under Clinton's command. He left Spain at the beginning of April 1814 but instead of returning to Britain, was sent to Genoa in northern Italy and was listed as being 'on foreign service under Lieutenant-General Lord William Bentinck'. With a short break of four months in Sicily, Alex remained in northern Italy until June 1815.[80]

Alex Cheyne's subsequent career

Through those difficult war years, Alex had witnessed great bravery and perseverance from officers and rank and file, as well as ill-discipline, dithering and cowardice. He had expanded his knowledge of engineering and had learnt how to organise a workforce even when he did not speak its language. His opposition to corporal punishment had been strengthened as he had served under several officers, including General Clinton, who commanded their troops effectively without meting out excessive punishment. He had suffered terrible hardship during the Corunna campaign. His service in the east of Spain and in the Mediterranean campaign – particularly his time in Palermo with its Byzantine mosaics, baroque palaces and royal court – had given him a wealth of experience and left him with many stories to regale.[81]

Cheyne's foreign service in the Napoleonic Wars had begun in 1808 when he was twenty-two. When he returned to Ireland he was nearly thirty years old. He arrived in Dublin on 24 June 1815 in time to celebrate Wellington's great victory at Waterloo (18 June 1815) with family and friends. After a few months in Dublin, Alex was posted to Clonmel in County Tipperary, where he was promoted to Captain on 1 December 1815. Less than eighteen months later, in April 1817, he left Clonmel to retire on half-pay, along with many other officers. The end of the Napoleonic Wars brought many changes to the military establishment.

Alex's father, Dr John Cheyne senior, was getting older and although his name was listed in the medical directory with that of his son, Charles, most patients were under his son's care. He had bought a parcel of land at Bonnington Brae, near Leith, and moved there to live with his two widowed daughters, Cecilia Strong and Bess Wilkinson, and his grand-daughters, Elisabeth and Cecilia Wilkinson. Alex joined his family at Bonnington Brae in 1817. For the next four years he occupied himself in building 'outhouses and offices' on his father's land.[82] During that period his brother William, who had been promoted to lieutenant colonel in 1816, was in the Persian Gulf and remained at Ras al-Khaima until July 1821. William was forty-six years old when he retired from the army. By the time he reached Leith, his father's health was causing concern. Dr Cheyne died on 31 December 1821.

In 1822 Alex was appointed Secretary of the Edinburgh-Glasgow Union Canal. This was not long after it had been completed and was not the easiest of appointments: shareholders were expecting a substantial return on their investment even though the canal had cost double the estimate to build. During this stressful period of his life, Alex

80 WO54/252; WO52/253.

81 Bussell papers, Battye Library, Perth. Mary Bussell, who travelled on the *James Pattison* on the same voyage as Alex, commented in her diary on the interesting conversations she had shared with him about his experiences.

82 This is how the buildings were described in John Cheyne's will.

published his ‘observations’ on a report of an inquiry.[83] It was probably because of his experience while working for the Union Canal that he made sure that everything that happened to him subsequently was properly documented. He followed this habit during his turbulent years in Van Diemen’s Land. While employed by the Union Canal, Alex purchased and subdivided land in the Edinburgh suburb of Stockbridge, building a row of houses in Cheyne Street where both he and his brother William took up residence.

In 1830 Alex’s younger brother George and wife Grace emigrated to the Swan River Settlement in Western Australia. Finding that most of the best land at the Settlement had been taken, they sailed for King George Sound, arriving there in June 1831. Their letters home were instrumental in persuading Alex to follow.[84] He resigned from the Union Canal in April 1831 and three years later arrived at Albany, accompanied by his nephews, George Macartney Cheyne and John Cheyne, the sons of Dr John Cheyne. Bruce, the youngest Cheyne brother, later followed Alex and George to Australia. After residing for a short time in Sydney he also moved to Albany.[85] Alex had been in Albany for two years when George Arthur invited him to transfer to Hobart as Director-General of Roads and Bridges.[86]

Alex kept in regular contact with his family in Scotland and England, particularly with his brother Dr Bayne Cheyne, who forwarded money from Alex to the father of his convict servant and subsequent landlord, Robert Burrowes. His sisters and nieces also received letters and even a parrot from Albany. Widowed at a young age and childless, Cecilia Strong remained a devoted sister to Alex until her death in 1845. It was Cecilia’s financial support that had enabled Alex to migrate to Australia in 1833. (He borrowed £3,000 from her which he never repaid.) It was her advice that was sought by Alex eight years later after Lieutenant-Governor Sir John Franklin sacked him from his position as Director-General of Roads and Bridges, a crucial time of his life. He wrote in his diary on Sunday 3 July 1842:

> Rec^d a letter from Mrs Strong, dated 10 March. She had dined with Mr Tucker[87] on the 8th who was of opinion I should not go home. Sir George Arthur[88] breakfasted with Mr Tucker on the 9th he was of the same opinion.

His engineering prowess should have enabled him to have a successful and profitable career. Unfortunately his forthright, blunt turn of phrase, or what his obituary described as his ‘combative character’,[89] sometimes caused him great difficulties – although he maintained friendships with many. His war experiences in Spain were not unique in Van Diemen’s Land. Several civil officers and settlers were veterans of the Peninsular War: men such as Edward Boyd (Surveyor-General), George Boyes (Colonial Auditor), James Butler, William Fletcher (Commissariat), George Hull, (Commissariat) Affleck Moodie (Commissariat), George Maddox (Commissariat), Thomas Walker (Commissariat), Peter Maclaine, George Meredith, Henry Miller, John Morgan, William Neilley, Edward

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83 A Cheyne, *Observations for Captain Cheyne … on the report by the sub-committee appointed by the Committee of management [of the Union Canal] … to enquire into all the circumstances connected with the building of Hailes Bridge, etc,* Cheyne, Edinburgh, 1831, National Library of Scotland, R.237.f.(3).

84 George and Grace Cheyne spent twenty-eight years in Albany and retired to Scotland in 1860.

85 Bruce spent eight years in Albany, dying in 1856. Five of the next generation of Cheynes also migrated to Australia: John’s sons George, John and Talbot; Bayne’s son, John Cheyne, and his step-son, Walter Lindesay Richardson. Walter Richardson (1826–1879) was the father of the novelist Henry Handel Richardson (Ethel Florence Lindesay Richardson). She was thus the great-step-niece of Alexander Cheyne. In addition, William Henry Graham, the grandson of Alex’s sister Elisabeth, also made his home in Australia. Many members of the Cheyne dynasty, and of the Grahams, now live in Australia, mainly in Western Australia and Victoria.

86 Alex lived in Van Diemen’s Land for nearly twenty-three years – from 8 December 1835 to his death on 6 July 1858.

87 Henry St George Tucker (*c*1771–1851) was chairman of the East India Company. See *DNB.* His wife Jane (d.1869) was the daughter of Robert Boswell of Edinburgh, writer to the signet, and a friend of Cecilia Strong.

88 Sir George Arthur (1784–1854) was Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen’s Land from 1824 to 1836. Alexander Cheyne’s appointment as Director General of Roads and Bridges dated from 1 January 1836.

89 *Hobart Town Courier*, 7 July 1858, p. 4.

Rawlings and John Spotswood. Others had served under Wellington at Waterloo. But the Dunkirk-like Corunna campaign had been an extraordinary experience. The writer of his obituary noted:

> Captain Cheyne was a man of strong understanding, unwearied assiduity, and of great perseverance of purpose. Religious in his convictions, his latter days were passed in cheerful contemplation, free from the troublous storms which 'toss life's bark and render home unsweet'. Purified and chastened by the vicissitudes of life, he died with the faith and fortitude of the Christian soldier.[90]

90 *Hobart Town Courier*, 7 July 1858, p.4.

WILLIAM CARL MORRIS: AN ADDENDUM

Alison Alexander

In 2005 the Burnie Historical Society hosted the Tasmanian historical societies' biennial conference. The theme was 'Our History's Characters', and my talk was entitled 'Tasmania's Unsung Heroes'. It dealt with people who had made a substantial contribution to the community, but who had never received a great deal of acknowledgement. I chose three people, one each from the south, north and north-west, and Carl Morris was my north-west representative.

Morris was a successful principal at a number of high schools around the state. As his biography occupied only a third of my talk, I could not describe his whole career in any detail, and I concentrated on his time at Devonport High School, in recognition of the north-west coast, the site of the conference. Morris went on to become headmaster at the Launceston High School, but I covered this in only a few sentences. After the talk was published[1] old scholar Peter Saunders pointed out to me, quite correctly, that I had not done justice to Morris's period at Launceston High. This short paper aims to redress this omission. Peter organised several other old scholars to write their reminiscences of Morris, and I am impressed that, fifty years after he retired, these former pupils are so attached to his memory that they insisted on adequate acknowledgement of all his achievements.

William Carl Morris was born in 1888 at Ulverstone and was educated at three schools, the last being Sheffield Primary School. There the headmaster encouraged him to become a pupil-teacher, which was then the usual way to enter the teaching profession. Morris progressed through the required stages, spending 1906 and 1909 at the newly-established Teachers Training College in Hobart, and the years 1907 and 1908 at the Sheffield Primary School as a Junior Teacher. He then taught at Queenstown Primary School in 1910 and 1911, Elizabeth Street Practising School in 1912 and then in 1913 at East Launceston Practising School where he remained until 1916 when he enlisted for service in the First World War. Returning to Tasmania in 1919, he was sent to Wellington Square, which had become the Practising School in Launceston, and then spent 1921 back at his old school, Sheffield Primary. He was appointed to Scottsdale in 1922 to begin secondary classes for a high school there. By that time he had completed his Bachelor of Arts degree extramurally and had written a thesis for his 'A' Teaching Certificate. After ten years at Scottsdale he became headmaster at Devonport High School. Both schools were extremely successful under his leadership.

Morris arrived at Launceston High in 1939 as the school's fourth headmaster. This was a difficult period, partly because changes in the curriculum had to be instigated, and partly because the Second World War broke out later that year. As in most schools around Australia, some staff enlisted, it was often difficult to find replacements, and there were more demands on those remaining. Air raid shelters and trenches were dug in 1942, a joint effort by staff, senior students and the Parents and Friends Association – part of running a school in this period.[2]

Despite these problems, all students who provided information recall that Carl Morris was an excellent headmaster, especially at a time when many other headmasters ruled by fear, roared out demands and were heavy-handed with the cane. He built Launceston High into one of the state's foremost educational institutions.

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1 A Alexander, 'Keynote paper: Tasmania's Unsung Heroes', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings*, vol. 53, no. 2, 2006, pp. 59–63.

2 Harold Lord, *60 years on … the history of the Launceston State High School 1913–1966 and Launceston Matriculation College 1967–1976*, Launceston, 1976, pp. 49–50.

> During this period the World War was covering the world, but WC Morris built the High School from a prominent State school to one of the leaders not only in the northern community but respected and acknowledged throughout the entire state by ALL secondary schools be they Public or state.[3]

How did he do this?

Students agree that though stern, Morris was always fair. 'The "Boss" was one of the best-loved men ever to teach on the staff of Launceston High School', wrote Tom Bailey. 'He had an abounding love for children, would always listen to them and was absolutely fair to them.'[4] 'My first meeting with WC Morris at a pre-enrolment interview impressed me greatly', wrote Alf Crawford. 'He was a man who knew me (and every other student) intimately from that first moment, who was concerned deeply and genuinely about the welfare of each of his students and who never failed to treat them with respect. One entered his office after some misdemeanour feeling two inches tall and left feeling ten feet tall.'[5] Peter Saunders agreed. While he was being enrolled in the School, Morris passed through the office and 'pausing to look at me, told me I had a "very good head", i.e. implying that I looked intelligent. I was, in fact, a very average student, but this unexpected compliment gave a very shy boy some confidence.'[6]

In those days, continued Tom Bailey, some teachers punished out of revenge, 'but this was not the Boss's style'. He punished in order to correct behaviour, so 'his penalties were varied and rarely took the form of corporal punishment in an era of callous cane-wielding. Usually, all the Boss needed to do was to talk to a student. Students had rights, were treated as individuals, and usually responded positively.'[7] 'It was, of course, against Carl's nature to make anyone uncomfortable on purpose', commented KJ Walker. 'In his presence no one was ever made to lose dignity.'[8]

Tom Bailey had a story which showed the faith Morris had in students. At the time, said Bailey, there was a hysterical reaction to stories of goings-on at Hobart High between boys and girls, so that there was a question mark over the state system of coeducation. While other schools discouraged boy-girl relationships, Morris trusted students. At a social he noticed that a visiting Hobart High footballer was attracted to a Launceston High girl, Margaret, who was living at the students' hostel. Morris always drove the hostel girls home, and he approached the boy. 'Kevin, would I be right in assuming you would be honoured to escort the young lady home?' Amazed, Kevin stammered agreement, and was permitted to accompany Morris and Margaret in the car. At the entrance to the hostel, the car stopped. 'Would I be right in assuming, Kevin, that you and Margaret might prefer to get a breath of fresh air and walk the rest of the way? I shall be leaving the hostel in twenty minutes' time.' 'That was a brave act for a headmaster to trust young people in that way', wrote Tom Bailey. 'But trust and faith in children – that was the Boss!'[9]

Devoted and hard-working, Morris knew the names of all his students. 'Other old scholars agree with me that WCM had a remarkable capacity for getting to know the names, and the individual circumstances of every boy and girl in the school – in those days about 500 pupils altogether', wrote Robert Sharman. He felt that the staff too had a high regard for Morris.[10]

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3 Letter from GB 'Paddy' Martin, 3 June 2007.
4 Tom Bailey quoted in Lord, p. 52.
5 Alf Crawford quoted in Lord, p. 52.
6 Letter from Peter Saunders, 29 September 2006.
7 Bailey quoted in Lord, p. 52.
8 KJ Walker quoted in Lord, p. 55.
9 Tom Bailey quoted in Lord, pp. 52–3.
10 Letter from Robert Sharman, 19 January 2007.

KJ Walker:

> When he walked around the balcony in his academic gown or out of the school gates at the end of the day in his homburg hat and high stiff collar like a character from the Forsyte Saga, it was with the bearing that made him appear, to us, every inch a headmaster.'[11]

Morning assembly was a feature of all schools at this period, and Launceston High was no exception.

> Each morning at 8.50 am the school assembled – the senior students seated around the balcony, the staff in order of seniority, on the stage. When everyone was in place and standing to attention, including the staff, Mr Morris emerged from his office opening on to the assembly hall, and strode, academic gown flying out behind him, to the stage, where, with a hymn or prayer, the assembly began.[12]

Peter Saunders remembers 'a happy and respectful school', where boys stood up when a female teacher entered the classroom, men teachers were called 'Sir', and wearing school uniform was strictly enforced.[13] Nancy Read has similar memories. 'Carl Morris was the awesome and dignified headmaster during my first two years', she wrote. 'He seemed to tower above the school and his very presence would silence any assembly.' Standards of work, dress and behaviour were high.

> I vividly remember being assembled for uniform inspection before our class attended a symphony concert. Full uniform included wearing hats and gloves but it was raining and I wore the only raincoat I had, a tartan one. I stood in fear and trepidation as he marched between the lines and inspected us and then stopped in front of me. He deliberated. It was not grey. It was not uniform. He did not know whether I could attend the concert or not in *that* coat. Finally he condescended to allow me to go provided I removed the coat as soon as I was out of the rain.[14]

This strictness was part of a desire to maintain esprit de corps, to make the school respected, and to enable children to feel they were attending a first-class school. If grey coats were necessary for this feeling to be substantiated in people's minds, grey coats it was. All children must have the maximum opportunity. Morris was especially sympathetic to the problems of country children, and was partially responsible for a girls' hostel opening in Launceston in 1946. Launceston High also played a role in gaining employment for students by arranging interviews with prospective employers: 'in many cases, the recommendation of LHS was a passport to a secure employment.' Morris was not only enthusiastic about developing academic education, but was interested in all aspects of students' learning, including physical education, and the first gymnasium at Launceston High was named after him.[15]

Morris himself taught geography. 'We shared a love of geography', wrote Bruce Taylor, '& he was very good at describing the mountain chains in the continents … I can remember once when I was travelling at the edge of the Pamirs in Badakshan, and thought that this was what Carl Morris was talking about.'[16]

11 KJ Walker quoted in Lord, p. 55.
12 Letter from Bruce Proverbs, 5 June 2007.
13 Letter from Peter Saunders, 29 September 2006.
14 Nancy Read's memories, quoted in Lord, p. 66.
15 Lord, pp. 50–1.
16 Letter from Bruce Taylor, 9 October 2007.

Peter Saunders had an affectionate memory of Morris' fairness:

> There must have been a rule that the class was not supposed to chat during the change-over period from one subject teacher to the next. A rule unlikely to be followed. When Mr Morris arrived for geography we would be presented with a portly rear-view of an academic gown and a voice that said, 'I'm coming in backwards so that I can't see who is talking.'[17]

'I hope you are laughing with me and not at me', one boy recalled Morris saying as at the end of a lesson he would become tangled, 'collecting his compasses and coloured chalks, his charts and maps, a sextant to show us how to find latitude, a globe or other geographical aid he continually had about him.'[18]

Lois Schindler had an abiding memory:

> While I was a pupil in E class, aged 11 or 12, a teacher was away for Geography or something like that, and they must have been desperate, because Carl Morris, the busy headmaster, came in. He taught us something about Geology which I have never forgotten. He taught us about sedimentary rocks, igneous rocks and metamorphic rocks. I can still picture the little drawings he did on the blackboard and filled in with coloured chalk. Very sensibly, instead of filling in for a teacher and trying to cover work he didn't know about, he taught us something useful.[19]

Morris valued all school activities. He encouraged school musicals, begun in 1937. At first these were Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, but later Harry Moses, a member of staff, wrote the school's own musicals. Morris also placed great emphasis on the Old Scholars' Association and the Parents and Friends' Association.[20]

Launceston High was not perfect, of course. Peter Saunders recalled that there were some teachers who could not keep order and 'on whom some of us did "play-up"', and there was some bullying. Nevertheless, under Morris Launceston High could claim to be more enlightened than some other schools of the period.

Lois Schindler later taught at Launceston High under Morris. 'I was a bit frightened of him when I was a teacher since I'd been a pupil, but he was a lovely person', she said. 'I think he was a good man.' One memory recalled the efforts Morris went to in order to best understand his students.

> There was another teacher, an [Austrian] Hitler refugee, called Minnie Penizek. She was very ebullient and lively, and one day she knocked on the door of Mr Morris' office and went in. He was sitting reading a scurrilous paper, *Truth*, an awful, awful rag full of scandal. Minnie told the rest of the staff that she said, 'Mr Morris, are you reading *Truth*?' He folded the paper up and put it down, and said, 'Dr Penizek, there is a girl you will be teaching today whose mother is splashed across the pages, which must be extremely painful for her, as well as the events which caused the story. I think it is a good idea to know about them.' We were all very impressed.[21]

On a more humorous note:

> When I was on the staff I had a colleague called Anne Honeysett, now Wood, who was the Physical Education teacher, a lovely person. She always looked younger than her years, and in those days she looked like one of the kids. One day when she

17 Letter from Peter Saunders, 29 September 2006
18 KJ Walker quoted in Lord, p. 55.
19 Phone interview with Lois Schindler, 31 July 2007.
20 Lord, p. 50.
21 Phone interview with Lois Schindler, 31 July 2007.

> was walking across the playground, she met Carl Morris. He stopped her and said, 'Little girl, you shouldn't be wearing lipstick at school'. It thrilled her to bits.[22]

Morris retired in 1953 after fifteen years at Launceston High. Former students recall how pleased both they and Morris were when they met in later years and how Morris kept up with their activities. 'During our days at Launceston High and in subsequent years we all grew to respect him more and more', wrote Alf Crawford. 'Meeting him in Hobart in the late 1960s one felt the same deep attachment as he stood at the top of the steps, fingers laced in the front of his waistcoat.'[23] 'Later, when I was in the teaching service myself, any notice of promotion brought a letter from Carl with congratulations that I knew were sincerely felt and pieces of philosophy from a full and successful career, all expressed in that impeccable upright hand and in those long Tennysonian style sentences', wrote KJ Walker.[24] And from Paddy Martin:

> In later years I achieved some sporting appointments and results and when in Hobart for any event, he always turned up to compliment me and wish me every success. Is it any wonder I regard William Carl Morris as the man who had a marked influence and I still maintain a lot of the successes I was fortunate to have were because of the high ideals the man set for me.[25]

I hope that this has successfully rounded out the story of William Carl Morris's teaching career, and removes him from the category of unsung hero. His students summed him up: 'an inspirational Headmaster and a true gentleman,'[26] 'a scholar and a gentleman.'[27]

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22 Phone interview with Lois Schindler, 31 July 2007.
23 Alf Crawford quoted in Lord, p. 52.
24 KJ Walker quoted in Lord, p. 55.
25 Letter from GB 'Paddy' Martin, 3 June 2007.
26 Letter from GB 'Paddy' Martin, 3 June 2007.
27 Letter from Bruce Proverbs, 5 June 2007.

OBITUARY

Lindsay Shield Whitham
1918–2008

The Tasmanian Historical Research Association is saddened at the death of long-time member and supporter Lindsay Whitham. Many members will have attended one of Lindsay's lectures or excursions, read his papers or his book, and admired his work, not only in historical research but in many other areas.

Lindsay Whitham was born in Lindisfarne in 1918, the son of Benjamin and Clara Whitham. His paternal grandfather, a sergeant-major in the Indian Army, retired to Tasmania with his wife Ellen and their six children when their son Benjamin was only a baby. He spent most of his boyhood at Fingal, where Whitham senior was a policeman. Like several of his sisters, Benjamin became a pupil-teacher, the recognised entry into the teaching profession. He did not like teaching, but by the time he discovered this it was too late. However, he was a successful teacher, and after years of part-time study, obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1919.

While he was headmaster of the Southbridge school, near Huonville, Benjamin met Clara Shield, daughter of John Shield, who owned extensive orchards as well as being Inspector of Public Buildings in Hobart, a member of the Hobart City Council and eventually Mayor of the city. Benjamin and Clara were married in 1910 and had four children: Brian (1911), Nancy (1915), Lindsay (1918) and Marie (1924). Lindsay remembered his father as reserved, a dreamer who loved walking along country lanes and reading poetry. Lindsay was closer to Clara, a very good mother 'to whom we could take all our troubles'. It was fortunate that she was an efficient housekeeper, for every three years or so she had to pack up their belongings and move to another Education Department home, hanging up curtains and putting down carpets in areas where they did not fit, and seeing the furniture become even more knocked about in transit. Both Benjamin and Clara had been raised in religious families but lost their faith, and Lindsay was not brought up to be a church-goer, except when he stayed with his Shield grandparents.

The family's home at Deloraine was the first Lindsay remembered – a double-storey brick house with electricity and running water, luxury for Clara after Strahan which did not have these amenities. The next move was to Geeveston, where the family lived in a weatherboard house without electricity. Out came the old oil lamps, but after a year the electricity was connected. Clara had one electrical appliance, an iron. Otherwise there was a wood stove, where water was heated for the family's baths. Lindsay recalled seeing strange new fruit, nectarines, in a neighbour's garden.

The Geeveston primary school was large, and the Whitham children did well and did not mind the fact that their father was the headmaster. Nancy passed the examination for high school, but was kept back until Lindsay was ready to go. He started at Hobart High School on his eleventh birthday. By that stage, in an attempt to escape teaching, Benjamin had left the Education Department and the family was living in West Hobart.

Hobart High in 1929 was a vast, impersonal place, a big change from a country primary school. Lindsay enjoyed the school work, but at the end of his second term Benjamin obtained a job in Launceston with the Department of Agriculture, and the family moved there. Lindsay attended Launceston High, but found the change disruptive. He had to take different subjects and catch up, and under HV Biggins as headmaster discipline was harsh. Lindsay remembered boys being 'belted across the ear' for minor misdemeanours, 'nothing much to have happy memories of'. He had better memories of

building Meccano structures with his friend Ralph Harry. They even made a three-phone telephone exchange, 'which greatly augmented games of cops and robbers'.

After Lindsay passed the Intermediate examination, his father decided to send him to Launceston Church Grammar School, and Lindsay won a scholarship there. He enjoyed this much gentler school, and sat for the Intermediate again, gaining seven credits. In the Depression Benjamin's job petered out, and he had to return to teaching. He was appointed to Ulverstone, and Lindsay attended Devonport High under Carl Morris. This was an excellent school, with good teaching and a pleasant atmosphere. Lindsay enjoyed the newly introduced sport of hockey, though it was seen as 'sissy' in comparison with the traditional football and cricket. He decided he wanted to become an engineer, and gained outstanding results in his Matriculation examination, which won him a scholarship to the University of Tasmania, as well as the award of Dux of Devonport High.

Lindsay loved his years at the University, which began in 1936. There were five students in his year of Engineering, four on scholarships, and competition was fierce. At first he did not work hard enough (partly because he was boarding in a non-academic family) and his results were not good, but this gave him a jolt after which he worked much harder, particularly once Benjamin was moved to Hobart and Lindsay could live at home. Lecturing ranged from excellent to pedestrian, recalled Lindsay; some lecturers read the same notes year after year, but others were more inspiring, such as Dr McAulay in Physics, Dr Jaeger in Applied Mathematics and Professor Tuck in Electrical Engineering. Lindsay obtained excellent results, winning several prizes in third and fourth years. Meanwhile, his brother Brian worked at St Vincent's Hospital in Launceston; his sister Nancy finished High School and took several office jobs before marrying, after which she helped her husband run their garage; and his sister Marie joined the Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force, married an airman, and eventually received an Order of Australia for her service to war widows.

At University Lindsay enjoyed student life, joining the Rifle Shooting and Dramatic clubs, and writing a letter to the radical student magazine *Cactus* criticising the secretary of the Students' Union when he tried to introduce fagging. He also took part in the annual Commemoration Day parades which poked fun at the establishment. In 1936 he sat in a chair dressed as Premier Albert Ogilvie; the following year he and his friend Dave Tudor built a scale model of traffic lights, which had just been introduced. Since it was coronation year, their lights were not red, green and amber but red, white and blue. The lights were on a dray; Lindsay had no idea how rough the ride on a solid-wheeled dray was going to be, and spent the ride desperately trying to stop the lights falling over. A photograph of Lindsay and the lights appeared in the *Mercury*. In the evening of Commem Day students put on a revue, and on one occasion Lindsay was enrolled in a burlesque ballet at the last minute, with no practice. He could not get in step with the others, which brought the house down, as the audience thought he was doing it on purpose.

Because of disruptive behaviour in the past, for several years students were banned from the audience of the official Commem celebration. When they were allowed back, Lindsay and a friend entered wearing long overcoats, the friend walking bow-legged as he had a kettle-drum slung between his legs. Lindsay had the sticks up his sleeves. When the procession of dignitaries entered the hall the friend began to play the drum, which, recalled Lindsay, amused some of the dignitaries but not others. It was not only dignitaries who were disrupted. One year some engineering students set up a remote-controlled switch on the main lighting in the Physics Lecture Theatre. Lindsay and a friend drilled two holes through the floor under the top row of benches in the theatre, put nails through so that their tips just protruded, and soldered them to a circuit which included a battery and a car horn. When the Students' Union annual general meeting was held in the theatre, by moving the toe of his shoe on the nails Lindsay could

give an occasional toot. In the 1990s he returned to the theatre on an Open Day, and was extremely pleased to see that the nails were still there.

Lindsay's excellent results at the University led to him being offered a job as junior assistant engineer by the Hydro-Electric Commission, which was an excellent opportunity. His first task was three months of construction work at Liawenee, where the canal diverting water into Great Lake was being enlarged. On his return to Hobart he was told to study the Trial Load method of analysing arch dams, and find out how to apply this knowledge to the planned Clark Dam at Butlers Gorge, a 67-metre high concrete arch dam, at the time of its completion in 1949 the highest arch dam in Australia. This work was far more stimulating, but it was interrupted by military service, for by this time the Second World War was making its presence felt. Lindsay was called up for three months of military service in the 12th Field Company of Royal Australian Engineers. The captain was a lecturer in economics, the sergeant-major helped his wife run a hat shop, the corporal was a lawyer, and Lindsay, the engineer, was a sapper. He quite enjoyed his time in the Army, and liked telling how, on the last night of manoeuvres, the sergeant-major called for volunteers for guard duty. As he called out 'Six till eight', Lindsay realised he had to avoid the two till four shift, so quickly volunteered for the next time slot, eight till ten. As they fell out, the sergeant-major whispered, 'That's the advantage of a university education'.

There was no more army service for Lindsay, for the Hydro manpowered many of its employees out of military service for essential work at home. They were extending existing power schemes and planning new ones to provide electricity to make zinc and copper, essential for war industries. Lindsay continued his work on Clark Dam using the Trial Load Method to calculate the stresses in the dam and therefore establish its safety. In this method the dam is represented by a grid of horizontal arches and vertical cantilevers. At each point of intersection, the engineer must guess how much of the reservoir water pressure is carried by the arch and how much by the cantilever. He then embarks on several months of calculations to see how good his guess was. A good guess results in the arches and cantilevers having similar deflections where they intersect, and the stresses in the concrete can then be calculated. A poor guess means start again. Lindsay became a very good guesser. The three analyses involved eighteen months of tedious computations using mechanical calculating machines. This work led to his Master of Engineering degree and the award of the Chapman Medal from the Institution of Engineers Australia, presented nationally each year for the paper which made the most important contribution to structural engineering.

Lindsay went on to design and supervise the construction of a hydraulic model to test and shape the ski jump spillway for Clark Dam. During the 1940s the Hydro's Civil Engineering Branch gradually expanded and provided opportunities for promotion. By 1946 Lindsay was in charge of a small section, with half-a-dozen engineers reporting to him.

In 1947 Lindsay married Phyllis Williams, a teacher in the Education Department, and the wedding was the start of an extremely happy relationship which lasted forty years. Lindsay and Phyl wanted to travel, and later in 1947 they sailed for England, where Lindsay took up an English Electric Company scholarship, undertaking a post-graduate course in hydro-electric power engineering at the Imperial College of London University. The course was inspiring, and Lindsay brought new ideas back to Tasmania. He also went on a study tour of dams in Europe, while Phyl taught in a girls' grammar school in London. Altogether it was an extremely interesting year away. Back in Hobart Lindsay resumed work at the Hydro-Electric Commision, and Phyl became involved with domesticity after the births of the couple's two children, Philip and Wendy. Both graduated from the University of Tasmania and had rewarding careers in the Commonwealth Public Service, Philip as a scientist and Wendy principally in education. Lindsay and Phyl were

always proud of their achievements. Phyl was also an enthusiastic voluntary worker for St Ann's Home until her sudden death in 1987.

At the Hydro Lindsay gradually rose through the ranks, doing 'a bit of everything' – canals, tunnels, pipelines – which he found enjoyable and interesting. He designed the 40-metre high Pine Tier concrete gravity dam on the Nive River near Bronte and had a great deal to do with most facets of the Liapootah power development. In 1964 he was sent to Britain to attend two conferences on dams. During his 38 years with the Hydro, the installed capacity in its hydro-electric power stations rose from 104 to 1,434 megawatts, and although his administrative work-load gradually increased, Lindsay had some detailed engineering design input into every scheme built or modified. In 1974 he was promoted to the position of Assistant Chief Civil Engineer (Design) with a staff of 150, who included about fifty professional engineers, as well as draftsmen, technicians and clerks.

Lindsay felt that he had a good relationship with his staff, and those members of his staff who I interviewed agreed. Sergio Giudici, Bruce Cole, Frank Kinstler and Daryl Ikin were younger engineers who worked under Lindsay, and all found him an excellent superior. Sergio commented that it was good to have Lindsay in charge. He had prestige in Australia through his pioneering work on the Clark Dam – if the Hydro engineers did not know how to do anything, they often taught themselves rather than contract outsiders, and this is what Lindsay had done. He was meticulous, signing off every drawing done in his department, which meant hundreds every year. If they were not up to scratch, he would write long notes querying them, and engineers had to have the proper explanation. One section engineer jokingly referred to this procedure as 'Whithamising'. Bruce Cole once asked Lindsay why he made so many notes, and he answered that he took the drawings and worked out how people would use them to build the structures, and based his notes on this. What might look to young engineers as a little fussy was in fact extremely practical. Lindsay's motto, said Bruce, was 'Thou shalt not confuse the foreman'. He taught young engineers not to be sloppy, recalled Sergio, and was respected for it.

Bruce remembered Lindsay also showing his practicality in his expectations of his staff. He took over a department which had a culture of thinking there would always be time to do a little more work on a design to perfect it, which meant designs were often late. Lindsay told his staff that designs must be completed on time; an engineer should say when he aimed to finish his work, and was expected to keep to this schedule. At the same time, Lindsay appreciated new developments which assisted work. Everything was hand-drafted when Sergio arrived in 1963, but he had been trained in England in computer technology which he introduced in Hobart. It was novel at the time and completely new to Lindsay, but he supported Sergio completely, appreciating the benefits computers would bring.

As a boss, Lindsay was always courteous and never lost his temper, though he could question pretty severely – but any admonishments were always done fairly and without rancour. He praised good work, and was approachable and warm, especially helpful to young engineers, as Daryl Ikin remembered. 'He was very important to me, as my first boss – he was extremely helpful and reliable, and everything he tackled was dealt with meticulously and ably – very valuable attributes. He was able to guide young staff along the right lines.' His staff respected him as a just man, one who had been responsible for major innovations in his career. There was much praise for him when he retired in 1978. In his final years he was involved in contract work for the civil components of the Gordon Power Scheme, but left before work began on the Lower Gordon dam. 'My personal view was that it was a good thing that the Gordon-below-Franklin dam was stopped', he commented.

Lindsay had several interests outside his work and family, a major area being bushwalking. As a boy he connected camping with the seaside – ants, flies and sand in

the food – but in 1941 he met Ron Smith, and they clicked straight away. Ron had been a bushwalker in South Australia, and in Hobart started making detailed surveys of the tracks on Mount Wellington for his own interest. Lindsay went with him a few times. Then in 1943 Lindsay's father went to Dover to visit a friend who took him on a new track to the lookout at Adamsons Peak. He told Lindsay, and in the long weekend in January 1944, Lindsay and Ron took the bus to Dover, and on Sunday walked from the Dover Hotel to Adamsons Peak and back. This excursion really made Lindsay fall in love with bushwalking. He and Ron did more walks, for example to Precipitous Bluff in 1946, and Ron introduced Lindsay to the Hobart Walking Club, which he joined early in 1945. Over the years he sat on the committee, was president and walks secretary, and wrote many articles for the club magazine, *The Tasmanian Tramp*. He always did more day walks than camping trips, and enjoyed looking for something new.

After Lindsay retired, he started walking on Fridays with a group of friends, who called themselves the Friday Walkers. By the time the group disbanded due to old age, in 2007, they had done over a thousand walks. Lindsay wrote about some of the highlights for his great friend Bob Wyatt: exploring the Catamaran 'jungle'; finding T-rail (see below) from Smithton to Lemana; tracing the wharf railway formation at Latrobe; climbing many mountains, from Agnew to Zeehan; the trip to the Bluff River Gorge 'where you acted as a ladder for me in a narrow cleft'; and 'Mary's hot scones at Bothwell (extra memorable)' – Lindsay enjoyed both giving and receiving hospitality.

Another interest was railways, not engines as much as where railways went, what they did, what they carried, signalling and kindred interests. Lindsay had first travelled from Hobart to Strahan in 1919, and after some uneconomic lines were closed, in the 1960s he started to travel every line in Tasmania, often in the goods van. He came to know many railway personnel, and made so many trips with the Emu Bay Railway Company that he was made a guest of the Company for life – but he outlived the Company. Lindsay also travelled on all major lines on the mainland.

A third interest was history, which began with an interest in the history of railway lines, particularly those using T-rail. In the 1960s Lindsay was introduced to the Tasmanian Historical Research Association, and he not only became a member, but contributed a great deal in various areas of the Association's activities. He delivered, and published in the *Papers and Proceedings,* a total of eighteen papers on varied subjects, from railway history to the vexed question of exactly how many pubs there were in Zeehan. As editor I knew there was no need to question Lindsay's accuracy – I doubt if anyone ever found that he made a mistake, for his research was always meticulous. Altogether Lindsay gave at least fifty talks to a variety of groups. In 1985 he was invited to be guest speaker at the National Trust (Latrobe) dinner celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the opening of the railway from Deloraine to Formby, and also at the National Trust state annual general meeting in 1987. Lindsay was an excellent speaker, always talking from notes only – he thought a historian should know his or her topic well enough not to have to read a talk.

Lindsay also led a number of excursions for THRA, which were greatly enjoyed by the participants. They remember following Lindsay as he brought the 1880s South Heemskirk tin field vividly to life; led them in the search for old railway tracks, all eyes alert for signs such as visible sleepers or the 'perfectly obvious' line of an old track; and inspired them to enthuse in a way they would never have thought possible over an 'anomaly', which some might see as a rusty old piece of metal, but which Lindsay's knowledge made appear as a fascinating piece of evidence of mining or railway activity. 'Here', as a former president Dan Sprod once remarked, 'is a researcher who puts his boots on.' Lindsay greatly appreciated this tribute. He was also a valued member of the THRA Committee from 1974 to 1975, and from 1984 to 1988, serving as Treasurer from 1984 to 1987. His financial support enabled the Association to prepare and publish the second volume of its Index to the *Papers and Proceedings*.

In 2002, both to honour Lindsay's contribution to the Association and to make his excellent papers widely available, the Association published them in one volume, *Railways, Mines, Pubs and People*, which included a biography of Lindsay and his own biography of his uncle Charles Whitham, west coast geologist and pioneer. This book has been most successful, running into multiple editions. Just before he died, Lindsay was pleased to hear that demand was still strong, and the Committee had discussed another reprint. This obituary is based on the biography in that volume, which included many of Lindsay's reminiscences as well as comments by colleagues, family and friends. Bruce Cole provided additional information on Lindsay's career with the Hydro. Heather Felton also kindly allowed the use of her interview with Lindsay for her social history of the Hydro, *Ticklebelly Flats and other stories from the people of the Hydro* (2008). Lindsay greatly enjoyed contributing to this history.

Lindsay remained alert and active both physically and mentally until the end of his life. In 2007, aged 89, he was still showing his son Phillip how to find landmarks in the bush. A few months later he complained to his daughter Wendy that he had 'frittered away' an afternoon instead of spending the time profitably. In February 2008 with a group of family and friends he celebrated his ninetieth birthday with a barbecue the Waterworks, surrounded by his much-loved bush. THRA honours his memory and appreciates his contribution to Tasmania as an engineer, a bushwalker, a railway enthusiast and a historian.

Alison Alexander

BOOK REVIEW

James Boyce, *Van Diemen's Land,* Black Inc, Melbourne, 2008, notes, references, index, 388 pp., hardback, $49.95. (ISBN 978-1-8639541-3-6)

In their controversial work, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker argued that the European colonisation of the Atlantic was fiercely resisted. The opposition to the new colonial order came not only from the indigenous peoples of the new world, but also from the commoners who had been co-opted into working the plantation economies. They set out to chart the means by which sailors, indentured servants, convicts and slaves attempted, not just to thwart the forces of capital, but also to build their own alternative colonial order based on the principles of rough democracy and common ownership. It was an uneven struggle and perhaps inevitably one in which the hydra of the commons would be defeated by the emergent European order. As a history, *The Many-Headed Hydra* never really worked. It was at times inspirational, brilliantly written but ultimately flawed. The main problem was the scope of the work. The attempt to impose a single historical narrative on such wide geographical area doomed the project to failure from the start. There is much of the *Many Headed Hydra* in James Boyce's recent book *Van Diemen's Land*, but this time the canvas is smaller and the central thesis of the book is built on altogether more solid ground than the watery wastes of the Atlantic.

The central theme of Boyce's argument was that Van Diemen's Land was no New South Wales. Indeed, compared with the bleak environment that confronted the early European settlement at Port Jackson, the southern colony was an Eden – a land of milk and honey. When European imports ran short, the colonists on the shores of the Derwent and Tamar survived by switching to a hunter–gatherer mode, preying on kangaroo, wallaby, emu, fish and shellfish. The result was an intense engagement with place; but this was an engagement with a working-class focus. As supplies of imported goods dwindled, authority was disrupted and prisoners and former prisoners acquired a greater degree of independence. It was convict servants who were employed as kangaroo hunters and later, as they discovered the grazing grounds created by Aboriginal firestick farming, as shepherds and stock-hut keepers in the interior. They employed lower-order vernacular to name the landscape over which they traversed, long before it could be mapped by surveyors and cartographers. Some became bushrangers who survived in the interior by forging alliances with Aboriginal peoples and raiding the properties of the emerging colonial elite, retarding the inward advance of respectable society. Where settlement did occur it was dominated by ex-convicts and former Marine and New South Wales Corps privates and non-commissioned officers who farmed small blocks of land. Like the bushrangers, they were clothed in skins – in fact the kangaroo-skin jacket became the universal garb of the colonial lower-order making it impossible to distinguish convict servant from small-scale farmer.

This society, as Boyce points out, was the antithesis of a penal colony. Indeed, such was the pathetic trickle of convicts arriving in Van Diemen's Land during the Napoleonic Wars that the vast bulk of society was composed of emancipists. This trend was exacerbated when the first settlement on Norfolk Island was evacuated and the islanders relocated to Van Diemen's Land. Although the farms of these early settlers were characterised as grossly inefficient, the evidence suggests that that they were surprisingly productive. In fact the colony rapidly became a net exporter of agricultural produce. For those used to post-enclosure farming practices the rough settlement patterns they encountered in Van Diemen's Land were reminiscent of the pre-industrial disorder of western Ireland or the highlands of Scotland. As a result they were the subject of ridicule and were adversely compared with the ordered estates of a small but influential group of

settlers with capital who were encouraged to migrate to Van Diemen's Land post-1820. Aided by a major reorganisation in the way that land grants were distributed, and a shift in government purchasing that favoured large scale production over small, the new elite were able to establish themselves as a dominant force pushing working-class settlers into marginal country. This was a process that was assisted by new impounding laws, dog controls, the Vagrancy Acts and regulations that restricted the supply of assigned convict labour to the respectable.

The result was that the previous egalitarian settlement pattern was replaced by a society of the 'very high and the very low', a transformation which has left its mark on the map: earlier names bestowed on the land by bushrangers and stock-keepers remaining only in broken country. Elsewhere they were swept aside as new naming practices were imposed by the colonial elite. A reorganisation of the process of convict transportation completed the transformation. The introduction of female factories, road parties, chain gangs and penal stations were instrumental in creating, as Boyce puts it, an 'increasingly dependent, fearful and submissive labour force'. By the mid-1850s the triumph of the new order was complete and its victory was celebrated by the imposition of a new name for the colony – Tasmania.

One of the reasons why Boyce's argument is more convincing than Rediker's and Linebaugh's is that he knows when to pull his punches. Thus, he does not try to argue that the working class resistance to the imposition of settler capitalism was multi-ethnic. Although he follows others in suggesting that the impact of settler society on Aboriginal peoples was limited prior to 1820, he makes no bones about who was responsible for deaths on the frontier.[1] Whereas it may have been the introduction of a pastoral industry that created the underling political and economic conditions that made a clash with Aboriginal society inevitable, it was convict and former convict bushmen and stock-hut keepers who actually did the killing. It was their knowledge of the country and the practices of indigenous peoples that enabled an assault on Aboriginal kinship groups (although the destruction of the remaining war bands in the period after 1827 proved more problematic).

Boyce has other important things to say. His argument about the introduction of the dog to Van Diemen's Land and its rapid adoption by Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples is important. In a county where dogs were previously unknown (the arrival of the dingo in Australia post-dates the flooding of Bass Strait), their introduction had a devastating impact on the local fauna. It was dogs, rather than firearms, which provided independence for lower-order Van Diemonian's enabling them to gain a substantial amount of what they needed by hunting. Of course all of this had environmental consequences. Boyce speculates, for example, that the strange phenomenon of dying trees reported over large areas of Van Diemen's Land was a result of a dramatic explosion in the possum population following the destruction of Aboriginal societies. The impact of Europeans was felt in other ways too. It comes as something of a shock to read that Louisa Meredith never saw a swan at Swanport.

For all Boyce's bold insights, however, there are frustrations. While his thesis appears radical many of its component parts have been argued elsewhere – although these leads are not always picked up on. Boyce fails to mention, for example, Geoff Raby's work on early farming practices, or Kirsten McKenzie's *Scandal in the Colonies* which would have helped to have placed the anti-transportation movement in a wider context.[2] The argument that working class migration to Australia presented an opportunity to turn back the industrial clock and establish an imagined pre-agricultural revolution

1 See, in particular, M Fels, 'Culture Contact in the County of Buckinghamshire Van Diemen's Land 1803-1811', *THRA Papers and Proceedings*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1982, pp. 47–79.

2 G Raby, *Making Rural Australia: An Economic History of Technical and Institutional Creativity, 1788-1860*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996; K McKenzie, *Scandal in the Colonies*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2004.

landscape of small independent farmers is also not new. As others have shown, it formed an important strand of the agitation for selection in the mid-nineteenth century.[3] Much of the recent literature on convict society is also strangely absent – which may account for the odd blunder (John Price was never the Superintendent of the Hobart Female Factory for example, p. 135).[4] Perhaps most importantly, a firmer understanding of the process of transformation in Britain society would have given the book more bite. The bibliography is particularly thin when it comes to works on the British isles.

There is also something distinctly odd about the way that important sections of the argument in relation to the impact of settlement on Aboriginal peoples have been hived off into three lengthy appendices. While this has helped Boyce pursue a more coherent narrative in the main section of the book, it nevertheless leaves the impression that the work as a whole is rather disjointed. One cannot help but wonder if it would not have been better to rework the appendices into a separate book specifically targeted at the post–Windschuttle debate.

None of these quibbles present a serious threat to Boyce's overall thesis. The inclusion of material from the wider literature would do much to strengthen, rather than weaken the argument. Sure, much of what Boyce argues needs to be examined in greater depth. Although he has mined the nineteenth-century literature there is much less evidence of archival work in this book. The timing of the decline of the Aboriginal population, the impact of settlement on the environment, the economics of early farming and the long-term effects of transportation on wealth distribution are all areas which could, and should be, studied in much greater depth than is evident here. Boyce, however, deserves credit for creating an additional imperative to pursue these agendas. By pulling the strands of early colonial history together he has provided a meta-narrative which will attract both future critics and supporters. In short, this is a major book that will almost certainly shape thinking about Van Diemonian society for years to come.

Hamish Maxwell-Stewart

3 See for example D Goodman, *Gold Seeking: Victoria and California in the 1850s,* Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1994.

4 Works which would have considerably strengthened the argument include: K Reid, 'Setting Women to Work: The Assignment System and Female Convict Labour in Van Diemen's Land, 1820-1839', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 34, no. 121, 2003, pp. 1–25; B Hindmarsh, 'Scorched Earth: Contested Power and Divided Loyalties on Midlands Properties, 1820–40', *Tasmanian Historical Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1999, pp. 63–80.

Some recent titles

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Macfie, Peter, *Underground*, Hobart City Council, Hobart, 2008, bibliography, notes, index, 100 pp., paperback, $24.95. (ISBN 978-0-9805139-2-9)

Kleinig, Simon, *Jack Thwaites. Pioneer Tasmanian bushwalker & conservationist*, Forty Degrees South Pty Ltd, Hobart, 2008, notes, references, index, 261 pp., paperback, $55.00. (ISBN 978-0-9804006-7-0)

Hirst, John, *Freedom on the Fatal Shore, Australia's first colony*, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2008, notes, sources, index, 497 pp., paperback, $36.95. (ISBN 978-1-8639520-7-10)

Nick Haygarth, *The wild ride: revolutions that shaped Tasmanian black and white photography*, National Trust of Australia (Tasmania), Launceston, 2008, bibliography, index, 148 pp., hardback, $59.95. (ISBN 978-0-9585174-4-7)

Haggar, AJ, *Torliev Hytten 1890–1980 Norwegian immigrant Australian economist*, University of Tasmania, Sandy Bay, 2007, index, 106 pp., paperback, $37.95. (ISBN 978-1-8629541-4-4)

Green, Anne, *A model municipality, places of management, mentoring & medicine in Launceston*, Launceston City Council, Launceston, 2007, bibliography, 248 pp., paperback, $49.95. (ISBN 978-0-9596090-8-0)

Felton, Heather, *Ticklebelly tales and other stories from the people of the Hydro*, Hydro Tasmania, Hobart, 2008, maps, photographs, chronology, notes, bibliography, index, 512 pp., hardback, $75.00. (ISBN 978-0-6464772-4-4)

Andrew, Wendy, *Footprints. The people and places of early Clarence Plains and Rokeby,* Tranmere-Clarence Plains Land & Coast Care Inc., 2008, bibliography, separate indexes for people and places, endnotes, photographs, maps, 222 pp., paperback, $39.95 (ISBN 978-0-6464896-5-0)

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