

Ross, Fraser & Patience

infrastructure builders at the turn of the twentieth century

'Ross, Fraser & Patience: infrastructure builders at the turn of the twentieth century', *Provenance: The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, issue no. 19, 2021. ISSN 1832-2522. Copyright © David F. Radcliffe.

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Abstract

To support population growth and economic development following the boom of the 1880s, government agencies and municipal and shire councils around Victoria created numerous new roads, bridges, railway lines and wharves. While the work of many leading engineers who designed or oversaw the construction of much of this vital infrastructure has been documented, little has been written about the many small contractors who undertook the construction of these facilities. This article tells the stories of three Scottish immigrants, Donald Ross, Peter Fraser and Simon Patience, who formed a series of contracting companies between 1886 and 1912. Ross & Patience built roads, bridges and defence facilities in inner bayside Melbourne. The firm then morphed into Ross, Fraser & Co. and, a decade later, became Ross, Fraser & Patience, specialising in the construction of railway bridges, jetties, piers and wharves that relied upon their pile driving expertise. They built the Point Gellibrand Pile Lighthouse that operated off Williamstown from 1906 for 70 years. This account of their work draws upon contract and other legal documents that have lain largely forgotten in public archives or preserved by historical societies. It illustrates how these prosaic records, when combined with digitised newspaper accounts of the time, can lead to important insights into the nature of contracting work more than a century ago.

Introduction

Our daily life depends upon critical infrastructure such as roads, railways, bridges and port facilities. We often take such infrastructure for granted or grumble when our plans are disrupted during the construction of new road or rail facilities and such like. As communities grow or transport technology changes, new or different infrastructure is needed; timber wharves and manual labour are replaced by massive, automated container terminals, and multitrack, reinforced concrete rail bridges replace single-track, timber-trestle ones. During the boom of the 1880s—the period known as Marvellous Melbourne—a wide array of infrastructure was created to cater for the rapid growth in population and the expansion of Melbourne. This included new port facilities. The economic downturn and depression that followed in the 1890s was severe. Major infrastructure projects, including the building of Melbourne's sewer system, provided much needed employment as the turn of the century approached.

The life and work of many of the leading engineers during this period has been explored at length. These include William Thwaites and the Melbourne sewerage scheme; Maurice Kernot and railway construction in Victoria; Sir John Monash, as both a civil engineer and strategic leader; and AGM Michell, best known for the thrust bearing that transformed the design of large steamships, and whose early career contributed to the development of regional water supply. While engineers conceive and design major pieces of infrastructure, the construction of these is primarily the province of contractors. The founders of some of the larger contracting firms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century have been recognised; however, the essential role played by smaller contractors in delivering vital infrastructure in Victoria during this period is seemingly absent from the historical literature.



Figure 1: L-shaped extension to Mornington Pier built by Ross, Fraser & Patience. 'The arrival of the boat', Mornington Pier, Victoria, c. 1900, accession no. H33675/22, State Library of Victoria, available at <<http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/76218>>, accessed 11 October 2021.

This article seeks to redress this gap by presenting the story of Donald Ross, his nephew Simon Patience and a third Scottish immigrant, Peter Fraser, who operated a series of engineering contracting firms during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. They built roads, defence infrastructure, railways, bridges, wharves, jetties and piers around greater Melbourne and in regional Victoria. They were one of many such firms: small enterprises with a couple of principals, who competed for tenders offered by government agencies such as the Public Works Department, the Melbourne Harbour Trust, Victorian Railways, and municipal and shire councils to build all manner of necessary infrastructure. Between them, these many small contracting firms employed thousands of labourers on a project-by-project basis.

Methods

The origin of this project was the discovery that Simon Patience and Elizabeth Ross, the sister of Donald Ross, were the original owners of our house in Port Melbourne and that Ross and Patience founded a contracting business locally. This discovery initiated an exploration of other construction projects undertaken by Ross and Patience. Information was gathered primarily from the 'Tenders Accepted' lists in the *Victoria Government Gazette*, and these were then cross-referenced against articles in metropolitan, suburban and regional newspapers using Trove. The newspaper analysis focused particularly on reports of meetings of municipal and shire councils. It was usually possible to get a short description of the project, its value and the client. This process led to the discovery of Peter Fraser and his role as a partner with Ross and Patience.

Searches were then conducted of the collections of the Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society and Public Record Office Victoria (PROV),[8] which revealed tender and contract documentation for several of the projects undertaken by these three contractors. These documents proved to be a rich source of detailed information about the nature and form of contracts and the methods for estimating cost. Among them was a large, coloured contract drawing for the well-known Point Gellibrand Pile Lighthouse from 1906.[9] Although the drawing is in relatively poor condition, the signatures of Ross, Fraser and Patience were clearly visible. Unfortunately, the search for drawings or images of the other structures they built yielded only one result, the Portland Deepwater Pier.

Shipwrights from Scotland

Donald Ross was born in 1849 in the village of Avoch on the Black Isle in Ross and Cromarty on the edge of the highlands of Scotland.[10] His father, Simon Ross, a fisher, and his mother, Margaret Patience, had six children including three who came to Australia: Elizabeth, Sarah and Donald. The Ross and Patience families had intermarried over several generations. When Donald indentured as a shipwright in 1871, he was living in Glasgow.[11] By 1877 he had emigrated and was working for his brother-in-law (Sarah's husband), George Linklater, who operated a slipway constructing paddle steamers in Echuca.[12] Donald moved to Melbourne and was living at Emerald Hill when he married Jeanie Seater on New Year's Day 1878; she was 18 and a milliner and he was 28. Jeanie was born in the goldfields at Ararat in 1859 to emigrants from the Orkney Islands, Scotland.[13] Donald and Jeanie moved to a three-room wooden house in Sandridge (Port Melbourne) and began a family.

Simon Patience was born in Avoch in 1854. His parents were David Patience, a merchant sailor, and Janet Ross, the younger sister of Elizabeth, Sarah and Donald. Simon apprenticed as a shipwright and in 1881 was still living in Avoch and pursuing his trade. By August 1883 he was living in Sandridge, possibly staying with Donald Ross, with whom he jointly purchased a block of land. In December 1883, Simon purchased another block of land in Sandridge, this time with Donald's sister, Elizabeth Ross. In September 1885, Simon Patience married Caroline Emily Hardy at New Norfolk, Tasmania, up the Derwent valley from Hobart. He was 31 and she was 20, daughter of a local builder. Simon and Caroline sailed to Melbourne in June 1886, settling first at Yarraville, and later at Footscray, and began to raise a large family. By

this time Donald Ross and his young family had moved from Port Melbourne to Footscray.

Peter Begrie Fraser was born in Aberdeen in 1851, the first child of William Fraser, a shipwright, and Jane Begrie, whose father was a merchant seaman.[14] William, Jane and seven-year-old Peter immigrated to Melbourne in 1858, residing first in Richmond, then Williamstown before settling in Footscray around 1863. Peter's mother died aged 36, when he was 15. He apprenticed as a carpenter and, in 1872, aged 21, married Elizabeth Redding.[15] Born in Footscray, she was a house maid at the time of her marriage; her father was a fisher. Meanwhile, William Fraser became a contractor and was in business with a Mr Hutchinson building marine structures including wharves and slipways. They had a steam-powered, pile driving barge.[16] It is likely that Peter worked in the business.

In their mid-30s, these three Scots with deep connections to the sea and backgrounds in marine carpentry, and who were neighbours in Footscray, went into business as contractors. Between 1886 and the early 1920s, Donald Ross, Simon Patience and Peter Fraser, in various combinations, operated a series of firms with wooden marine structures becoming their speciality.

Ross & Patience

Donald Ross and Simon Patience formed a partnership in 1886 and their first contracts involved earthworks and asphaltting associated with defence facilities at Williamstown and Port Melbourne.[17] This was part of the preparations made around Port Phillip Bay in the 1880s and 1890s against a potential Russian attack. [18] Another of their early contracts was from the Port Melbourne Council to pave Ingles Street. This work included the laying down of a 'tramway' in the middle of the road north of the railway line. Better described as a plateway, this was not a set of rail tracks for steel wheeled carriages but rather a roadway that comprised a parallel set of flat steel plates laid into the road to support heavily laden, horse-drawn wagons.[19] The schedule of rates for the job are shown on the contract documents (Figure 2). Such schedules remain the basis for much contracting work today.

A dispute arose over payments, so Ross & Patience sued the council. The writ in the Supreme Court called for £478 12s 11d, being £201 2s 11d for work completed and £50 (the deposit) plus £221 10s in damages for breach of contract.[20] In the end, the council paid just £257 2s 11d

BOROUGH OF SANDRIDGE. 1887

Contract No. 480 entered into this 31st day of January 1887
with *Ronald Ross & Simon Patience*
of *Footscray*
for the following:— *Works required in the formation and relaying and the construction of a Steel plate Tramway in Ingles St Port Melbourne*

The Contract to be completed on or before the 19th day of March 1887
The amount deposited as Cash Security is £ 50: " : "

SCHEDULE OF PRICES.

Quantities.	Description.	Price.	Amount.
47 Chains	Excavation & formation for tramway as specified	9 ^{rs} per ft. 88	1 "
47 Chains	Surface formation as specified	10 ^{rs} per chain 23	10 "
4 Chains	Sheet formation	7 ^{rs} 10 "	30 "
1000 C yds	Bleeding 3 rd metal finished as specified	4 ^{rs} 6 ^{rs} cyp. 225	- "
250 "	Screening old metal	9 ^{rs} 6 "	31 5 "
800 "	Supply & laying 3 rd metal tarred	1 ^{rs} 11 "	422 10 "
47 Chains	Tramway complete as specified including work of plate		466 4 "
	Relaying rail works complete		30 "
	Relaying pipe		7 "
Total Amount of Contract			1624 10 "
Additions or Deductions			168 10 6
1884	Sept 24	Payments as follows:—No. 1	129 9 - ✓
	March 10	" 2	101 15 - ✓
	" 24	" 3	418 2 6 ✓
	Apr 6	" 4	457 1 - ✓
	" 20	" 5	148 18 - ✓
	May 5	" 6	256 13 - ✓
	" 19	" 7	50 - ✓
	Sept 26	" 8 4 th instal.	204 2 - ✓
		" 9	...
		" 10	...
			1793 0 6 1743 0 6

Figure 2: Ross & Patience contract for Ingles Street, Borough of Sandridge, Contracts, 1876–1894, Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society.

in contracting work, and this would have been an early lesson for the fledgling partnership.

Most of their contracts over the next decade involved building or repairing bridges, wharves and piers, as listed in Table 1.

The gap in contracts undertaken by the partnership between 1888 and 1894 needs some explanation. In March 1888, Victorian Railways let the contract for building the Ringwood – Fern Tree Gully railway line to J. Forbes & Co. It was worth £32,218 10s 1d. A few months

Table 1: List of construction contracts by Ross & Patience, compiled from the *Victoria Government Gazette* and newspapers.

Year	Description of Work	Client	Value
1886	Earthworks for Central Battery, Williamstown	Public Works	£433/6/9
	Asphalting & drainage at Defence Reserve, Port Melbourne	Public Works	£588/3/4
1887	Making Ingles Street, Port Melbourne	Port Melbourne Council	£1624/10/0
	Removal of 325 feet of wharfage and earth near Falls Bridge.	Melbourne Harbour Trust	£878/13/11
1888	Repairs bridge over the Saltwater River at Maribyrrong Rd	Essendon Council	£309/2/-
	Snagging punt for the Tarwin River at Anderson's Inlet	Public Works	£340
1894	Bridge over North and South Arms of Condah swamp	Public Works	£244/10/3
1895	Repairs Mornington Pier	Public Works	£51/13/-
	Construction of wharf at Yarraville	Melbourne Harbour Trust	Unknown

later, J. Forbes & Co walked away from the job with little work completed and lost their deposit. A newspaper reported that the contract had been picked up by Ross & Patience and that they had employed 400 men to work on the rail construction.[21] However, the contract had in fact been transferred to Hendry & Co., comprised of George Hendry and Simon Patience.

Subsequently, Andrew Michael McCann, an engineer from Footscray, joined the firm, which became McCann, Hendry & Co. This is detailed in the insolvency case of Andrew McCann in 1892.[22] His was one of a cascade of insolvencies that occurred during the 1890s as the inevitable bust that followed the speculation boom of the 1880s began to bite.[23] At the opening of the railway in December 1889, Simon Patience represented the firm and responded to the toast to the contractors.[24]

Ross, Fraser & Co.

Meanwhile, Donald Ross teamed up with Peter Fraser in late 1887 operating as Ross, Fraser & Co. specialising in marine structures and wooden bridges. This followed the passing of William Fraser in March that year after which the pile driving machinery of Hutchinson & Fraser passed to Peter.[25] Table 2 lists many of the projects undertaken by Ross, Fraser & Co. between 1887 and 1897. It shows the variety of clients they dealt with and the range of the value of the different projects they undertook, some very small and some quite large.

While they mostly tendered for work in Victoria, Ross, Fraser & Co. submitted at least one interstate tender. This was to build a bridge between Grafton and Glen Innes in the Northern Rivers area of New South Wales; however,

Table 2: Successful and unsuccessful tenders by Ross, Fraser & Co., compiled from the *Victoria Government Gazette* and newspapers.

Year	Description of Work	Client	Value
1887	Eumemmerring bridge (only tender but it was rejected)	Cranbourne Shire Council	Unknown
1888	Wharf on west bank of the Saltwater River Footscray	Melbourne Harbour Trust	£199/6/6
1891	Extension of jetty at Dromona	Public Works	£457/10/11
	Coal wharf at railway dock, West Melbourne swamp	Victorian Railways	£5619/2/6
1892	New jetty and repairs to approach at Geelong	Public Works	£1055/16/6
	Coal bunkers at the rail dock near the sanitary works	Melbourne City Council	£931/11/-
1893	Timber beam bridge Chambigne Crk, NSW (unsuccessful)	NSW Tenders Board	£671/1/8
1894	Repairs to the Yarra Street jetty at Geelong	Public Works	£448/14/8
	Dartmoor Bridge (unsuccessful)	Portland Shire Council	£1236/15/11
	Toolern Creek bridge repairs	Melton Shire Council	£65/15/6
1895	Holmes bridge (unsuccessful)	Springfield Shire Council	£273/3/-
1896	Jetty at Metropolitan Sewerage Farm at Werribee	MMBW	£3539/19/4
1897	Jetty and shed at the powder magazine at Skeleton Ck.	Public Works	£2697/15/10
	Baths at Beaumaris (tender withdrawn due to an error)	Moorabbin Shire Council	Unknown

they were unsuccessful. While Tables 2 and 3 include several unsuccessful tenders, there would have been more that we do not know about as newspapers often only published the name of the successful tenderer.

Ross, Fraser & Patience

In late 1897, Ross, Fraser & Co. morphed into Ross, Fraser & Patience and their business remained focused on wooden marine structures. We know that Ross and

Patience undertook some contracts on their own in 1894 and 1895, so it is possible that Simon Patience was part of Ross, Fraser & Co. If there was confusion over who worked with whom, some tried to take advantage of it. In 1887, and again in 1899, Simon Patience was forced to issue a public notice that David Patience, who had sought to gain an advance in the name of issue a public notice that David Patience, who had sought to gain an advance in the name of Ross, Fraser & Patience, had no connection to that firm.[26]

Table 3: Successful and unsuccessful tenders by Ross, Fraser & Patience, 1897–1911, compiled from the *Victoria Government Gazette* and newspapers.

Year	Description of Work	Client	Value
1897	Construction of embankment Donald to Birchip railway	Victorian Railways	£336/12/10
	Bridge over Richardson Ck., Donald to Birchip railway	Victorian Railways	£1692/4/-
1899	Erection of new jetty Portland	Public Works	£13,392/8/3
1901	Repairs Yarra St Jetty Geelong	Public Works	£1104/3
1902	Erection of footbridge over Stony Creek at Yarraville	Footscray & Williamstown Councils	£363/8/9
	Erection of McCoys Bridge (unsuccessful)	Deakin Shire Council	£2989/7/5
1903	New wharf and shed in Hobart (unsuccessful)	Hobart Marine Board	£6937/19
1904	Repairs to jetty and approaches Sorrento	Public Works	£590/3/6
	Erect boat jetty North Road Brighton	Public Works	£215
1905	Extension of breakwater jetty Portarlington	Public Works	£446/15/5
	Fender piling at Jetty at Lorne	Public Works	£317/16/2
1906	Extras on jetty at Lorne	Public Works	£152/12/5
	Erection of Point Gellibrand Pile Light	Public Works	£1925
1907	Rebuilding bridge over Deep Creek at Darraweit Gium	Merriang Shire Council	£547/11/8
	Extension + repairs Middle Brighton pier	Public Works	£557/13/3
1908	Erection of Jetty at Point Ormond	Public Works	£673
	L-Head extension of Mornington pier	Public Works	£1128/17/8
	Ovens River bridge at Rocky Point, Mytleford to Whorouly	Oxley Shire Council	£1094/18/10
	Lifeboat shed, wharf and approaches Port Albert	Public Works	£281/15/-
	Sub-contract for piling work, Yarra bank improvements	John Monash	£47
1909	Spring piling to Mornington pier	Public Works	£1065/11/4
	Rebuilding the bridge over Gardiners Creek	Camberwell Council	£285/16/6
	Repairs to outlet of main drain at Prahran	Public Works	£177
1910	Repairs to jetty at Lorne	Public Works	£227
	Pile piers for Carrum Ck railway bridge	Victorian Railways	£532/18/5
	Pile piers for Mordialloc Ck railway bridge	Victorian Railways	£692/0/9
	Reconstruction of wharfs, north side of the Yarra	Melbourne Harbour Trust	£3430
	Pile piers for Kananook Ck railway bridge	Victorian Railways	£144/17/-
1911	Extension of the Brighton Beach pier	Public Works	£889/11/-
	Pile driving new shipbuilding yard Williamstown	Public Works	£199/17/9

Whatever permutations occurred, their client base had now narrowed to working mainly with the Public Works Department and Victorian Railways, who provided a large amount of repeat business, some larger projects and some smaller ones. Steady work from satisfied clients who know your performance and can rely on the outcomes is the key to successful contracting. The one tender they did submit interstate, to build a wharf in Hobart, was unsuccessful.

They also accepted some very small jobs, including a subcontract from John Monash for pile driving work as part of building a landing stage and promenade improvements along the banks of the north bank of the Yarra, east of Princes Bridge, in 1908.[27]

The contract documents for at least five projects undertaken by Ross, Fraser & Patience for Victorian Railways are held at PROV.[28] These contain information such as contract conditions, specifications for the work, lists of work and materials executed, schedule of rates, diagrams and various correspondence. The signed contract for the bridge over the Richardson River on the Donald–Birchip railway in 1897 is illustrated in Figure 3.[29]

The deepwater pier at Portland was the largest contract secured by Ross, Fraser & Patience and it represented a significant improvement in the commercial development of this harbour. The firm is reported to have had a high reputation with the Public Works Department and all others with whom they did business:

At present Mr Ross is supervising pier construction at Geelong, the other two partners being at Portland. Mr Fraser was engaged on pier construction in Portland thirty odd years ago, and was also connected with one of the boat harbor contracts. All the partners are practical men, and men with progressive ideas; prompt to seize upon any new expedient that will tend to economise labor and expedite the work in which they are engaged. Add to this a knowledge gained by lengthy experience of the values of material and the sources from which they can best be obtained, and we have roughly the secret of the success of the firm, and the high reputation they enjoy with the Public Works Department, and all others with whom they have business relations. The contractors themselves are very modest men, and not at all inclined to boast of their own achievements, but it does not need very keen discernment to arrive at the above conclusions, which are borne out by the facts incident to the career of the firm.[30]

The *Portland Guardian* observed that the partners, Ross, Fraser and Patience, led from the front. Touching on a perennial issue for all construction teams—the weather—it was reported that, on projects the firm had done around Hobson’s Bay, there were times when “for five or six days on end they were unable to work by reason of bad weather”:

‘Portland is the best place ever I worked in for a big job,’ said Mr. Patience, and this was endorsed by Mr. Fraser. Again, Mr Patience remarked ‘If we had a choice of jobs in Mordialloc, Werribee, Dromania, Point Henry, or Portland, I would take Portland, and so would Mr Fraser.’

Peter Fraser met and married his second wife, Ellen Child, in Portland in 1901 during the building of the deepwater pier.[31] His first wife Elizabeth had passed away four years earlier.

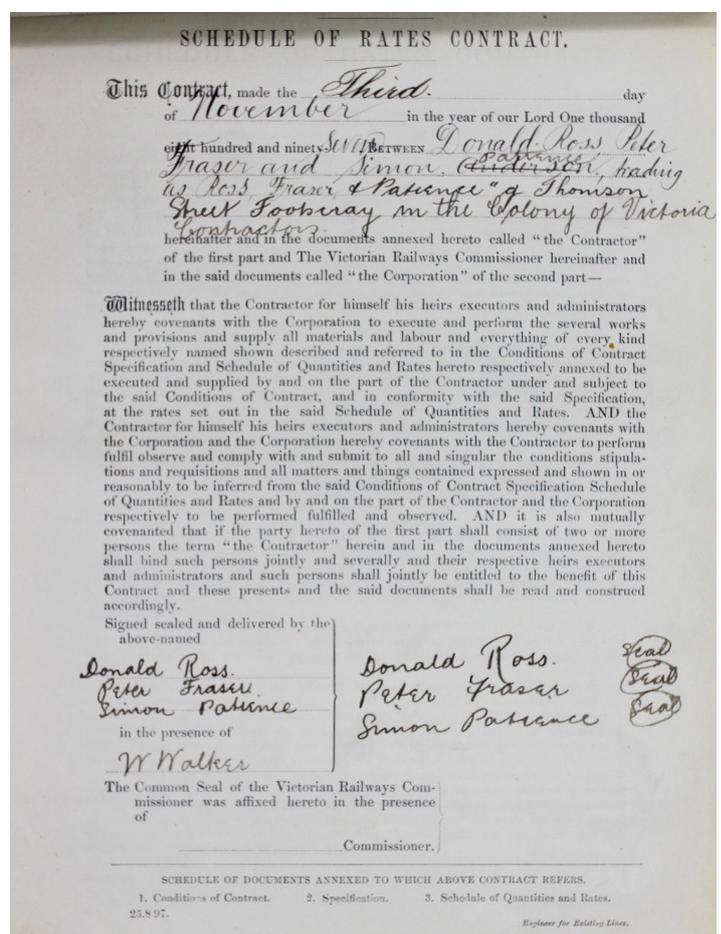


Figure 3: Schedule of Rates Contract, PROV, VPRS 17077/P1, Unit 585, Contract No. 6678, Fraser and Patience.

Following the Portland pier job, Ross, Fraser & Patience built a footbridge over Stony Creek, between Footscray and Williamstown. The purpose of the bridge was to reduce deaths caused by people crossing from Yarraville to Spotswood using the rail bridge. With two councils involved, disagreements inevitably arose.[32] During the course of the job, wilful damage was done to equipment at the construction site. A couple of local men who had previously been involved in pretty theft from the worksite



Figure 4: 'Deepwater pier & baths, Portland, Vic.', c. 1908, accession no. H90.160/253, State Library of Victoria, available at <<http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/386166>>, accessed 11 October 2021.

sawed through a 40-foot-long piece of Oregon pine that was being used in connection with the pile driving operations.[33] Wilful damage at construction sites is still a significant issue today, as witnessed by the lengths contractors go to to secure and protect their equipment overnight.

The most recognisable of the marine structures built by Ross, Fraser & Patience is the former Point Gellibrand Pile Lighthouse. The contract drawing for this project is shown in Figure 5.[34]

Completed in 1906, the pile light replaced a light ship that had been moored over the reef at Point Gellibrand off Williamstown.[35] The pile light operated for 70 years before being struck and badly damaged by a ship in 1976. The structure was subsequently demolished by setting it on fire.

The last known contract by Ross, Fraser & Patience was for driving over 300 wooden piles as part of the construction of the Victorian ship building yard at the Alfred Graving Dock at Williamstown.[36] As with earlier projects, they used Australian hardwoods, red gum foundations and box and ironbark piles. Workers newly arrived from the 'home country' found these materials difficult to work with, being more familiar with pine and other softwoods. The new shipyards were opened by the governor in April 1913 to much fanfare and with the hope and expectation that they would play an important part in building vessels for the nascent Royal Australian Navy.[37]

It is a curious coincidence that the company's last job together and the first one by Ross & Patience were both defence facilities. Two of Simon Patience's sons, Donald, a schoolteacher, and Roy, an accountant, served in World War I.[38]

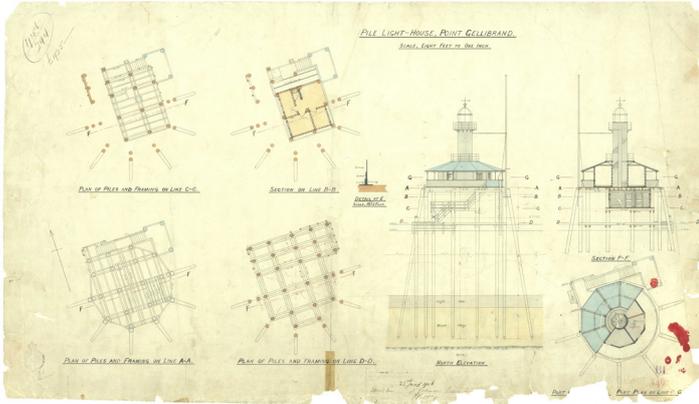


Figure 5: Pile Light House, Port Gellibrand, contract drawing signed 22 January 1906, PROV, VPRS 16723/P1.

What remains

There is no record of new tenders being awarded to Ross, Fraser & Patience after 1911, although some existing contracts would have been completed in 1912. By now, Donald Ross and Peter Fraser were both in their early 60s. Around 1915, Simon Patience moved from Footscray to Carlisle Street, St Kilda, and set up in business with his son, also called Simon. Patience & Son won a small contract in 1917 from the Country Roads Board to erect a bridge on the Ballarat–Castlemaine road at Campbelltown, and the following year a larger one for piling work and preparation of slips to expand the shipyards at Williamstown. In 1920, Patience & Son built a bridge at Campbelltown.[39]

Simon Patience passed away in 1923, aged 68, and Donald Ross died in 1926, aged 76. The probate records of each reveal that Patience had total assets of £5,709, the vast majority of which was government bonds, shares in the Metropolitan Gas Company and a saving account, with £1,000 being in rental properties and land he owned.[40] Ross left assets of £4,786 mostly in the form of rental properties and land, with £1,500 being in bonds and a savings account.[41] So contracting had been good to them.

Tragically, Simon Patience Jnr, now a contractor in his own right, was killed in a workplace accident in 1927 while constructing a new bridge over the Barwon River at Barwon Heads. Aged 34, he suffered fatal injuries when a 2.5-ton wooden beam fell on him as he was trying to free it from a railway wagon.[42] Construction has always been a dangerous occupation, even more so before occupational health and safety practices, as we know them today, were an integral facet of workplaces. As a young man, Donald



Figure 6: Point Gellibrand Pile Light House, c. 1960s, PROV, VPRS 8357/P1, Unit 6, Photograph [006].

Ross cut his foot badly with an axe while building paddle steamers on the Murray River, but he recovered.[43] Over the 30 years that firms involving Ross, Fraser and Patience operated, it is likely that a number of workers would have been seriously injured. This is not a reflection on them so much as it is on the prevailing standards at the time.

The bridges, wharves, piers and other infrastructure built by Donald Ross, Peter Fraser and Simon Patience have either succumbed to the ravages of weather and time, or been removed and replaced by newer, larger structures to accommodate later growth in the metropolitan area and regions. However, the Peter Fraser Memorial Hall in Barkly Street, Footscray, is a tangible reminder of them. The Ross, Fraser and Patience families all had long associations with the Presbyterian Church in Footscray. When Peter Fraser passed in 1933, aged 82, his long connection with the church—dating back to the time his parents moved to Footscray when he was 15—was remembered. He was a church elder for 40 years and superintendent of the Sunday school for 30 years. The expansive Peter Fraser Hall, with seating for 450, a dining room with kitchen adjoining, young men's club room and gymnasium, bible classroom and caretaker's quarters was opened by Governor of Victoria Lord Huntingfield in February 1936. [44] The hall is still used today by the Uniting Church of Australia.

Conclusion

The small firms that built much of the essential infrastructure around Melbourne and regional Victoria at the turn of the twentieth century seldom feature in the history books; however, as this article shows, it is possible to construct a picture of contracting in that era. While the history of each of these contracting firms is unique, the story of contractors Ross, Fraser and Patience provides insights into the period, the nature of contracting, the types of infrastructure being built and how contractors were viewed at the time. Such research has been facilitated in recent years through access to digitised newspapers online using Trove. Long forgotten and somewhat prosaic contractual documents and construction drawings from municipal archives and government department records preserved by local historical societies and PROV provide fine-grained insights into how contracting businesses operated a century ago.

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

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- [6] J Ann Hone, 'Collier, Jenkin (1829–1921)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, available at <<https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/collier-jenkin-236/text4899>>, published first in hardcopy 1969, accessed 27 August 2021.
- [7] For the purposes of this article, the literature review was limited to an extensive search of the *Victorian Historical Journal*, *Engineering Heritage Australia* and *Provenance*, which revealed only the occasional references to construction contractors in Victoria during the period of interest (1880s–1910s). In each instance, these were incidental to the article in question, being centred on someone or something else. Contractors, their life and work, were never the primary focus of these works. Further, those contractors who were mentioned were typically engaged in large-scale construction projects valued in the tens or hundreds of thousands of pounds. Small-scale contractors do not appear in any of these articles. In addition, I consulted John Lack's *A history of Footscray*. There is no mention of Ross, Fraser or Patience even though they lived there and their businesses were based there. There is nothing in either of the histories of Port Melbourne (by U'ren and Turnbull, and by Margaret and Graham Bride). I also searched the *Engineering History and Heritage* journal of the Institution of Civil Engineers (a UK-based journal), but the only relevant reference was to a book published by them in 2015 called *The contractors*—a follow-up to *The engineers* in 2011—both looking at the history of each group over the past 300 years. Naturally it was about British and Irish engineering contractors and those featured were all very large-scale contractors.
- [8] Borough of Sandridge, Contract Book, 1876–1894, held at the Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society. The following sources were consulted from PROV: VPRS 267 Civil Case Files; VPRS 28 Probate and Administration Files; VPRS 17077 Contract Files, Construction of Railway Lines, Associated Buildings, Structures and Facilities, Manufacture and Delivery of Locomotives, Electrification of Suburban Lines; VPRS 16723 Estray Harbour Works Plans.
- [9] PROV, VPRS 16723/P1 Estray Harbour Works Plans, Pile Light House, Port Gellibrand. Contract drawing signed 22 January 1906.
- [10] Scottish Census, Parish: Avoch; ED: 1; Page: 25; Line: 6; Roll: CSSCT1851_13; Year: 1851.
- [11] Scottish Census, Parish: Govan; ED: 28; Page: 2; Line: 3; Roll: CSSCT1871_143; Year 1871.
- [12] 'Another launch', *Riverine Herald* (Echuca/Moama), 10 April 1877, p. 2.
- [13] Marriage Certificate, Births, Deaths, and Deaths, Victoria, 1878/728.
- [14] Scottish Census, Parish: *Aberdeen St Clements*; ED: 3; Page: 6; Line: 16; Roll: CSSCT1851_37; Year: 1851.
- [15] Marriage Certificate, Births, Deaths and Marriages, Victoria, 3484/1872.
- [16] 'The Melbourne harbour trust', *Argus* (Melbourne), 15 October 1885, p. 11.
- [17] *Argus* (Melbourne), 23 July 1886, p. 10.
- [18] Michael Kitson, 'An attack on Melbourne: a case study of the defence of Australia's major ports in the early 1890s', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, no 35, December 2001, available at <<https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/journal/j35>>, accessed 20 April 2021.
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- [20] PROV, VPRS 267/P7 Civil Case Files, 1887/3321 Ross and Patience v The Mayor Councillors and Burgesses of Port Melbourne.
- [21] *Lilydale Express*, 18 August 1888, p. 2.
- [22] 'The insolvent estate of A.M. McCann', *Argus* (Melbourne), 19 July 1892, p. 3.
- [23] John C Weaver, 'A pathology of insolvents: Melbourne 1871–1915', *Australian Journal of Legal History*, 8, 2004, pp. 109–131.
- [24] 'Opening of the Fern Tree Gully railway', *South Bourke and Mornington Journal*, 4 December 1889.
- [25] PROV, VPRS 28/P0 Probate and Administration Files, 34/186 William Fraser: Grant of Administration.
- [26] *Age* (Melbourne), 12 December 1899, p. 10.
- [27] Alan Hologate, *Yarra Bank Improvements*, available at <<http://www.ahologate.com/marriv/yarrabanks.html>>, accessed April 25, 2021.
- [28] PROV, VPRS 17077/P1 Contract Files, Construction of Railway Lines, Associated Buildings, Structures and Facilities, Manufacture and Delivery of Locomotives, Electrification of Suburban Lines.
- [29] PROV, VPRS 17077/P1 Contract No. 6678/1514 Donald to Birchip Railway Line, Contract for Richardson River Bridge – Contractor Ross, Fraser and Patience.
- [30] 'Portland Harbour, the new pier', *Portland Guardian*, 24 April 1901, p. 3.
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- [32] 'Stony Creek Bridge', *Independent* (Footscray), 11 January 1902, p. 3; *Independent* (Footscray), 25 January 1902, p. 2.
- [33] 'April fools: wilful damage at Yarraville', *Independent* (Footscray) 12 April 1902, p. 2.
- [34] PROV, VPRS 16723/ P1 Pile Light House, Port Gellibrand, Contract drawing signed 22 January 1906.
- [35] 'Gellibrand lighthouse', *Argus* (Melbourne), 4 August 1906, p. 19.
- [36] 'Alfred Graving dock', *Williamstown Chronicle*, 26 August 1911, p. 2.
- [37] 'Red letter day locally', *Williamstown Chronicle*, 12 April 1913, p. 2.
- [38] NAA: B2455, Patience Donald; NAA: B2455, Patience Roy Louis.
- [39] *Ballarat Star*, 6 February 1920, p. 3.
- [40] PROV, VPRS 28/ P3 215/559 Simon Patience.
- [41] PROV, VPRS 28/ P3 209/329 Donald Ross.
- [42] 'A contractors death', *Age* (Melbourne), 17 March 1927, p. 7.
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