

Provenance 2022

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Front cover: Melbourne Central Institute, c. 1920. PROV, VPRS 8357/P0001/63, Photograph [108],
Postcard of the Victorian Missions to Seamen, Melbourne Victoria, undated.

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About *Provenance*

the journal of Public Record Office Victoria

The purpose of *Provenance* is to foster access to the archival holdings of Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) and communicate the relevance of this collection to the wider Victorian community.

Provenance journal publishes peer-reviewed articles, as well as other written contributions, that contain research drawing on records in PROV's collection.

The records held by PROV contain a wealth of information regarding Victorian people, places, communities, events, policies, institutions, infrastructure, governance and law. *Provenance* provides a forum for scholarly publication drawing on the full diversity of these records.

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The Editor, *Provenance*
Public Record Office Victoria
PO Box 2100
North Melbourne Victoria 3051
Australia

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Editorial

Welcome to the 2022 issue of *Provenance*, the free, annual, online journal of Public Record Office Victoria (PROV). *Provenance* is a forum through which both professional and non-professional researchers who make use of the extensive collection of records held by PROV and other archival and historical collections can publish their research and writing. Authors have the option to have their work anonymously peer reviewed within scholarly conventions, or to publish a more informal or general interest article based on their research findings or research journey.

This issue includes four original articles based on research of Victorian archival collections. Several draw on records of government activity within the state's collection held at PROV—including urban planning, resource management and public health—to explore the ways in which the ideas, processes and decisions of public officials have influenced the development of Victoria in distinct ways.

In his peer reviewed article, 'The two fishery inspectors: managing the Victorian fishery, 1885–1894', David Harris highlights a relatively understudied area in the history of the management of Victoria's environmental resources: government oversight of the colony's fisheries in the late nineteenth century. Harris examines the priorities and focus of two successive fishery administrators through close examination of a key extant source of government activity relating to Victoria's fisheries from this period: Outward Letter Book, Inspector of Fisheries and Game, 1885–1894.

The correspondence and reports contained in this letter book reveal the competing ideas of government officials and interested parties about the preservation, use and management of fisheries and Victoria's marine resources. Access to sustainable commercial fish stocks, the introduced practices of European fishing communities, the dietary habits of colonial Victorians, legislative protections and the move to industrialise the local fishing industry by the end of the nineteenth century are among the various topics covered in the letter book. Harris's article helps trace debates and concerns about the sustainable management and legislative protection of Victoria's fisheries to the earliest decades of the colonisation of Victoria.

Sebastian Gurciullo's article, 'Reclaiming the slums: the Housing Commission of Victoria's plans for inner Melbourne', draws on his research of the PROV collection that focuses on planned urban infrastructure projects that did not eventuate, or that were significantly adapted

in response to community lobbying. Another article from this research, 'Deleting freeways: community opposition to inner urban arterial roads in the 1970s', is published in the 2020 issue of *Provenance*.

Gurciullo's article contrasts two aspects of the Housing Commission of Victoria's (HCV) far-reaching plans for the revitalisation and transformation of the inner suburbs of Melbourne during the 1960s and 1970s: the construction of high-rise towers to house lower-income residents, and the proposed demolition and redevelopment of large parts of the inner city considered as slums. As Gurciullo demonstrates through case studies of Debney Meadows Estate in Flemington and the proposed Carlton Redevelopment Zone, records of the HCV reveal the thinking behind its responses to concerns about substandard housing, homelessness, and the social and economic conditions of lower-income families. However, while the construction of high-rise towers met the housing needs of thousands of people, large-scale suburban reconstruction was not in tune with the feelings of an already changing demographic, which had begun the process of small-scale regeneration of these inner-city neighbourhoods alongside the HCV's public housing initiatives.

Lucinda Horrocks' article, 'Discovering an archive', provides a fascinating window into what happened after a significant collection of records documenting the history of the Mission to Seafarers was discovered underneath a stage in its heritage-listed building in Flinders Street, Melbourne, in 2007. Horrocks became aware of the archive in 2018 when the Mission to Seafarers commissioned her film company, Wind & Sky Productions, to produce a short documentary film about the Ladies Harbour Lights Guild (LHLG), a group of women who fundraised and organised social events and activities in support of sailors' and seafarers' welfare. Within the boxes was a collection of photographs and documents related to the activities of the LHLG from its foundation in 1906 through to the 1960s when it ceased to operate. Through this experience, Horrocks witnessed the ongoing work of volunteers and staff in the mission community to document, digitise and catalogue the archive, and in so doing learn more about the significance of the work of this group of remarkable women. Many of the records are now catalogued in the Victorian Collections online portal.

Meaghan McKee revisits the case of Sarah Hanks, who died in the small goldmining settlement of Walhalla during a smallpox outbreak in Victoria in 1868–1869. Her article, 'The story of Mrs H, case number 35: a victim of smallpox or fear?', brings together research covering a

wide range of sources (e.g., public records, newspaper reports and local history) to investigate Sarah's experience in the context of recent renewed local interest in her story, including questions about the possible location of her gravesite. McKee's research explores some of the ways in which fear and a lack of understanding impacted on how people suffering with smallpox were treated at this time, including attempts to contain and isolate those thought to be suffering from the disease, and even how their bodies were treated after death. McKee also raises questions about the notoriety associated with smallpox, noting the tendency to diagnose chickenpox cases as smallpox, as well as a singling out of the Chinese population for vaccination to prevent possible outbreaks. In the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic, it is timely to consider some of the experiences of the Victorian community during the mid-nineteenth century, when smallpox and chickenpox outbreaks were a frequent occurrence.

I hope you enjoy reading the articles in this issue.

Tsari Anderson
Provenance editor

Refereed articles



The two fishery inspectors

managing the Victorian fishery, 1885–1894

'The two fishery inspectors: managing the Victorian fishery, 1885–1894', *Provenance: the Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, issue no. 20, 2022. ISSN 1832-2522. Copyright © David Harris.

David Harris is an adjunct research fellow in the Centre for the Study of the Inland at La Trobe University. His PhD at La Trobe University, completed in 2014, was an environmental history of the Gippsland Lakes in the nineteenth century. His previous academic research was an MA at the University of Melbourne investigating a history of housing and social reform in inner-suburban Melbourne between 1900 and 1920. He has published on the early history of public housing in Victoria, aspects of Victoria's colonial fishery and the Gippsland Lakes in the nineteenth century. More recently, he contributed to a textbook for a section of the new VCE Australian History course. He taught in Victorian Government secondary schools, has contributed to state and federal secondary curriculum support projects and has lectured in urban history at Victoria College, Rusden. He was as an education officer at Heritage Victoria, has contributed to several heritage conservation studies and has taught environmental history at La Trobe and Monash universities. His interest in the 'Outward Letter Book, Inspector of Fisheries and Game' was sparked during research for his PhD thesis. He was intrigued that he had never seen it referenced in any research on Victoria's colonial fishery; its mere existence was a mystery, as it had obviously avoided destruction, unlike other Victorian Government nineteenth-century fishery archives.

Contact details: d.harris@latrobe.edu.au

Abstract

The 'Outward Letter Book, Inspector of Fisheries and Game' used between 1885 and 1894 is an unusual archival item at Public Record Office Victoria. Apart from being a rare example of a letter book from the Victorian Government's colonial-era Department of Fisheries, it was used by only two inspectors over almost 10 years. Rather than the expected matter-of-fact administrative tone, the letters, memos and reports preserved in the Letter Book carry a clear sense of the authors as they express their opinions over a range of matters to do with the fishery. Both inspectors came from maritime backgrounds, so there is strong sense of identification with the commercial fishers with whom they regularly worked. At the same time, there is a palpable resonance with current concerns about the marine environment, species extinction and destructive fishing practices—matters that concerned both commercial fishers and the inspectors. Finally, the Letter Book captures a period of significant change in commercial fishing in the colony, as the older, pre-industrial remnants of artisanal fishing, brought to the colony by commercial fishers during the gold rush, gave way to an imagined industrial fishery with dreams of a Bass Strait trawling industry.

Introduction

Between the 1850s and early 1890s, the Victorian Parliament introduced at least seven Acts to do with fisheries.[1] The colony's fish resources received legislative protection as did oyster beds as well as foreign fish introduced for sport into Victorian waterways. It is reasonable to assume that all this legislative and administrative activity, which included several inquiries, must have generated a significant amount of paperwork. Remarkably, all that remains of these attempts to manage and regulate the colonial fishery is one letter book: 'Outward Letter Book, Inspector of Fisheries and Game' (hereafter referred to as the Letter Book). [2]

AJ Harrison, a former secretary for fisheries in Tasmania and a biographer of the celebrated fishery scientist William Saville-Kent, was also puzzled by the absence of Victorian colonial fishery records at Public Record Office Victoria (PROV). He suggested the files were 'apparently

lost' when records from the Department of Trade and Customs were transferred to the Commonwealth at Federation.[3] This seems unlikely as the new state of Victoria retained the same administrative responsibilities for fisheries as during the colonial era. It is likely the records were destroyed as a result of the 1916 Interim Report of the Royal Commission into the Civil Service, which recommended 'obsolete' records could be destroyed.[4] Either way, due to an intriguing set of circumstances, PROV holds an administrative remnant of the colonial government's attempts to manage the Victorian fishery. Harrison could not have known that the document existed when he was researching Saville-Kent because it only arrived at PROV in recent years. It had been in private hands until 2008 when it was donated to the State Library of Victoria. It was subsequently transferred to PROV.

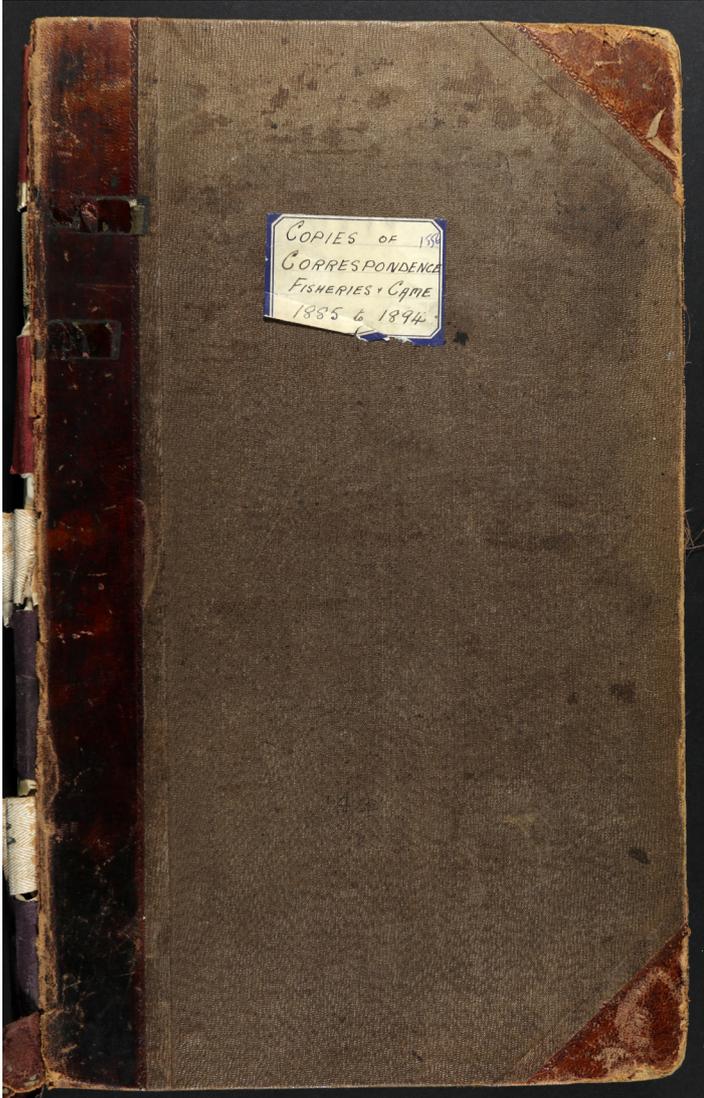


Figure 1: Cover, 'Outward Letter Book, Inspector of Fisheries and Game', 1885–1894, PROV, VPRS 16182/P0001 Unit 1.

A treasure trove, the Letter Book contains duplicates of reports, letters and memos written across almost a decade (1885–1894) by Captain Charles Mandeville, chief fisheries inspector from 1884 to 1887, and his successor, Captain James Anderson, who occupied the role from 1888. Comprising more than 700 pages, it documents competing interests and ideas associated with the exploitation of the colonial fishery, thereby offering rare insight into colonial ideas about the environment and the exploitation of a shared resource. Much like a diary or a collection of letters, it enables the reader to chart a trajectory of perceptions and ideas from two individuals who had similar responsibilities for fishery management. At the same time, as the Letter Book contains evidence

of the grinding wheels of the colonial bureaucracy, it also reflects a nineteenth-century concern with the environment and fishery management refracted through the perspectives of these two government officials. Although the story of the colonial fishery ended more than a century ago, in a larger sense, it is unfinished, as similar issues persist into the present. This paper explores how the 'Outward Letter Book, Inspector of Fisheries and Game' contributes to our understanding of the colonial fishery and the attempts by colonists to manage a natural resource they were exploiting.

Histories of nineteenth-century Victorian fisheries

Histories of Victoria's colonial fishery have drawn on a range of viewpoints from local and family histories to more academic approaches. The majority of published research takes the form of locally based studies, with a substantial amount of research coming from local and community historians.[5] Understandably, many of these histories concentrate on families involved in the fish trade, an approach that is also evident in several oral history projects that focus on more recent history.[6]

A small number of scholars have brought perspectives from historical and maritime archaeology, environmental history, and the history and philosophy of science to their research on aspects of the colonial fishery.[7] Museums and archives staffed by volunteers at Port Albert, Lakes Entrance, Paynesville and elsewhere have also been essential to collecting and establishing archives to protect records.

While local studies are an essential part of teasing out the details of the colonial fishery, perspectives offered by historians in the northern hemisphere provide a broader international context to trends evident in colonial fishery debates. Evidence of international connections is apparent in the Letter Book: for example, a report to the consul for Sweden and Norway on Victoria's fishery and a response to a letter from a commercial fisher at the British fishing port of Grimsby who suggested that Victorian commercial fishers could be trained by British fishers. Studies of the Pacific Northwest in North America, the French Atlantic coast and Monterey Bay in California are also relevant to the Victorian colonial fishery: racial tensions that characterised the commercial fishery in California were present in colonial Victoria, although with some local differences; competition for inshore commercial fisheries between tourist and commercial fishing interests were present on the Gippsland Lakes, as they were at Arcachon on the French Atlantic coast and at Monterey Bay; and the rise of angling as a sporting

interest among the urban middle class in the Pacific Northwest and concomitant political activity had parallels in Victoria when angling and fish acclimatisation groups asserted their own environmental priorities in the management of the colonial fishery, particularly during the 1870s and 1880s.[8]

In Victoria, a significant influence on fishery politics and commercial fishery management during the colonial period was the Victorian Acclimatisation Society (VAS). Historian Pete Minard characterises the VAS as an international scientific movement that sought to introduce non-native animals and plants to new areas. During the colonial period in Victoria, it was concerned with social and environmental reform.[9] Minard's portrait of the

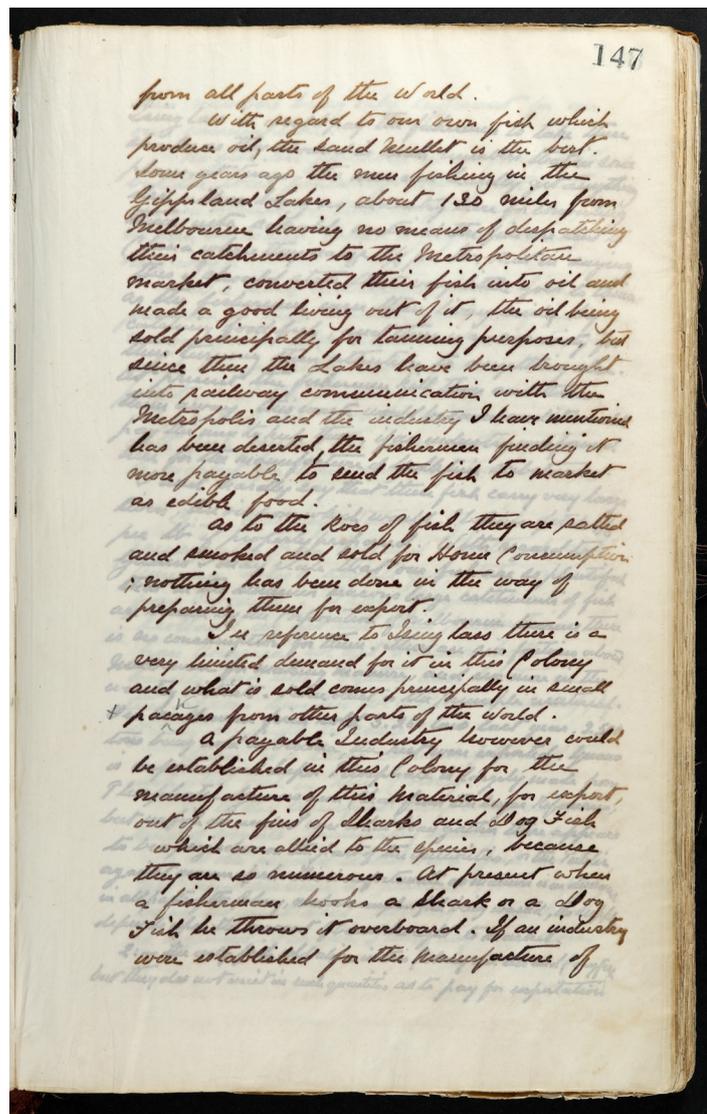


Figure 2: Extract from Charles Mandeville's report to the consul for Sweden and Norway on Victoria's fishery, 25 June 1886.[10]

acclimatisers reflects the circumstances in which they operated and establishes their contribution in the context of prevailing debates, both in the colony and overseas. The Letter Book demonstrates that the acclimatisers' environmental concerns were not unique in the colony, but were part of a much wider debate about the colonial fishery and issues related to commercial fishing.

The Letter Book

Containing more than the mundane work of administration, the Letter Book has unexpected reflections on preserving and managing the marine fishery, and other insights such as the place of fish in the colonial diet. A significant amount of correspondence in the Letter Book is from the inspectors to the commissioner for trade and customs, but there are also annual reports and other items of correspondence that were published in colonial newspapers. A letter or report could be written for a particular recipient or audience and a more general audience: for example, a letter addressed to the consul for Sweden and Norway or a fishery commissioner from New South Wales might also appear in several newspapers. Such public engagement made the inspectors participants in ongoing public debates about the uses and management of the colonial fishery.

A comparable, though very different, source to the Letter Book is another letter book and a set of pocketbooks that Angela Taylor used to write *A forester's log*, a study of forester John La Gerche. Taylor's history provides valuable insights for comparison of the work undertaken by government officers engaged with different types of environmental management.[11] Unlike La Gerche, whose responsibilities were confined to a specific region (Ballarat–Creswick), the fisheries inspectors, although based in Melbourne, were required to travel to distant fishing settlements along the coast and to inland regional centres. The inspectors' Letter Book, like La Gerche's letter book and pocketbooks, contains important reflections on aspects of the colonial exploitation of a natural resource. For the inspectors, the enforcement of fishery regulations relied, to a large extent, on a network of honorary and paid assistant fishery inspectors throughout the colony. Like La Gerche, they faced problems of under-resourcing that compounded the difficulties of meeting their responsibilities, and they employed different strategies to meet those demands. Mandeville, as will be discussed below, devoted considerable time and attention to problems associated with the dumping of unsold fish at the Melbourne Fish Market and to writing long, official letters about all aspects of the fishery. By contrast,

Anderson, who had the added responsibility of collecting information for the fisheries' annual reports after they were introduced in 1889, appeared to rely on his networks and personal contacts among the fishing community to keep him informed about matters requiring action.

The Letter Book is not a logbook. Therefore, it is difficult to discern the work patterns of the two inspectors. Further, as the duplicate letters are only of outward correspondence, there is little evidence of the relationship between the inspectors and their superiors, although both men were open in their criticisms of unworkable management practices. For example, Mandeville's frustration over ongoing difficulties with enforcing regulations on the Gippsland Lakes is evident in his letter to the commissioner of trade and customs in 1887:

The law with regard to the Gippsland Lakes is a farce, what do the men down there care for lines struck out on a chart in the Customs House or copies of Laws and notices pasted up with no one to see them carried out?[12]

Mandeville's solution was to close the Gippsland Lakes to netting between November, December and January. This would make it possible to regulate the transport of fish and help put a stop to wastage at the Melbourne Fish Market where, in one month, 50 tons of perch and bream, which were full of spawn, were buried at the tip because they could not be sold.[13]

Mandeville also turned his attention to what he believed was the ignorance of colonists about fish as part of their diets. He believed Victorians were predominantly a meat-eating community, with the consumption of fish being either related to religious beliefs or 'merely ... a matter of fashion', although he noted there was a market for imported preserved fish.[14] Part of the problem, in Mandeville's view, was that people did not know how to purchase fresh fish. It was also the case that customers could be deceived about the quality of fish sold by hawkers and stall holders. Colonists, he argued, were unfamiliar with buying fresh fish and 'townspeople who have small dealings in fish ... do not really know whether the fish are fit for human food'. 'The housewife', he explained, 'always looks at the gills' to check for freshness. However, while red was taken as a sign of freshness, it was easy to colour the gills with 'a little bullocks blood', and salmon, trout, pilchards and silver fish turned red when they were rotten.[15] Mandeville wanted town councils to employ fisheries inspectors, as distinct from health inspectors, to manage and inspect the sale of fish at markets.

The dumping of fish at the Melbourne Fish Market was a recurring complaint. The main cause was the lack of refrigeration; however, commercial fishers argued that fish sellers used dumping as a way of creating an artificial scarcity that was then used to inflate prices. Complaints about dumping appear throughout the Letter Book, both in terms of wasted product and economics, primarily the money commercial fishers paid on freight for fish that may be condemned. Taking just two instances from the first annual report in 1889: 65 tons of fish were condemned between December 1886 and February 1887, and 56 tons were condemned the following summer.[16] Other example of waste frequently referred to by the inspectors included the sale of underweight fish and lobsters with spawn attached. Lobsters were sold live but it was illegal to take them when they were spawning. A common practice was to strip their eggs prior to sale. Mandeville described this as a 'shameful practice' that was resulting in declining lobster numbers. Yet, it seems the practice was entrenched, for when Anderson wrote his first annual report in 1889, he mentioned that 28-dozen crayfish full of spawn had been seized at the market the previous August. While no further spawning lobsters were seized that year, Anderson believed this was only because the eggs had been removed prior to market. The only hope he saw on the horizon was that 'some of the Queenscliff fishermen favour a close season'.[17]

Although neither Mandeville nor Anderson discussed it directly, it is likely that many fishing families used older fishing methods they had brought with them to the colony during the gold rush. For example, when, following the railway, the first groups of mainly Scottish commercial fishers moved from Westernport Bay to the Gippsland Lakes in the late 1870s, they requested a telegraph line be established between Gippsland and Melbourne so they would know the demand for fish at the Melbourne Fish Market on any given day. This conservative approach was overwhelmed by the numbers of commercial fishers who entered the trade part-time or seasonally. Mandeville preferred the full-time fishing families who maintained the old ways. It was not a nostalgia for artisanal fishing; rather, it was an assumption that such fishers had a long-term investment in the health of the fishery. Following a visit to Phillip Island in 1885, Mandeville mentioned in his report how visitors to the island (by which he meant tourist anglers) had plenty of spare time to fish out the lakes. By comparison, full-time fishers, he reflected: 'Make their living entirely by fishing and therefore take more interest in the fish generally ... they are less wasteful of the fry than those in parts where fishing is only taken up occasionally'.[19]

August 28. Doge here seized at the beach
 which were full of spawn. September 20. fish
 only. in Oct. Nov. & Dec. although the
 principal part of the fish were female the
 cause to the market price of them was
 it was the opinion of the Inspector of old bank
 as well as myself that all the eggs had been
 brushed and washed out leaving not the
 slightest trace behind. In my letter of Sept 6
 I recommended a close season the fishermen
 have been too long but I still consider that
 there should be time allowed for the females
 to deposit their spawn and in support
 of that recommendation I am supported
 that some of the Inverclyde fishermen
 favor a close season

I have the honor to be
 Sir
 Your Obedient Servant
 James Anderson
 Inspector of Fisheries

Figure 3: Extract from James Anderson's report to the minister for trade and customs, 4 December 1888.[18]

Later that year, during a visit to Port Albert, Mandeville expanded on this theme of the importance of full-time commercial fishers to the productive use of the fishery. Clearly in a buoyant mood, he referred to Port Albert as the finest fishing ground in Victoria—if not all Australia—a place where flounder and whiting were so plentiful that all other fish were being thrown back in the water. He reserved his greatest praise for the fishing families he met:

the fishermen are a hard working well conducted set of men, who will I believe, bring up their children to their own calling, this being so, they take an interest in the fishing, and I am of the opinion that the majority wish to have law and regulations and wish that they be enforced. They are bringing up a fine race of people, in fact the fine physique of the young men and boys strike the visitor, they are with few exceptions excellent horsemen (?) and there are few places in the world where you could get a better brigade of 'Irregular [sic] horse'. For instance one man has thirteen children, nice sons all about six feet and one they say is six feet six ins [inches]. [20]

Mandeville's comments provide insight into the way Victorian commercial fishers were embedded in British maritime culture. His reference to 'a fine race of people' drew a connection, often made during this period, between the strength of the empire and British mariners, while the term 'irregular horse' referred to the practice the British used in India to provide support to the regular military. While the military potential of commercial fishers appears to have been largely a product of Mandeville's fertile imagination, the idea was nevertheless discussed in the colony, including a proposal that commercial fishers be formed into a special naval brigade.[21]

The exploitation of marine resources was a frequent topic on which Mandeville mused as part of his interest in the potential of the colonial fishing industry. Writing to the consul for Sweden and Norway, he mentioned, matter-of-factly, about the trade in shark fins with China and the potential to produce isinglass, a gelatine derived from fish bladders that had several uses including as part of brewing beer:

At present when a fisherman hooks a shark or a Dog Fish he throws it overboard. If an industry were established for the manufacture of isinglass, it would pay the fisherman to take these sharks as they abound in such numbers that in some places at times the men can hardly get anything else. There being no industry here for converting them into saleable material the fins are sent to China where they realize 2/6 per lb. But in saying this I should state that very little goes to China as the fishermen make their living easier by catching food fish and there is no necessity for their turning their attention to anything else.[22]

The potential for a trade in fish by-products, particularly those that were rarely discussed or considered in the colony, was attractive to Mandeville. It bothered him that Victorian colonists could not see the value in isinglass or scallops and that no-one was interested in trading in fish meal.[23] (His discussion about shark fins is notable for its omission of Chinese commercial fishers who had established a lucrative trade with Singapore and Hong Kong conducted by Chinese businesses who also exported traditionally dried fish and abalone.)[24]

The inspectors not only dealt with a wide range of topics, as demonstrated in the breadth of issues covered in the Letter Book, but also had considerable reach. As their letters and reports were often printed in colonial newspapers, they were significant participants in ongoing public debates about the exploitation of the fishery and its management.

The two inspectors in time and place

If the importance of fishery management in the colony was measured by the number of staff and resources allotted to it, then it would be difficult to find anything of less significance to the colonial government. Pete Minard has highlighted that the 1880s were a significant period when 'fisheries management matured as a science' in America and Europe.[25] But, in Victoria, fishery management stagnated. Between 1880 and the appointment of Charles Mandeville in 1884, the fisheries branch in the Department of Customs and Trade virtually ceased to exist. The position of chief inspector remained, but only for administrative purposes; in practice, honorary inspectors enforced fishery regulations. Some of these inspectors were members of local angling societies or fish acclimatisation societies; they might be the local police constable or a local magistrate or the holder of some other professional position in the community.[26] In the absence of a fishery inspector to meet with commercial fishers, the department focused on the enforcement of regulations at the expense of management. Assisting with this approach was a ready supply of anglers willing to be enforcers. The appointment of Charles Mandeville occurred at a time of considerable tension between commercial fishers and the department. To make up for years of neglect, both inspectors, once appointed, met regularly with commercial fishers. Perhaps the changes in fishery management that occurred over the period covered by the Letter Book were also a response by the colonial government to the way its practices were out of step with international trends.

The two inspectors brought different perspectives about the colonial fishery to the task of fishery management. During their tenure, both engaged frequently with the commercial fishing community. Their different perspectives and approaches to the job were a reflection of their different personalities and maritime backgrounds. Charles Mandeville, a former British naval officer, came to the position following a brief but controversial period as commandant of the Victorian Colonial Navy. Despite newspapers raising doubts about his capacity to make sound judgements or follow naval protocols, he was

appointed chief inspector of fisheries in December 1884, aged 37. In July 1887, following his sudden death, his obituary ignored the untidy details of his colonial naval career, focusing instead on his achievements as a fishery inspector, for which (and without any training) he had showed 'great aptitude in mastering both ichthyology and the details of sea fishing'.[27]

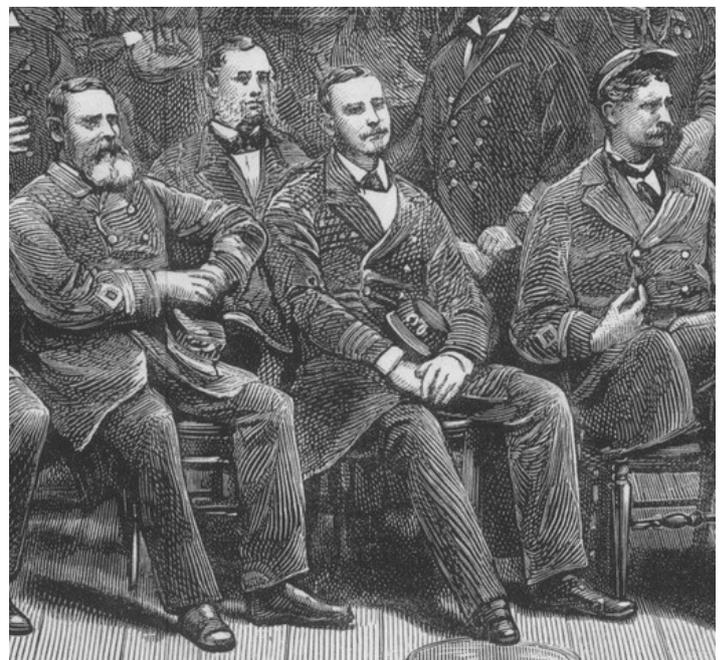


Figure 4: This engraving (top) was created from a photograph taken onboard the Cerberus, 18 February 1878. Captain Mandeville is in the centre of the three men in the front row (see detail bottom). Mandeville had been appointed commander of the Victorian Colonial Navy in 1877 and the Cerberus had been recently purchased by the Victorian Government. The original caption read: 'Our colonial defences—The Victorian ironclad "Cerberus"'. Courtesy of Friends of the Cerberus Inc.[28]

Mandeville regularly attended social functions at Government House and counted among his social connections Premier Graham Berry and FF Bailliere, a well-known Melbourne bookseller, publisher and bon vivant. Critics, of which there were many, voiced their disapproval of him in parliament and the *Argus*. For example, when his career in the Victorian Colonial Navy ended, there was speculation as to whether he would be appointed inspector of charities, but the *Argus* quipped that it would be easier to imagine him as ‘an official of nothing in particular’.[29] Certainly, his less than lustrous career in the Colonial Navy was not a recommendation; however, if his appointment as chief fishery inspector was a sinecure, it did not detract from the interest he took in, and the breadth of his reports on, the fishery.

Mandeville’s successor, Captain James Anderson, also came from a maritime background. He had arrived in the colony in 1853 at the age of 19 from the east coast of Scotland where he had been raised in the fishing village of Pittenweem, Fifeshire. Pittenweem relied on the herring trade in the North Sea. Other leading commercial fishing families in the colony, such as the Mentiplays, emigrated from the same village; another fishing family, the Carstairs, came from an adjacent village, Cellardyke. Working first as a boatman transporting goods up the Yarra River, Anderson later crewed on several government vessels until he was appointed master of the government steamer,

Lady Loch. [30] He became the chief fishery inspector in June 1888, a year after Mandeville died.

Mandeville’s death, the *Argus* suggested, presented an opportunity for ‘some radical changes’.[32] While the changes Anderson introduced were hardly radical, his approach to fishery management was more grounded in the daily practicalities of the commercial fish trade. Anderson’s workload increased to include the writing of annual reports containing an array of statistical measures, and he also undertook intercolonial visits and hosted visiting fishery experts. Such new responsibilities for the chief fishery inspector may have been designed to give the impression that Victoria’s fishery was ready to meet the new era that Federation would bring.

Sections of Anderson’s annual reports appeared in the daily press, but none appear to have been tabled in parliament. Each year statistics were collected and collated about the number of commercial fishers at each town or fishing station, the value of the equipment used, the fish species caught, the number of baskets sent to market, the economic turnover at different fish markets and the prosecutions for breaches of fishery regulations. Details of the number of baskets of fish sold at the Melbourne Fish Market were available in the daily newspapers, but there was no accounting of individual species or numbers of individual fish per basket.

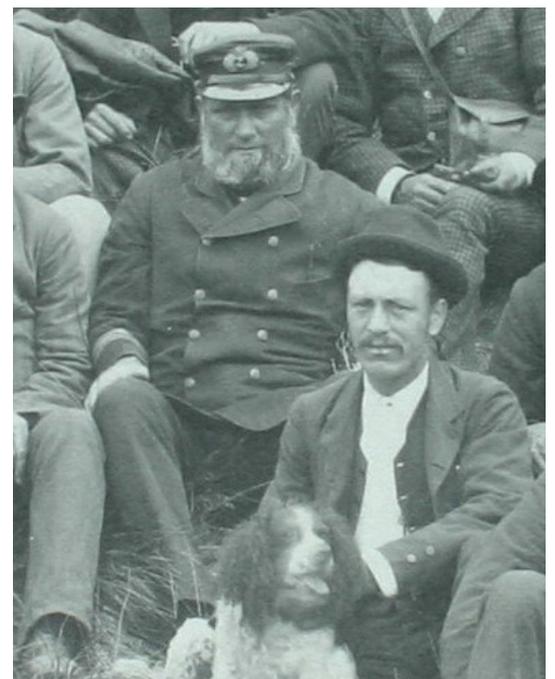


Figure 5: Expedition Group with Captain Anderson, some of the crew of government steamer *Lady Loch*, islanders and two dogs at King Island 1887. Full photograph (left) and detail with the captain in the middle (right). Taken during a Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria expedition to King Island. Source: Museums Victoria: <https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/1250709>. [31]

The 1888 Melbourne Centennial Exhibition, held during Anderson's first year as chief inspector, boasted an aquarium featuring numerous elements of the Victorian fishing industry: fish hatcheries, fishing boats, fishing nets, live fish and displays of fish models created by William Saville-Kent. Anderson's work and the fishery display at the exhibition was considered proof of the social progress being made in the meeting of science and commerce; yet, in reality, little scientific advancement had been made in understanding the colonial fishery.

Colonial fishery science had not contributed much to understanding about native fish species, being mainly confined to identifying where local fish species belonged in the wider context of European scientific identification and the naming of species, and promotion of the artificial propagation of oysters and fish. The most qualified in the area of fisheries was Professor Frederick McCoy, a man described by Brian Saunders as 'essentially a museum worker [who] appeared not to recognise the importance of field work, other than specimen collection, in zoology'. [33] In 1892, four years after the Centennial Exhibition, Anderson admitted in evidence to a government fishery inquiry that he knew nothing about the habits of fish in the colonial fishery, adding that neither did anyone else. [34] His certainty about this level of ignorance was not misplaced. In 1919, a royal commission into Victoria's fisheries reported on the lamentable absence of knowledge about the marine life in the ocean off the Victorian coast:

So little is known of the habits of any of our fishes that no one can say authoritatively what effect the operations of the fishermen are having upon the shoals, or that present methods are not a menace to the very existence of the species. [35]

In the intricate weft and warp that held commercial fishing community together, disputes and rivalries were endemic, and science had little relevance. Rather than tensions over scientific perspectives about the fishery, most disputes arose from matters concerning access to the different parts of the fishery or conflicts over loyalties. Anderson's friendship with those families he had known in Scotland often drew him into disputes. Among the broader fishing community, he was criticised for relying too much on the advice of 'friends and relatives'. Certainly, in circumstances in which politics rather than science had the greater influence over the management of the fishery, the established families were not likely to squander the chance of exercising political influence. Connections were very important. Commercial fishers such as William Carstairs had a long history of lobbying

colonial politicians, appearing at government fishery inquiries and being present when politicians visited the Gippsland Lakes. Carstairs was active in efforts to undermine a regulation banning commercial fishing on Lake Tyers (where fishing had been reserved for Aboriginal fishers and visiting tourists since 1878), a move that had the support of the local magistrate court as well as Anderson. Repeatedly breaking the law demonstrated that it was impossible to enforce, resulting in repeal of the ban in 1888. Anderson reported that 'the opening of Lake Tyers for netting has given general satisfaction all over the district'. [36] While the reality was more complex, Anderson's seemingly innocuous comment belied his personal support for those involved.

Personal networks established by the older generation of fishers began to be less effective as the size of the fishery expanded and attention turned to the establishment of a trawl fishery in Bass Strait. The colonial fishery was not yet industrial, but, recognising that it was heading in that direction, some commercial fishers combined into unions to protect their interests. At Port Albert, the South Gippsland Fishermen's Union was one of several unions formed to represent the interests of commercial fishers; others were established on the Gippsland Lakes and at Portland. Initially taking their lead from the emerging labour movement, they affiliated with the Trades Hall Council until the contradiction became apparent that some commercial fishers were business owners and some were workers, leading to the creation of fishery associations.

To the new generation of unionised commercial fishers, Anderson appeared to have the ear of fishing families who were of 'the same old school of conservatives [who] believe and act as their forefathers did'. [37] The older generation of fishers such as William Carstairs opposed unionisation—a change that marked the beginning of the end of his type of political and familial influence, and of the management of the fishery by one chief inspector and a legion of honorary assistant inspectors. As the size of the fishery grew, and as it became clear that established political connections served only the interest of a few, Anderson began to appear out of step with the changes taking place in the different fishing communities.

Anderson and the visiting experts

By the late 1880s, with the prospect of Victoria becoming a state in the new Australian Commonwealth, effective exploitation and regulation of the colony's fishery had become a matter of 'national importance'. The Victorian Government, seeking to reform the small, poorly funded

fisheries department that sat within the customs department, looked to New South Wales and Tasmania for inspiration. Anderson's annual reports provide clear indication of the fishery's changing direction during this time.

In 1887 and 1888, the Victorian Government employed two fishery experts, William Saville-Kent and Sir Thomas Brady, to advise on the fishery. Both produced reports that received a typical colonial response—overwhelming disinterest in the opinions of visiting experts. If nothing else, their influence can be seen in Anderson's extra workload. Saville-Kent's and Brady's visits did not go smoothly, as politics, personalities and social networks were never far from anything to do with the colonial fishery.

Saville-Kent's career as superintendent of Tasmanian fisheries had ended abruptly and acrimoniously in mid-1887 when the Tasmanian Government refused to renew his contract.[38] He subsequently approached each of the colonial governments for support in establishing an artificial oyster industry, and he approached the conservative Victorian upper house for an invitation to report on the colony's fishery. In the latter, he found support from Dr Frank Dobson, an enthusiastic member of the Victorian Acclimatisation Society, the Linnean Society and the Field Naturalists Society.[39] Individual politicians and some lobby groups, such as the VAS and the Fish Protection Society, which had been calling for a royal commission into the fishery, supported Saville-Kent's appointment, several politicians identifying oyster farming as one of the potential benefits that could arise from his report.[40] The Victorian Government employed him on a two-month contract to advise on oyster cultivation and to write a report on Victoria's fishery, but the results were probably of greater benefit to Saville-Kent's career than they were to the Victorian fishery.

By the time Saville-Kent was concluding his survey of the Victorian fishery in 1888, Sir Thomas Brady, an inspector of Irish fisheries, had arrived in Tasmania. Coincidentally, as was often the way with British imperial professional networks, Brady had been involved with Saville-Kent's original employment as the Tasmanian fisheries superintendent and had come to supervise the breeding of 600,000 salmon ova he had brought with him.[41] His duties in Tasmania completed, Brady visited Victoria where, with the ink barely dry on Saville-Kent's report, he was invited to provide his perspective on the Victorian fishery. Victorian politician LL Smith, who represented the Mornington electorate in the Legislative Assembly, a constituency containing many commercial fishing

families, had recommended Brady be invited to report on the fishery after Saville-Kent's visit. Smith possibly saw a political opportunity, as many commercial fishers had been angry about the way Saville-Kent had conducted himself during his visits to fisheries around the colony. Perhaps Smith also knew of the tension between Brady, an 'old-school' fishery manager, and Saville-Kent, the model of a young, ambitious, modern fishery scientist.[42]

Anderson's reports on Saville-Kent's work were unflattering, which was only to be expected. Saville-Kent foolishly claimed to have mediated in a dispute between commercial fishers on the Gippsland Lakes, although locally it was believed he had involved himself in a matter that was none of his business. As several of the commercial fishers were among those who regularly advised Anderson, Anderson took pleasure in reporting on the 'complete failure' of Saville-Kent's artificial oyster beds at Corner Inlet.[43] Nor did Anderson take kindly to Brady's report: he advised the collector of customs that he did not think 'the fishermen of the Colony who bring up their sons to follow their calling would care to avail themselves of any scientific knowledge respecting the fishing industry' from Sir Thomas.[44] Yet Brady made some recommendations that appealed to Anderson. For example, commenting on the longstanding debate regarding the size of mesh used in commercial fishing nets, Brady observed that 'to interfere too much with the fishing industry is decidedly objectionable', earning Anderson's praise.[45]

Anderson's overall dismissal of Saville-Kent's and Brady's reports was, perhaps, short-sighted, as the colonial government was looking to the future. It had identified the need to address major problems as they arose rather than allowing them to accumulate to the point where public outcry forced the calling of a select committee of inquiry or a royal commission. Anderson's new yearly reports contained a wealth of information. For example, the 1890 annual report, which contained data collected during 1889, identified the quantity and value of fish and crayfish delivered to the Melbourne and Ballarat fish markets. Evidence that changes were underway can be seen in the monthly reckoning, for the first time, of the numbers of baskets condemned as unfit for consumption, the numbers of baskets with underweight fish and the total weight of baskets delivered. Interestingly, the 1890 report also included information about the time of year when it was believed commercial fish species spawned and a listing of the legal weight of saleable fish. Anderson's reports on a series of unsuccessful trawling trials in Bass Strait was a further indicator of the new direction the government wanted the fishery to take.

The invitations to Saville-Kent and Brady to report on the colonial fishery were an expression of mounting urgency and the need for reform of fishery management and regulation, which, as in previous years, ultimately led to a fishery inquiry. The politics associated with the appointment of the visiting experts reflected longstanding divisions over the colonial fishery that had been seething since at least the late 1860s and with greater intensity throughout the 1880s.

Conclusion

The Letter Book reveals how the colonial fishery was perceived by those responsible for managing it. While neither of the inspectors had a scientific understanding of the fishery, they were participants in vibrant debates—for example, over the unsustainable exploitation of crayfish and the wasteful practices at the Melbourne Fish Market, where tons of unsold fish were dumped—during a period of significant change as the effective management of the fishery for commercial exploitation became a matter of urgency. The Letter Book also reveals the curious value to the colony of established commercial fishing families whose practices of restraint stood in contrast to the problems of excess caused by novice or seasonal commercial fishers.

The Letter Book is also a record of the steps taken towards the creation of an industrial fishery at a time when some families still practised older styles of commercial fishing; it thus records a way of life confronted with new thinking and new realities of earning a living as a fisher in the twentieth century. How and why nineteenth-century environmental debates and enthusiasm for the fishery as something worth protecting were silenced as Victoria became part of the Federation and exploitation of the fishery gathered momentum remains a mystery.

Beyond these aspects of management and economic change is the rich tapestry that is colonial engagement with marine and freshwater environments. The colonisers brought a diversity of understandings and theories to explain the colonial fishery landscape. Commercial fishers, fishery bureaucrats, honorary fishery inspectors, Chinese immigrant fishers, politicians, fish acclimatisers, scientists, visiting fishery experts, anglers, fish auctioneers, fish hawkers, fishing companies, consumers and many others understood the waterways of the colony differently and responded to it accordingly. The Letter Book provides significant insights into these myriad, rich, colonial imaginings.

Endnotes

- [1] *Act for the Protection of Fisheries of Victoria 1859; Act for the Regulation of the Oyster Fisheries in Victoria 1859; Act for the Preservation of Fish in the Lakes and Rivers of the Colony of Victoria 1859; Fisheries and Game Statute 1864; Fisheries Act 1873; The Fisheries Act Amendment Act 1878; Fisheries Act 1890.*
- [2] PROV, VPRS 16182/P0001 Outward Letter Book, Inspector of Fisheries and Game, Unit 1, 1885–1894. This is one of the rare archival records related to the Victorian colonial fishery.
- [3] AJ Harrison, *Savant of the Australian seas: William Saville-Kent (1845–1908)*, Australian Historical Association, Hobart, 1997, fn 33, 429.
- [4] Thank you to Charlie Farrugia, Senior Collection Advisor at Public Record Office Victoria, for clarifying what might have happened to the fishery records; see also EW Russell, *A matter of record: a history of Public Record Office Victoria*, Public Record Office Victoria, Melbourne, 2003, pp. 28–30.
- [5] There are several well-researched local histories on Victorian colonial fisheries such as chapters in Peter Synan, *Highways of water: how shipping on the lakes shaped Gippsland*, Landmark Press, Drouin, 1989; Bruce Bennett, *The fish markets of Melbourne*, Bruce Bennett, Hawthorn, 2002; Bruce Bennett, *The Hastings fishermen: and the history of fishing at Hastings on Western Port*, Bruce Bennett, Hawthorn, 2004; Joy Seevers, *Where pelicans are: a story of tragedy and tranquility*, Black Fin Books, Lakes Entrance, 2004; Stanley Joseph Evans, *Fins, scales, and sails: the history of fishing at Port Fairy 1845 to 1945*, Jim Crow Press, Daylesford, 2003; Allan Meirs, *Fisher folk of Fishermans Bend*, Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society, Melbourne, 2006; Neil Everitt, *They fished in wooden boats: a history of Port Franklin and the fishing families*, ECG Copy Centre, Warragul, 2011.
- [6] Garry J Kerr, *Craft and craftsmen of Australian fishing, 1870–1970: an illustrated oral history*, Mains'l Books, Portland, 1985; Timothy Lee and Jill Ellis, *Casting the net: an oral history project of the Lakes Entrance Family History Resource Centre*, The Centre, Lakes Entrance, 2002; End of An Era, *About the fishermen*, available at <<https://gippslandfishermen.wixsite.com/endofanera/gallery>>, accessed 2 December 2022; Tanya King and Dayne O'Meara, “‘The people have spoken’”: how cultural narratives politically trumped the best available science (BAS) in managing the Port Phillip Bay fishery in Australia’, *Maritime Studies*, vol. 18, 2019, pp. 17–19. Deakin University, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40152-018-0097-5>; Jodi Frawley, “‘Dancing to the billabong’s tune’”: oral history in the environmental histories of Murray–Darling Basin rivers’, in K Holmes and H Goodall (eds.), *Telling environmental histories*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2017, pp. 51–79.
- [7] An unsurpassed study on an aspect of the colonial fish trade is Alister Bowen, *Archaeology of the Chinese fishing industry in colonial Victoria*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 2012. See also Anna Clark, *The catch: the story of fishing in Australia*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 2017; Pete Minard, *All things harmless, useful and ornamental*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2019; David Harris, ‘Chinese fishing at Metung’, *Paynesville Maritime Museum Journal*, vol. 7, July 2018, pp. 20–25; David Harris, ‘A slow catastrophe? Fishing for sport and commerce in colonial Victoria’, in Nancy Cushing and Jodi Frawley (eds.), *Animals count: how population size matters in animal–human relations*, Routledge Environmental Humanities, New York, 2018.
- [8] See, for example, TD Smith, *Scaling fisheries: the science of measuring the effects of fishing, 1855–1955*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994; JE Taylor, *Making salmon: an environmental history of the northwest fisheries crisis*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1999. Two excellent histories with relevance to the current political battles in Victoria over commercial fishing, tourism and sport fishing are CY Chiang, *Shaping the shoreline: fisheries and tourism on the Monterey Coast*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2008; A Garner, *A shifting shore: locals, outsiders, and the transformation of a French fishing town, 1823–2000*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2005.
- [9] Minard, *All things harmless*.
- [10] PROV, VPRS 16182/P0001 Mandeville to the Consul for Sweden and Norway, 29 June 1886, p. 147.
- [11] Angela Taylor, *A forester’s log: the story of John La Gerche and the Ballarat–Creswick State Forest, 1882–1897*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998.
- [12] PROV, VPRS 16182/P0001 Report to the Commissioner for Trade and Customs, 14 April 1887.
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- [13] Ibid.
- [14] PROV, VPRS 16182/P0001 Mandeville to the Consul for Sweden and Norway, 29 June 1886.
- [15] PROV, VPRS 16182/P0001 Report to the Secretary of Trade and Customs, 9 July 1886. Mandeville had previously reported this on 16 March 1885.
- [16] PROV, VPRS 16182/P0001 Annual Report January 1889.
- [17] Ibid.
- [18] PROV, VPRS 16182/P0001, p. 280.
- [19] PROV, VPRS 16182/P0001 Mandeville to the Secretary for Trade and Customs, 23 May 1885.
- [20] PROV, VPRS 16182/P0001, 9 November 1885.
- [21] *Victorian Parliamentary Debates (VPD)*, 1887, vol. LVI, p. 1801.
- [22] PROV, VPRS 16182/P0001. pp. 147–148.
- [23] PROV, VPRS 16182/P0001 Mandeville to the Consul for Sweden and Norway, 29 June 1886, pp. 148–149, 153.
- [24] See Bowen, *Archaeology of the Chinese fishing*.
- [25] Minard, *All things harmless*, p. 127
- [26] Harris, 'A slow catastrophe?'
- [27] 'Death of Captain Mandeville', *Age*, 4 July 1887, p. 5.
- [28] Original image from: *The Graphic*, 13 April 1878, p. 372, available at <https://www.cerberus.com.au/cerberus_1878.html>, accessed 29 November 2022.
- [29] 'Captain Mandeville', *Kerang Times and Swan Hill Gazette*, 21 September 1883, p. 4.
- [30] 'The late Captain Anderson', *Williamstown Chronicle*, 8 October 1910, p. 3.
- [31] Original image available at <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-147417638/view>, accessed 29 November 2022.
- [32] *Argus*, 15 July 1887, column 2, p. 5.
- [33] Brian Saunders, *Discovery of Australia's fishes, a history of Australian ichthyology to 1930*, CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, 2012, pp. 152–155. Also see Minard, *All things harmless*, for a discussion of McCoy.
- [34] *Victorian Parliamentary Papers (VPP)*, 1892–93, vol. 1, 'Final report from the Select Committee upon the Fishing Industry of Victoria, together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence and Appendices', Captain James Anderson, 22 July 1892, Q 1172–3.
- [35] *VPP*, 1919, vol. 2, 'Report of the Royal Commission on Victorian Fisheries and Fisheries Industries', p. 6.
- [36] PROV, VPRS 16182/P0001 Report to the Minister for Trade and Customs, 20 August 1889, p. 345.
- [37] Chairman, Gippsland Lakes Fisherman's Union, 'The fishing industry', *Argus*, 22 July 1889, p. 9.
- [38] 'Tasmanian intelligence', *Tasmanian*, 28 May 1887 p. 25; 'Tasmania', *Argus*, 2 July 1887, p. 5.
- [39] *VPD*, 1887, vol. LVI, p.1803. Dobson was also related to Tasmanian politician Alfred Dobson who was Speaker of the Tasmanian Parliament at the time Saville-Kent was employed there. Elizabeth Barrow, 'Dobson, Frank Stanley (1835–1895)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, available at <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/dobson-frank-stanley-3418/text5175>>, published first in hardcopy 1972, accessed online 28 February 2020.
- [40] *VPD*, 1887, vol. LVI. pp. 1802–1803. Much has been written about Saville-Kent, his work and his personality. His visit to Victoria seems less successful than others have suggested. See Minard, *All things harmless*; Harrison, *Savant of the Australian seas*; Iain McCalman, *The reef: A passionate history*, Viking Press, Melbourne, 2013.
- [41] LEX, 'The superintendent and the inspector of fisheries', *Mercury*, 30 July 1887, p. 4; *VPD*, vol. LVII, 1888, p. 95.
- [42] Harrison, *Savant of the Australian seas*, p. 426.
- [43] PROV, VPRS 16182/P0001, 'Annual Report of the Inspector of Fisheries of Victoria for 1889', p. 379.
- [44] PROV, VPRS 16182/P0001, 18 September 1888, p. 258.
- [45] PROV, VPRS 16182/P0001, 11 September 1888, p. 252.

Forum articles

Reclaiming the slums

the Housing Commission of Victoria's plans for inner Melbourne

'Reclaiming the slums: the Housing Commission of Victoria's plans for inner Melbourne', *Provenance: the Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, issue no. 20, 2022. ISSN 1832-2522. Copyright © Dr Sebastian Gurciullo.

Dr Sebastian Gurciullo is a professional archivist, curator, editor and writer. He has worked at the National Archives of Australia, Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) and University of Melbourne Archives. He has been the editor of the Australian Society of Archivists journal *Archives and Manuscripts*, and PROV's journal *Provenance*. He is currently a member of the editorial board of *Archives and Manuscripts*, and the assistant editor of *Provenance*. He co-authored (with Simon Flagg) *Footprints: the journey of Lucy and Percy Pepper* (PROV and NAA, 2008) and co-curated an exhibition (with Tsari Anderson) based on this book (2011). He is a member and webmaster of the Section for Literary and Artist Archives at the International Congress on Archives (ICA). He is currently working as a collection manager at PROV and his current research interests are focused on unbuilt projects from Melbourne's urban and planning history.

Author email: sebastos@tpg.com.au

Abstract

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Housing Commission of Victoria embarked on building large apartment towers for people on relatively modest means. This came at the culmination of more than 30 years pursuing an ambitious housing program to remove substandard housing across the city. While the apartment towers, such as those built in Flemington at Debney Meadows Estate, were a major change in Melbourne's built form, the HCV was successful constructing these across many suburbs in the inner city in order to house thousands of people. It was when the HCV became involved in proposals for large-scale urban renewal, as was the case in the Carlton Comprehensive Redevelopment Area, that it met very stiff community opposition. This article explores these two examples, the Debney Meadows site and the Carlton redevelopment zone, through the abundant HCV archive, to show both the care and attention that the HCV brought to planning housing, but also its overreach in proposing to demolish half of a heritage suburb that was already undergoing spontaneous grassroots renewal.

Grand plans: a requiem

In the 1960s and 1970s, some of Victoria's largest postwar government agencies had plans to transform Melbourne, particularly the inner suburbs. Unlike recent decades, in which urban development is often driven in an ad hoc way by private sector interests, these government agencies had the power to both plan and build large-scale infrastructure, and they had big, ambitious and visionary ideas. However, for many of the people they would have impacted, these plans often seemed like externally imposed solutions emanating from autocratic bureaucracies that seemed to show little regard for the local communities they were supposed to serve. Community consultation as we understand it today was not something these agencies undertook in the 1960s. And so, the stage was set for a clash between local inner-city communities and the government agencies that were determined to 'renew' their suburbs.

As Guy Rundle recently observed in connection to the profound challenges wrought upon the City of Melbourne by the COVID-19 pandemic over the past two and a half years, the battles of the 1960s offer a thought-provoking contrast to the present. Back then, as Rundle reflects, the

progressive side of politics in Melbourne had a distinctly urban focus:

State Labor, and the Labor and progressive independents in the [Melbourne City] council, were energised by the inner-city residents' associations which had risen in opposition to a wild freeways plan and mass demolition by the Housing Commission. They set the stage for a process of rethinking what a city centre should be.[1]

Rundle's nostalgic observations, made from our neoliberal present in the midst of a major crisis, are directed at what he perceives as the lack of any coordinated or imaginative vision in urban policy that is adequate to present circumstances. He implies that, in the 1960s and 1970s, the oppositional campaigners had worthy government adversaries with grand, if questionable, plans. From the vantage point of the present—an era in which a neoliberal approach to urban planning and policy prevails—the relative autocracy of large government bureaucracies inspires a kind of nostalgia. Instead of being geared predominately to profiteering and instilling competitiveness, mid-twentieth-century urban planners sought to plan rationally and for the public good, if often with a heavy hand. In contrast, the current housing

affordability crisis is met with piecemeal remedies and policies that largely fail to address the supply side of the equation, while large-scale redevelopment sites lack the probity of a comprehensive and coordinated approach based on sound planning, deliberation and a recognisable sense of the public good.[2]

It is difficult for us to comprehend the extent of the power of postwar government bodies over local communities in the 1960s and the active role they took in shaping the suburbs where those communities lived and worked. These days, a great deal of what was once done by government bodies like the Housing Commission of Victoria (HCV) or the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) has been devolved, and much of urban policy is now carried out, in a less centralised and regulated way, by the private sector and under-resourced local government bodies.[3] Few people today would remember the big coordinated plans the HCV developed and attempted to implement in the 1960s and 1970s. Those of us who did not live through this era will be unfamiliar with the organisational culture and values that such an agency embodied, and the struggle that was required to force it to change its plans to better fit impacted communities.

The culture of the HCV was imbued with a quasi-evangelical belief in the efficacy of modernism. In this respect it was not unusual. There was widespread enthusiasm in post-World War II Australia ‘for modern forms of architecture, transport and design’. From this perspective, Melbourne’s inner city, with its industrial-era mix of manufacturing often abutting terrace housing, was seen as the urban legacy of a waning era, ‘a “slum” region of deteriorating housing, poverty, red light areas, homelessness and crime’.[4] Therefore, urban redevelopment along modernist principles was seen within the HCV and other agencies as both an economic and social necessity for inner-city Melbourne. However, by the time its visionary plans were ready, the demographics of this urban landscape had dramatically changed, setting the scene for a clash between the new inner-city communities and big government agencies involved in urban planning and infrastructure.[5] In this changing social environment, it was only relatively small-scale projects, those that did not entail suburb-wide demolitions of so-called ‘slum areas’, that succeeded in being implemented. I will illustrate this by contrasting two sites in inner Melbourne—the Debney Meadows Estate in Flemington and the Carlton Comprehensive Redevelopment Area—to evoke some of the benefits and drawbacks of centralised government intervention in housing and urban planning.



Figure 1: The Flemington high-rise flats and part of Debney Park during the lockdown of the buildings, July 2020. Author’s personal collection.

Debney Meadows Estate

The Housing Commission flats of Debney Meadows Estate still accommodate thousands of people. In July 2020 they rose once more to public prominence as an early focal point for Melbourne’s second major community outbreak of COVID-19. Around 3,000 people across nine apartment towers (including those in the nearby North Melbourne estate) were ordered to stay home. I watched with dismay as this human drama unfolded right in front of my own home, which is located directly adjacent to the Debney Estate.

Whether you love them or loathe them, these iconic inner-Melbourne towers loom large above the surrounding streetscapes and are replicated in suburbs across the inner city, from Prahran in the east to Williamstown in the west. The Housing Commission’s correspondence files document the development and building of these towers that have housed thousands of Melbourne families over the years, particularly immigrant communities and others on low incomes. The construction of high-rise towers was the culmination of an ambitious housing program that was initiated by the Victorian Government in 1938 in response to the identification of large swathes of substandard and slum housing in the inner suburbs at that time.

Though mainly composed of letters, the correspondence files also have hundreds of plans and drawings and other visual material related to the design, layout and internal fittings of each apartment tower and their surrounds.[6] The files about the Flemington flats go back to the late 1950s, when Debney Meadows Estate, as the site was

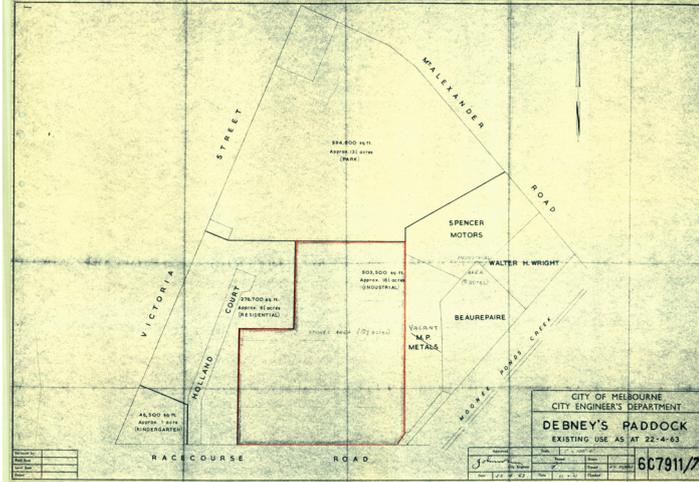


Figure 2: The site of the Housing Commission Victoria development in Debney's Paddock showing the existing land uses at 22 April 1963. PROV, VPRS 1808/P0, Unit 59, File D7 Debney Meadows Estate – Part 1, Drawing no. 6C7911/7.

officially called, was comprised of open space, WWII-era industrial buildings and a few run-down weatherboard houses.

The development of the site was not without controversy. Until 1957, what was known as Debney's Paddock was mostly owned by the City of Melbourne and had been earmarked for public parkland. The council revoked this long-standing intention and instead decided to renew industrial leases for a further six years, leading to fierce community and political opposition. The dispute, which lasted for more than five years, was resolved by EF Borrie, MMBW chief planner, who invoked powers over metropolitan planning to determine that most of the 15-hectare site would eventually become parkland (which is today known as Debneys Park), except for 2 hectares that would be set aside for public housing (which is today the site occupied by the HCV flats).[7]

Planning for the site commenced in the late 1950s. In 1958, Victorian Minister for Housing Horace Petty signalled to the secretary of the HCV that he supported the urgent construction of high-rise towers in inner-Melbourne HCV estates.[8] This meant that the HCV would develop the Flemington site as a 'mixed estate', a combination of medium walk-up buildings and high-rise towers. After resolution of the dispute about what proportion of the site would become parkland, no significant public opposition was raised in connection with the development of public housing.[9] This was the case even though the first of the HCV's 20-storey high-rise towers was built there and was a major departure for the area in terms of both height and density. As has



Figure 3: Looking east along Racecourse Road at the first of the Flemington high-rise flats completed in 1965, with the 'cloud' sculpture now on the roof, April 2021. Author's personal collection.

been observed by Peter Mills, the development did not directly threaten the housing stock of a gentrifying area, as occurred in the Carlton Comprehensive Redevelopment Area (which will be explored in the next section).[10] Unlike many of the other inner-suburban Housing Commission projects of the era, initially Debney Meadows Estate was a largely vacant site, with the exception of six timber homes in bad repair on the western side and some industrial use on the southern and eastern boundaries that had been erected hastily during WWII (see Figure 2). A large part of the construction site was on land donated by Melbourne City Council after the resolution of the dispute about the future of Debney's Paddock.

The first part of the housing project was the construction of the walk-up buildings (up to four storeys) along Victoria Street in Flemington. The first of four 20-storey towers, situated directly adjacent to Racecourse Road, was completed in 1965; three more almost identical towers were later added alongside (all within the red boundary in Figure 2, which shows the previous industrial land use on the site). This first tower comprised 180 flats (40 three-bedroom, 120 two-bedroom and 20 one-bedroom flats) and was intended to primarily house small- to medium-sized families. This first tower now features a recognisable 'cloud' sculpture on its roof, added in 1995 after renovations designed by ARM Architecture (referencing Oscar Niemeyer's Church of St Francis of Assisi in Brazil). [11] The first tower served as a kind of template, which became known as a Z-block, being replicated elsewhere with slight variations at other HCV estates.

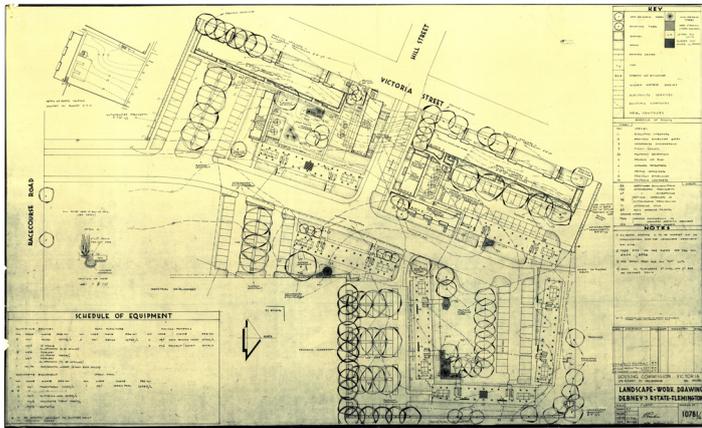


Figure 4: Details of the tree plantings and landscaping in the low-rise part of Debney's Estate. PROV, VPRS 1808/P0, Unit 60, File D7 Debney Meadows Estate – Part 3, Drawing no. 10781/L.

Each flat included a living room/dining area, kitchen, bathroom with private WC (toilet), entrance hall, telephone and TV outlets, as well as built-in cupboards for storage. Laundry facilities (washing and drying) and a central chute for rubbish disposal were located on each floor. The buildings had two lifts and a community room on the ground floor. Gas heaters were installed in the living room of each flat, while hot water heating was centralised and costed into rents. Car parking and children's playgrounds were at ground level in the surrounds of the building. Access to the apartments was via a walkway 'balcony' that allowed for better lighting and cross-ventilation as windows could be located on two opposite sides of each apartment. Excluding the frame and structure, the flats were largely made of prefabricated parts of precast concrete that were sealed and bolted into place.[12]

The HCV files contain a great deal of evidence of the careful planning, consultations and thought processes involved in building the flats, including the ways in which problems and issues were resolved. It is clear from this ample documentation that much thought was given to details such as floor layouts, tree plantings, the adjoining parkland (Debneys Park), playground equipment, and the provision of amenities and facilities for residents. Great attention was paid to landscaping, particularly tree plantings, which was overseen by the landscape architect Margaret Hendry, who, earlier in her career, had contributed to Canberra's landscape design.

The official opening (by Minister for Housing and Forests LHS Thompson MLC) of the first of the 20-storey towers at Debney Meadows took place on 23 June 1965. The official party visited flats on the twentieth floor, some of which had been furnished for display purposes by Melbourne department chain store Waltons, no doubt in the hope that



Figure 5: One side of the official opening brochure for Debney Meadows' first 20-storey flats in June 1965. PROV, VPRS 1808/P0, Unit 59, File D7 Debney Meadows Estate – Part 1, official opening brochure.

tenants would be enticed to replicate the fittings in their own flat.[13]

The official brochure boasted that the estate was 'Australia's largest and most modern complex of flats' and emphasised the ongoing collaboration with the City of Melbourne that would see 'extensive parkland improvements to the playing fields to the north of the estate'. These improvements would include 'the construction of a modern pavilion with changing, toilet and shower facilities, upgrading the sports ground, the construction of a large children's playground and an extensive tree planting programme'.[14] The brochure foreshadowed further collaborations between HCV and the City of Melbourne at other sites across the inner city.

Even prior to the completion of this first Z-block, the HCV had begun developing a typology of the kinds of standard configurations it wanted to build, including types that closely resembled the floorplans built at Debney Meadows (see type F, Figure 6). The typology clearly shows that the HCV wanted to create a variety of standard forms that it could roll out to large numbers of sites across the city in various combinations. The correspondence accompanying the typology shows that Debney Meadows was already figuring as a benchmark in the ongoing process of refining the typology, with the aim of increasing efficiency and predictability in rolling out the design simultaneously across multiple sites.[15] Although the reality was much less varied (the basic Z-block came to be replicated many times in most of the later HCV developments), the towers and flats were all solid,

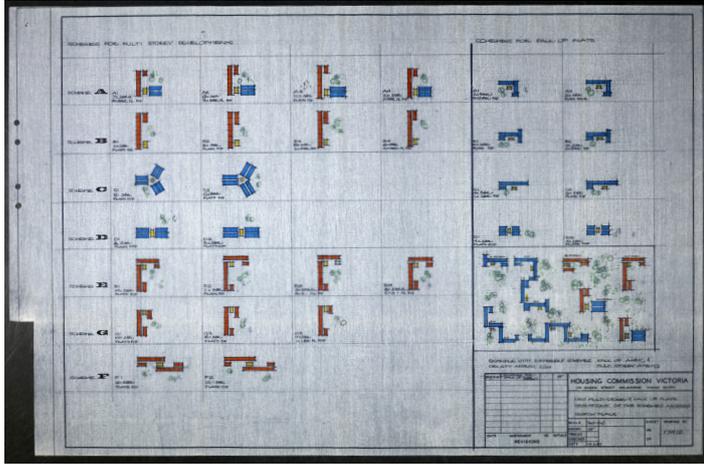


Figure 6: Schemes for multi-storey and walk-up developments, March 1963. PROV, VPRS 1808/P0, Unit 73, File F8 Flats (Multi-Storey), Drawing no. 17412.

affordable and generously sized with ample natural light, and they continue to stand to this day. Many recently built high-rise apartments produced by private developers offer much less in contrast.

Carlton Comprehensive Redevelopment Area

From 1938 to 1956, the HCV built around 32,000 units that were mostly single-family rental homes. Remarkable as this was as a program of social housing, the HCV considered it to be inadequate to the aim of substantially improving existing houses or replacing slum housing in the inner city. This was despite evidence that some of the areas that had once been considered problematic (such as Carlton) were spontaneously undergoing improvements and small-scale redevelopments.[16]

For instance, in 1951, the row of terrace houses at 100–108 Drummond Street was being converted by a private developer into a complex of 20 apartments with a mix of private dwellings with shared communal facilities (kitchen, bathrooms, laundries). Two memos written by HCV Secretary JH Davey, who visited the site with Housing Minister Ivan A Swinburne, note the condition of the properties and state concerns about the possible risks of relying on this kind of redevelopment. While these buildings were not slums as such, they were clearly in a poor state of repair and required significant improvements. The core buildings were structurally solid but features like verandahs, balconies and outbuildings were dilapidated and in need of repair. The concern was that many such buildings could easily become slums if they were divided into small apartments with higher



Figure 7: The street frontages (left) and backyards (right) of 100–108 Drummond Street, Carlton. Photographs documenting inspection on 8 August 1951 by HCV Secretary JH Davey and Housing Minister Ivan A Swinburne, PROV, VPRS 1811/P0, Unit 114, File S14 Slum Reclamation General File.

densities, particularly in the absence of any substantial investment in repair and improvements.[17]

From 1956 a policy shift took place that encouraged more home ownership and focused on ‘Slum Reclamation’ projects in which higher densities of up to 200 people per acre were touted, requiring the building of flats of different configurations, from walk-ups to high-rise elevator blocks. As Peter Mills has argued, in the early 1960s this renewed effort to tackle slum reclamation was merged with a broader aim to undertake widespread urban renewal in which high-rise towers would figure prominently to achieve the densities that would justify the cost of land acquisition. These factors combined to drive all HCV proposals from 1965 towards high-rise-only estates. Large swathes of inner Melbourne were to be remade and modernised at greater densities and would involve both public and private housing estates (see Figure 8 for an early rendering of this imagined new Melbourne urbanism).[18]

The new HCV housing was aimed at people who would be displaced by the clearance of slum areas and/or those on low incomes. A survey in 1960 estimated that at least 1,000 acres of ‘run-down’ housing existed in the metropolitan area; subsequently, the HCV replaced about 22 acres per year of the worst affected parts. Compulsory acquisitions were part of this approach in locations deemed to be ‘Reclamation Areas’. To make inner-city land purchases economically viable, high densities were required, even though, on the ground, much of the land would be open space of some kind (up to 80 per cent), including landscaped gardens, car parks, playgrounds and tree plantings.

The HCV’s focus on ‘Slum Reclamation’ was met with fierce community opposition in many of the large inner-city areas earmarked for demolition. Had the HCV’s initial vision been realised, whole inner-city neighbourhoods



Figure 8: Photomontage of a 31-acre redevelopment north of the Exhibition Gardens to accommodate 7,000 people, prepared by Melbourne architects Noel O'Connor and Carl Hammerschmidt, published in the Herald, 6 March 1958, found in MMBW news clippings scrapbook, PROV VPRS 8609/P21, Unit 318. Thanks to Peter Mills for bringing this image to my attention.

would have been demolished and rebuilt. Unlike Debney Meadows at Flemington, which was relatively modest in scale, did not involve large-scale demolition and went ahead without any resistance, so-called slum reclamation involved displacing whole residential neighbourhoods and so was highly controversial.

The proposed clearance areas were to be massive. In the case of the Carlton Comprehensive Development Area (Carlton CDA), which was the only one that was ever really fleshed out, more than half of Carlton and a large portion of North Carlton—an area extending north from Grattan Street to Fenwick Street, and from Swanston Street to Nicholson Street (see Figures 9 and 10)—would have been demolished and rebuilt through a combination of HCV and private development. The HCV plan, developed by consultant architects and town planners Leslie M Perrott & Partners, recommended a suburb-wide reconfiguration.

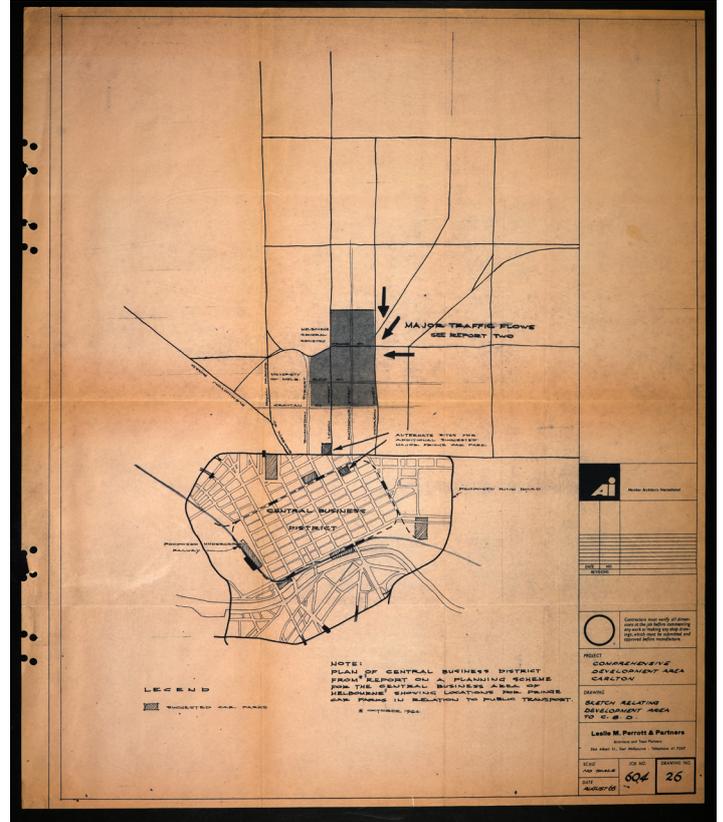


Figure 9: Plan showing the scale and position of the Comprehensive Development Area Carlton relative to the Melbourne CBD, prepared by Leslie M Perrott & Partners for Housing Commission Victoria, August 1965. PROV, VPRS 1808/P0, Unit 47, Item C38 Carlton Comprehensive, drawing no. 26.

Some streets would have been removed completely and the now iconic Lygon Street shopping and restaurant strip (which, even at the time, had a distinctly Italian and bohemian flavour) would have been entirely demolished. The shopping strip was characterised as 'unsuitable for contemporary traffic conditions and marketing techniques', and the shops themselves as:

inefficient of land use, disjointed, confusing and socially and aesthetically unsatisfactory ... Accordingly, while we are conscious of the character and significance to the old Carlton environment of the Lygon Street [shops] and other [commercial] groups we have no option but to plan to completely replace them with facilities that will complement the total development proposals.[19]

A multi-level complex of shops and carparks would replace the shopping strip, extending from Lygon to Rathdowne streets, and from Elgin to Grattan streets.[20] Other land uses would have included both public housing (multi-level and high-rise constructed by the HCV) and

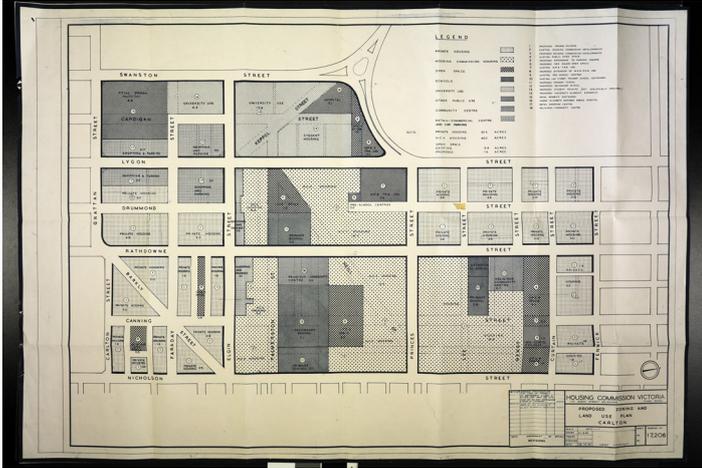


Figure 10: Plan showing proposed zoning and land use in the Carlton Comprehensive Development Area, Housing Commission Victoria, October 1966. North is to the left. PROV, VPRS 1808/P0, Unit 47, Item C38 Carlton Comprehensive, drawing no. 17206.

private estates created by interested developers. Land was also set aside for new government administration buildings, schools, open space, university and hospital expansions and other facilities.

As part of the overall planning effort, the consultants hired by the HCV prepared new road plans to deal with the increased traffic requirements for the area. Several schemes were proposed with different major road configurations—all of them envisaged major arterial road expansions and huge new interchanges. Though these were only schemes and options for consideration, each seemed to make provision for a new major east-west arterial/freeway along Princes Street. At the time, a major transportation plan was in development for the city that included an extensive and interlocking freeway network. It is, therefore, not surprising that road schemes produced for the HCV made provision for such a freeway. As documents in the transportation planning files clearly show, the Eastern Freeway was originally envisioned as continuing past Hoddle Street (where it currently terminates) through Clifton Hill, Collingwood, Carlton, Parkville and beyond.[21]

In the example shown in Figure 11, Road Proposals Scheme A, a six-lane freeway in a trench would have replaced Princes Street, extending west from the end of Alexandra Parade. Bridges would have been constructed at Nicholson, Canning and Rathdowne streets. Nicholson Street would have had ramps to reach the freeway trench below. At the intersection with Lygon Street, a three-level interchange with various flyover ramps would have been created adjacent to the Melbourne General Cemetery,

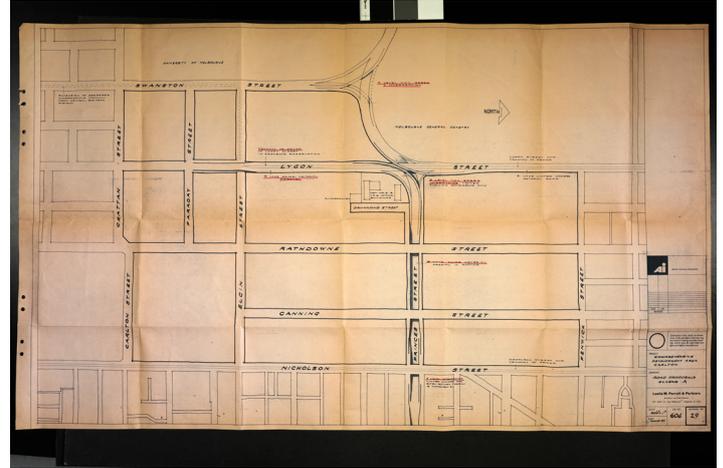


Figure 11: Plan showing Road Proposals Scheme A of the Comprehensive Development Area Carlton, prepared by Leslie M Perrott & Partners for Housing Commission Victoria, August 1965. PROV, VPRS 1808/P0, Unit 47, Item C38 Carlton Comprehensive, drawing no. 29.

and part of Lygon Street would have been converted to a six-lane arterial road. An intersection at Swanston Street would have seen a two-level interchange with flyover ramps created between Newman and Queen's colleges at the north end of the University of Melbourne and the southern boundary of the cemetery. As Leslie M Perrott stated in a paper presented to the Joint Urban Seminar held at the Australian National University in 1966, the approach to be taken on the Carlton CDA constituted a move away from simple slum reclamation to a more comprehensive urban renewal approach that would focus on 'the problems of obsolescence and congestion' that had generated 'the poorness of our urban environment'. [22]

While preparations commenced for building three additional high-rise towers at the Debney Estate in 1966, meetings were being held by the HCV and other stakeholder agencies in regard to the future of Carlton. [23] The MMBW, the City of Melbourne, the Town and Country Planning Board, the Hospitals and Charities Commission, the Department of Education and the Melbourne Transportation Committee (which itself was overseeing the development of major freeway plans for the city) were all represented in these meetings and consultations.

Following discussions with the HCV's technical committee, some of the representatives of these agencies began to express reservations about the scale of the proposal being put forward by Leslie M Perrott & Partners on behalf of the HCV. Most of these agencies had, for their own reasons, been willing participants in progressing HCV's other projects. In particular, the MMBW, although generally in

favour of major urban renewal plans for the inner city that were supplemental to the Metropolitan Planning Scheme, balked at the scale of the demolitions that were being put forward. Further, its representatives thought that the proposed urban densities of 200 people per acre in HCV developments and 100–120 per acre for private housing development were too high.

In a meeting with the technical committee addressing Report 4 of the consultants in September 1966, Chief Planner Alistair Hepburn and Senior Planning Officer Mr Harris of the MMBW asserted that there was no justification for accepting:

the proposition that the CDA/Carlton should be planned for total redevelopment rather than on the basis that whilst the majority of areas may at some time need to be demolished and redeveloped nevertheless there may be some section of sufficient quality that they should be permanently retained in their present or rehabilitated condition.[24]

The MMBW felt that other areas in inner Melbourne were in greater need of redevelopment but acknowledged that various factors (hospitals and university expansions and education needs in the area as well as traffic congestion and the 'desirability of revising the road network') combined to make Carlton a compelling case for a 'pilot study'. Interestingly, the MMBW's representatives defended the shopping strip, and urged that it be retained, 'taking into account the requirements of the present [migrant] population in the area'. Concern was also expressed that 'Carlton's present attraction' and 'the whole fabric of the site will be lost if the scheme is implemented in its present form'. In short, Hepburn said that while the MMBW 'was in favour of something being done in Carlton', it did not think 'such a "wholesale" scheme' was warranted—especially not one that involved the whole area being pulled down.[25]

The scale of the proposed reconfiguration of an iconic inner-city suburb such as Carlton is almost incomprehensible for Melburnians today. The ambition of the plan, which would have unfolded over 15–20 years, was to literally demolish and rebuild most of a suburb along 'modernist', planned lines. In May 1965, Frank J Foy, the general secretary of the Real Estate and Stock Institute of Victoria, produced a report that summarised numerous misgivings about the proposals that were already taking shape. Foy observed that, while:

this section of Carlton ... has some bad pockets, [it] is not by any means a slum area and although there are some properties which are run down and have not been the subject of re-development, very many others have been greatly improved and an amount of redevelopment has taken place by the erection of flats and other buildings.[26]

In other words, the planned urban renewal seemed to be missing the existing urban renewal that was already taking place spontaneously, making the area substantially less slum like. In addition, the shopping strip, although it admittedly contained some run-down properties, was also improving. If the shopping strip was subject to large-scale demolition 'in favour of one central area, it is likely that a number of shop-keepers will lose at least a substantial portion of the Goodwill they have built up over the years', Foy noted. He was concerned that the scale of the plans would have a detrimental impact on property values and would stifle much of the spontaneous regeneration and investment that was already taking place in the area, disrupting rather than engendering business activity. He recommended that the HCV's development activities be limited to the area bound by Lygon, Princes, Nicholson and Palmerston streets.

In the end, less than half of the area proposed by Foy was redeveloped by the HCV. It is difficult to determine why the HCV's initial plans for Carlton were so comprehensive: perhaps it was a habit of thinking that stretched back to the days when the HCV was first created to alleviate substandard housing and to prevent the emergence of true slums. As some of those voicing concerns at the time noted, Carlton was far from rife with slum dwellings. Perhaps the real driver, as alluded to in some of the observations of the MMBW representatives and others, was that there were other 'pressures' on the area that needed to be addressed: expansion of the university and hospital, more schools, and better traffic and road network management. Perhaps it was all of the above—a combination of interests and players—that made Carlton a compelling site for enacting a technocratic form of modernism: remaking a whole suburb in the name of progress.

Conclusion

The HCV correspondence files provide insight into the thinking and effort behind a number of consequential urban planning and infrastructure projects during a time of great social and demographic change in inner Melbourne. They document an ambitious housing program that had to make compromises with local residents and communities that rejected the characterisation of their homes as slums and resisted the demolition of their neighbourhoods. That compromise resulted in the distinctive landscape of today's inner city, where high-density towers for people on low incomes and limited means dwell inside some of Melbourne's most beautifully preserved heritage suburbs. The plans and activities of agencies such as the HCV allow us to glimpse a time in which strong government intervention on the supply side of housing was still taken seriously as a possibility. For all the overreach and drawbacks of some of the grander plans for urban redevelopment in areas like Carlton, revisiting the approach taken during this era reminds us that there may still be other and more effective ways to address housing affordability and urban planning than those that have prevailed in recent times in Melbourne.

Endnotes

- [1] Guy Rundle, 'Winter is here for Melbourne's CBD as city runs out of spirit and vision', *Crikey*, 14 April 2021, available at <<https://www.crikey.com.au/2021/04/14/melbourne-cbd-planning-covid/>>, accessed 5 May 2021.
- [2] Kate Shaw, 'Murky waters: the politics of Melbourne's waterfront regeneration projects', in K Ruming (ed.), *Urban regeneration in Australia: policies, processes and projects of contemporary urban change*, Routledge, New York, 2018, esp. p. 135. See also Alan March, *The democratic plan: analysis and diagnosis*, Ashgate, Burlington, 2012, p. 64.
- [3] Michael Buxton, 'When system becomes strategy: next steps in Victorian neoliberal planning', 8th State of Australian Cities National Conference, 28–30 November 2017, Adelaide; Brendan Gleeson & Nicholas Low, 'Revaluating planning: rolling back neo-liberalism in Australia', *Progress in Planning*, vol. 53, no. 2, 2000, pp. 83–164; Mark Beeson & Ann Firth, 'Neoliberalism as a political rationality: Australian public policy since the 1980s', *Journal of Sociology*, vol. 34, no. 3, 1998, pp. 215–231.
- [4] Renate Howe, David Nichols & Graeme Davison, *Trendyville: the battle for Australia's inner cities*, Monash University Publishing, Melbourne, 2014, p. 1.
- [5] These shifting demographics and the cultural clash between the emerging inner-city communities of Melbourne and Victoria's major infrastructure bodies in the 1960s and 1970s has been covered by the author elsewhere, see Sebastian Gurciullo, 'Deleting Freeways: community opposition to inner urban arterial roads in the 1970s', *Provenance: the Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, no. 18, 2020, available at <<https://prov.vic.gov.au/explore-collection/provenance-journal/provenance-2020/deleting-freeways>>, accessed 23 July 2021.
- [6] For instance, see PROV, VPRS 1808/P0, Unit 72, file F6 Flats (General), Unit 65, file E14 Equipment for Houses and Flats.
- [7] 'Board's chief planner wants Debney's for public recreation', *Age*, 4 February 1958, p. 3; 'Council row over Debney's', *Age*, 25 February 1958, p. 1; 'Housing and Parks only for Debney's Paddock', *Age*, 21 May 1963, p. 5.
- [8] HR Petty, Minister for Housing, to Secretary HCV, 21 July 1958 and 11 September 1958, PROV, VPRS 1808/P0, Unit 73, File F8 Flats Multi-Storey, Unit 73.
- This was brought to my attention by Peter Mills, *Refabricating the towers: the genesis of the Victorian Housing Commission's high-rise estates to 1969*, School of Philosophical, Historical and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, Monash University, 2020, p. 149.
- [9] The one exception seems to be the opposition voiced by the Federation of Co-operative Housing Societies, which claimed that the costs associated with the high-rise plan 'would be a ridiculous price and a scandalous waste of funds', see 'Protest move on Debney's flats', *Sun*, 23 May 1959, found in an MMBW news clipping scrapbook, PROV, VPRS 8609/P21 Historical Records Collection, Unit 318.
- [10] Mills, *Refabricating the towers*, p. 8.
- [11] Rory Hyde, 'ARM Architecture and the big public', *ArchitectureAU*, 7 November 2016, available at <<https://architectureau.com/articles/arm-architecture-and-the-big-public/>>, accessed 1 May 2022.
- [12] PROV, VPRS 1808/P0, Unit 58, File D7 Debney Meadows Estate Part 1.
- [13] PROV, VPRS 1811/P0, Unit 29, File D5 Debney Meadows.
- [14] PROV, VPRS 1808/P0, Unit 59, File D7 Debney Meadows Estate – Part 1, official opening brochure
- [15] PROV, VPRS 1808/P0, Unit 73, File F8 Flats (Multi-Storey).
- [16] PROV, VPRS 1808/P0, Unit 141, File P40 Publications, *The Housing Commission, Victoria*, 1965.
- [17] PROV, VPRS 1811/P0, Unit 114, File S14 Slum Reclamation General File, memos from JH Davey, Secretary, Housing Commission, dated 10 August 1951 and 22 February 1952.
- [18] Peter Mills, *Refabricating the towers*, chapters 4–7.
- [19] PROV, VPRS 1808/P0, Unit 47, File C38 Carlton Comprehensive Part 1, Report 2, 9 April 1965, p. 3.
- [20] PROV, VPRS 1808/P0, Unit 47, File C38 Carlton Comprehensive Part 1, Report 2, 9 April 1965, p. 6.
- [21] On the development of the freeway plans for this area see Gurciullo, 'Deleting freeways'.
- [22] LM Perrott, 'Carlton Redevelopment', in PN Troy (ed.), *Urban Redevelopment in Australia*, Papers presented to a Joint Urban Seminar held at the Australian National University, October and December 1966,

Research School of Social Sciences, Urban Research Unit, Australian National University, 1967, pp. 218–219. Perrott was invoking the findings of a report on ‘Urban redevelopment’ by a committee appointed by the Civic Trust in Great Britain.

- [23] PROV, VPRS 1808/P0: Unit 47, File C38 Carlton Comprehensive; Units 58 and 59, File D7 Debney Meadows Estate (Parts 1 and 2).
- [24] PROV, VPRS 1808/P0, Unit 47, File C38 Carlton Comprehensive, meeting minutes 15 September 1966.
- [25] PROV, VPRS 1808/P0, Unit 47, File C38 Carlton Comprehensive, meeting minutes 15 September 1966.
- [26] PROV, VPRS 1808/P0, Unit 47, File C38 Carlton Comprehensive Part 1, Frank J Foy to HCV, 21 May 1965.

Discovering an archive

'Discovering an archive', *Provenance: the Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, issue no. 20, 2022. ISSN 1832-2522. Copyright © Lucinda Horrocks.

Lucinda Horrocks is a producer, writer and co-founder of Wind & Sky Productions, a company specialising in documentary storytelling. Based in Ballarat in regional Victoria, she collaborates largely with her partner Jary Nemo on short documentaries and online exhibitions. Her award-winning projects about history, society and science are distributed online, have toured international festivals, are screened at dedicated screenings and events and are on permanent display at museums and cultural institutions.

In 2018 her company was commissioned under a Victorian Government Victoria Remembers Grant to make the film *Harbour Lights* about the Mission to Seafarers Victoria and the activities of the Ladies Harbour Lights Guild during WWI. Completed in 2020, the film won best documentary in the US 2021 Directors Circle Festival of Shorts. *Harbour Lights* is freely available to watch, show and share via the Wind & Sky Productions website.

Contact details for Lucinda: enquire@windsky.com.au | www.windsky.com.au

Abstract

In turn of the twentieth-century Melbourne, a pioneering network of women at the Mission to Seafarers called the Ladies Harbour Lights Guild (LHLG) supported sailors who risked their lives at sea. The deeds of this remarkable group of women were almost forgotten until 2007, when a set of dusty old boxes were discovered stored under the mission's theatre in the 90-year-old state heritage-listed building at 717 Flinders Street. The boxes held an archive filled with documents and photographs related to the activities of the LHLG from its foundation in 1906 to its demise in the 1960s. In recent years, a dedicated team of volunteers and staff at the mission has been gradually digitising, identifying and cataloguing the guild records. In 2018 and 2019 I had the opportunity to observe the work of the archive team while producing a short documentary about the LHLG. This article answers the question: what happens next after an archive of rare significance is discovered? Here I document some observations of the mission, its ongoing work, and the remarkable building and its connection to a hundred-year-old story of shipping, sea work and a community of volunteer women, as revealed through the slow and fascinating work of exploring an archive.



Figure 1: Mission to Seafarers Victoria today. Still from the film *Harbour Lights*, 2020. Courtesy of Wind & Sky Productions.

Treasure trove[1]

In 2007, the Mission to Seafarers, that curious-looking building with the dome and the bell tower at the Docklands end of Flinders Street, discovered 10,000 rare archival documents stored beneath a stage. The 90-year-

old state heritage-listed building had needed a spring clean, Andrea Fleming, the Mission to Seafarers chief executive, told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Broken computers, desks and old books were piled into a skip, and then 'right down at the back of the stage in the main hall were all of these dusty old boxes, we pulled those dusty old boxes out—and they revealed an archive'. [2]

It is easy to understand why the story made the news. The discovery of long-forgotten records hidden under a stage has irresistible appeal. It feels like the beginning of an adventure, the type where a historical mystery inevitably leads to a treasure hunt with maybe a few murders plus a bit of romance along the way. But what happens next when a real life archive is discovered?

I had a chance to find out in 2018 and 2019 when the mission invited my film company to make a documentary about the building's connection to World War I (WWI) and a group of women called the Ladies Harbour Lights Guild (LHLG). The topic of the documentary related to the

discoveries a committed group of volunteers and staff were making as they worked through the mission archive.

The spoiler (which will be no surprise to anyone who has ever actually worked with archives) is that 'what happens next' is complex, time-consuming and unromantic. But there is a kind of adventure to it as well. In its own way, an archive really can lead to treasure.

What is the Mission to Seafarers?

The Mission to Seafarers is an Anglican-aligned organisation with international links that has provided welfare to seafarers since the early days of Melbourne's ports.[3] The Melbourne mission is situated on the busy south-western edge of the CBD where multi-lane Wurundjeri Way snakes traffic onto the West Gate Freeway. When it first opened in 1917 its address, 'Australian Wharf' (it is now more prosaically addressed as 717 Flinders Street), made it part of Melbourne's commercial shipping precinct on the Yarra River.[4] Today it gets a little lost amid the high-rise developments, cafes, direct fashion outlets, five-star hotels and convention centre, but it was once a prominent landmark in a lively working area of ships, wharves, cargoes, pubs, markets and industry. Thousands of annual visiting sailors would have recognised it as one of many missions around the world offering services, religion and respite to seamen.[5]

In the nineteenth century, concerns over the poverty sailors often lived in, the exploitation they were vulnerable to and worries over their spiritual welfare led to the emergence of a number of philanthropic and religious organisations offering welfare and religious services to sailors.[6] The first such mission in Victoria was a floating church—a ship hulk anchored in Hobson's Bay—in 1857. [7] Shore-based missions were subsequently built at Port Melbourne and Williamstown. Like the floating church, these were founded close to where the ships anchored. Known as 'institutes' or 'rests', they provided libraries, a place to send and pick up mail (hugely important in the days before telephone and internet), letter writing facilities, and alcohol-free games and entertainment as well as religious services.[8] The missions were open to sailors of all nationalities and faiths, the 'men and boys landing in a city where they have no friends and no one seems to care for them'.[9]

The pattern of missions was always to be as close as possible to where seafarers were. When late nineteenth-century water engineering works brought commercial shipping up the Yarra River right into Melbourne's heart, there was a need for welfare services in the city docks.

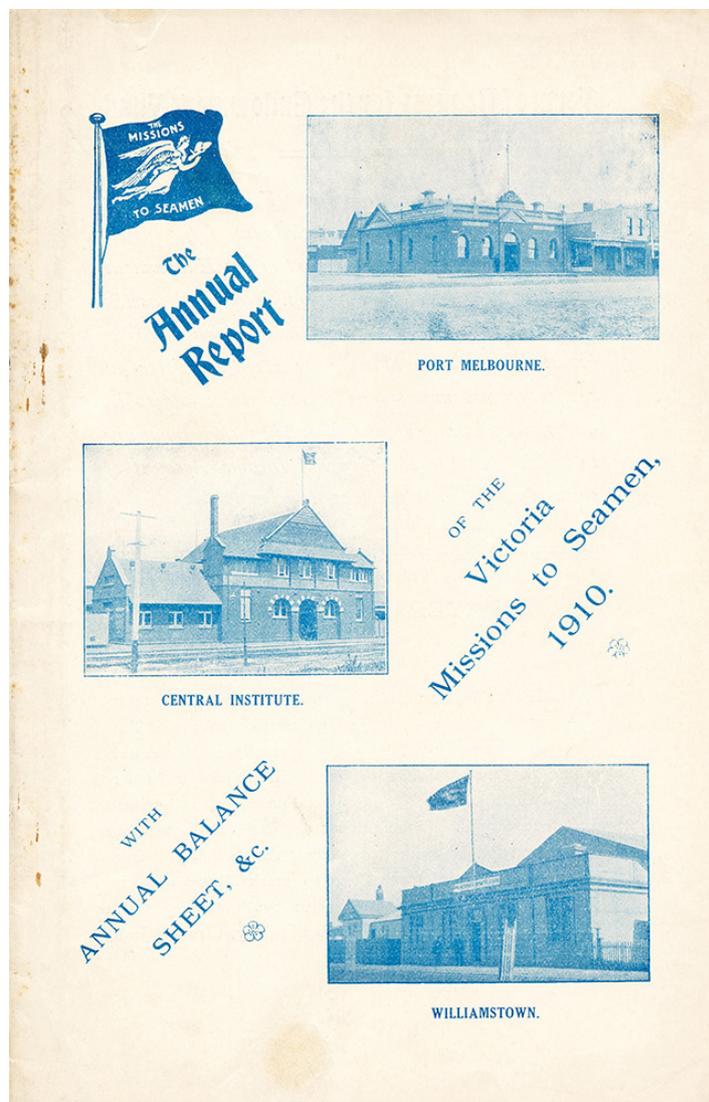


Figure 2: Cover of the Missions to Seamen 1910 Annual Report with photographs of the Port Melbourne, Melbourne (Siddley Street) and Williamstown institutes. Courtesy of the Mission to Seafarers Victoria.

This is why the Melbourne mission was built in this location.[10]

Though Melbourne remains heavily reliant on commercial shipping, mechanisation and the advent of container ships means seafarers no longer come up the Yarra. Nowadays ships dock further to the city's west. But the mission has kept operating from its CBD location. According to the volunteers who understand the history, 717 Flinders Street is globally unique. To date, they have not found any other mission that has kept performing its original function for such a long time in the same custom-built facility. 'We think it's the oldest one in the world', Gordon



Figure 3: Seafarers, c. 1910. Courtesy of the Mission to Seafarers Victoria.

Macmillan, then chair of the heritage committee, told me in 2019.[11]

A glimpse inside

Designed by Melbourne architect Walter Butler, the building is considered a significant exemplar of early twentieth-century Arts and Crafts and Spanish Mission style.[12] Passersby look curiously at the interesting façade, the unusual dome and the Art Nouveau lettering on the doorway arch. Signs say 'open to the public' but people rarely come inside. Those who do find a mosaic-decorated, maritime-themed foyer that opens on the left to a courtyard garden and cloister, at the end of which is a small, non-denominational chapel. Sometimes, if the chapel doors are open, you can go in. Stained-glass windows fill the space with a dreamy blue light; a wooden pulpit in the shape of a ship poop deck juts backwards towards the pews. Seafaring motifs are everywhere.

Turn right at the foyer and you enter a spacious room with a bar in a corner and a stage at the end (yes, the very stage beneath which the archives were discovered).



Figure 4: Melbourne Central Institute, c. 1920. PROV, VPRS 8357/P0001/63, Photograph [108], Postcard of the Victorian Missions to Seamen, Melbourne Victoria, undated.

This main club room, designed for a different era of large ships crews and many visiting sailors, can be busy, but often is sparsely filled with quiet groups of ship workers here to pay a visit to the city or talk to their families via video link. Occasionally they play snooker or other games. Sometimes someone will pick up a guitar by the stage and strum a song from their home country. Photos of nineteenth-century sailors adorn the walls.

Beyond the club room is a round room with a domed roof inspired by the dimensions of Rome's Pantheon.[13] It was originally a gymnasium but is now used for functions and exhibitions.

Though over one hundred years old and showing wear and tear, the building has a surprising peacefulness to it. It is a comfortable space. Historian Chris McConville describes it as 'a gem of a building'. 'It's hard to think of other buildings that were built for working class people', he says, 'designed with this sort of human scale and a sense of how people would use the building, and how they would feel comfortable in it.'[14]

Victorian State Architect Jill Garner agrees. To her, Walter Butler wound into the building's narrative a unique offer to seafarers of 'somewhere that's spiritual, that gives them a place to remove themselves from the street outside'. It tries to 'give them a home in a city that's possibly not their home'.[15]

Ship workers might only be here for hours while the containers are unloaded and loaded, instead of weeks at a time as was once the case, but seafaring remains lonely and dangerous work and the respite offered by the mission can still mean a lot. Today, as they did one hundred years ago, seafarers struggle with exploitation, poor pay and bad health. A small core staff, a chaplain

and a network of mission volunteers called ‘Flying Angels’ ensure that the mission is open every day, including weekends and public holidays. The Flying Angels drive community buses and collect seafarers from the vast docks of Melbourne’s west. Seafarers who visit the mission do so to get connected with medical services, to get access to fresh food shops or just to do some sightseeing. The Flying Angels and the mission’s resident chaplain also visit ships to provide outreach.

One day, while filming, we went up to the heights of the KPMG Tower that overlooks the mission. Seen from above, the community buses were in constant motion—little white rectangles weaving in and out of city traffic, bringing seafarers back and forth.

The archive

The dusty boxes stored under the stage contained well-preserved minute books, letters books, visitor logs, ship visit logs, scrapbooks of newspaper clippings, annual reports and newsletters of the organisation dating back to the 1850s. The archive is particularly rich in material and photographs from the early 1900s when the Melbourne mission building (or, more accurately, buildings) was built.

After 2007, once the archive was rediscovered, a dedicated community of staff and volunteers began sifting through the documents. A heritage significance assessment was commissioned that helped consolidate a planned program of discovery and publicity.[16] Working on site in a room that, as the mission’s then-curator and lead archivist Jay Miller told us in 2019, was too cold in winter and too hot in summer,[17] their task was to store the collection in a suitable setting, and then to sequentially work through the objects, cataloguing, labelling, digitising, undertaking additional research, and uploading images and object descriptions onto the public facing Victorian Collections online portal.[18]

The work hasn’t finished yet. Ten thousand items are a lot to get through. It is slow work, but also fascinating. Each document pored over unlocks deeper connections to the place. Every annual report or newsletter provides clues or clarification.

Manchester-based geographer Uma Kothari was a visiting professor at the University of Melbourne in 2017. She observed the diligence and excitement of the archive work at close hand. A spontaneous decision to see what went on inside the mission building led to her joining the activity, sitting alongside the volunteers working through the archives—an experience made more meaningful because it happened in situ surrounded by the ‘busy

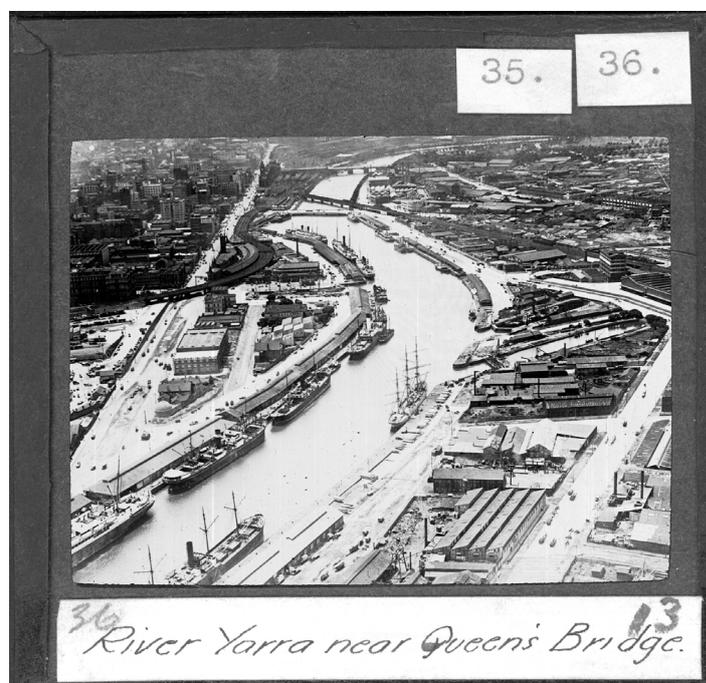


Figure 5: Aerial photograph of the Yarra River, c. 1920. The Mission to Seafarers is in the middle lower left of the image. PROV, VPRS 8360, Numbered Lantern Slides, 35 River Yarra Near Queens Bridge, Undated.

comings and goings of seafarers, staff and visitors’. She experienced a ‘profoundly personal entanglement with the place and its rich history’, and she could see others around her were similarly engrossed and rewarded.[19]

Like Kothari, we observed something special in the journey of the archival explorers as they worked in the setting of the living mission, unpacking the complicated history of the building and its people. Much of it was already known, but the archives helped fill in the details of sketchy timelines, or confirm events through the cross-checking of reports. And some of the story was a complete surprise. As Kothari found, it was tempting to jump in and join the research adventure.

One mystery the archives helped to untangle was the confusing presence of apparently two mission buildings in the one place. The mission opened its first ‘Central Institute on Australian Wharf’ in 1906.[20] This building is today known as the Siddeley Street Mission, and, surprisingly, it was occupied only briefly. The annual reports in the archive help to explain why. The mission’s landlord, the Melbourne Harbour Trust, a powerful government organisation in charge of Melbourne’s ports, needed the site for future wharf extensions.[21] Forced to relocate, the mission built a replacement institute practically next door. This opened in 1917 and is the Flinders Street building in existence today.[22] Both

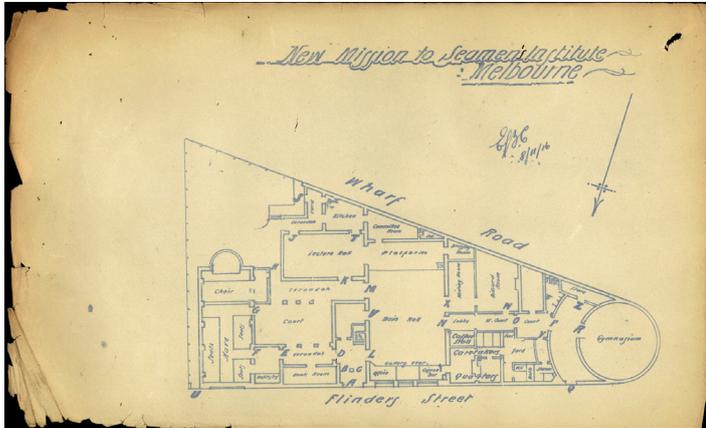


Figure 6: Plan of new buildings for the Mission to Seamen, 1916. PROV, VPRS 7882/P0001, 2071, Public Building Files, Seamen's Institute Australian Wharf Flinders Street Extension.

buildings were designed by Walter Butler.[23] Butler proposed an ambitious Arts & Crafts and Spanish Mission-inspired complex, incorporating a domed gymnasium, recreation hall, chapel, garden and chaplain's residence, for the second iteration.[24]

The two mission buildings and their construction dates provide a useful cross-reference for volunteer research teams in dating archival photographs, as images with the Siddeley Street façade or interior can only have been taken between 1906 and 1917. However, the fact that both buildings were designed by the same architect and called the 'Central Institute on Australian Wharf' makes for bewildering research. Understanding the Siddeley Street – Flinders Street chronology seems a kind of initiation for those learning to tackle the archives. One day, after inquiring about an image, I was told by a bemused volunteer researcher—'oh, but that's Siddeley Street!', as if they were relieved that it all finally made sense.

Forgotten women

One of the archive's particular strengths is a subcollection of photographs, letters, reports and minutes of a women's auxiliary group called the Ladies Harbour Lights Guild (often referred to in the archive as the 'Ladies' or the 'Guild').

The LHLG was part of the fabric of Melbourne's Mission to Seafarers up to the 1960s and a feature of other such missions in Australia and globally.[25] Women of the guild undertook volunteer domestic chores, put on teas, did fundraising, knitted beanies, held social events, wrote letters to sailors and partnered visiting seafarers at mission-run dances.



Figure 7: Cricket match, c. 1910. Courtesy of the Mission to Seafarers Victoria.

The mission recognised and appreciated the LHLG's importance. A pair of large stained-glass windows in the chapel to a Miss Godfrey and a Miss Tracy honour them as guild founders. Miss Godfrey's window depicts 'Faith', Miss Tracy's 'Hope'. The windows were erected in the 1930s after their deaths.[26] Yet, though the extended mission community remembers the last decades of the LHLG fondly and well, the foundational period of the guild and the contributions of misses Godfrey and Tracy stretched further back than oral histories could recall. Very little was known of them.

The archives, however, provide a detailed picture of the origins of the LHLG. From the early 1900s at least up to the 1930s,[27] quirky updates in the newsletter *Jottings from Our Log*, and chaplain's reports and guild secretary updates in the annual reports, mention the guild constantly and effusively. Early twentieth-century photographs in the archive contain fascinating images of guild women in long white dresses and broad brimmed hats at outdoor events, playing cricket with seafarers, laughing at picnics: women who stare right at the camera and smile.

It turns out the women of the guild played a major role in the foundation of 717 Flinders Street. This realisation was a powerful surprise for the research staff and volunteers who cared deeply that the early work of the guild had been almost completely forgotten. The community made it a goal to tell their story.[28]

By the time we filmmakers came along, many identities had been sorted out and their personalities were very present. Miss Ethel Godfrey, the one in the chapel stained-glass window, was a well-connected Melbourne socialite who founded the LHLG and led it for 25 years as honorary



Figure 8: Ladies Harbour Lights Guild, c. 1920. Miss Godfrey is fourth from right in the centre middle row with a child on her lap. Miss Tracy is on Miss Godfrey's right on the middle row, third from the left. Courtesy of the Mission to Seafarers Victoria.

secretary.[29] She was often pointed out to me and I was soon able to pick out her strong face in the photos. She was an object of fascination to many of us, not least because she was a mature, independent and obviously competent woman whose achievements had apparently been lost to time. The daughter of an elite squatter family, Miss Godfrey was a trained singer who mingled in Melbourne's highest social circles. She also, surprisingly, became an articled law clerk in 1895, when she was 34 years old.[30] 'So many strings to her bow', sighed Jay with what sounded like admiration mixed with awe when we interviewed her for the film.[31]

Miss Godfrey formed the LHLG in 1906, aged 45. This was at the beginning of the Siddeley Street era, after a newly arrived chaplain, Alfred Gurney-Goldsmith, had invited women to become more involved in the mission.[32] Miss Alice Sibthorpe Tracy, the woman in the other stained-glass window, joined shortly after and would serve for many years as honorary treasurer. 'I love Miss Tracy', a researcher told me: 'She has such an interesting face!'

Miss Godfrey, Miss Tracy and the LHLG were formidable networkers and fundraisers who built up a system of regional and suburban branches of women subscribers. Jay Miller described the membership as a 'who's who of Melbourne'.[33] Guild patrons were the wives of governors-general, governors and mayors.[34] High society members paid a large subscription fee of a guinea and hosted seamen's picnics and social fundraising events at their leafy mansions.[35] 'Working' or 'half-crown' members paid a more modest subscription and volunteered time at the mission.

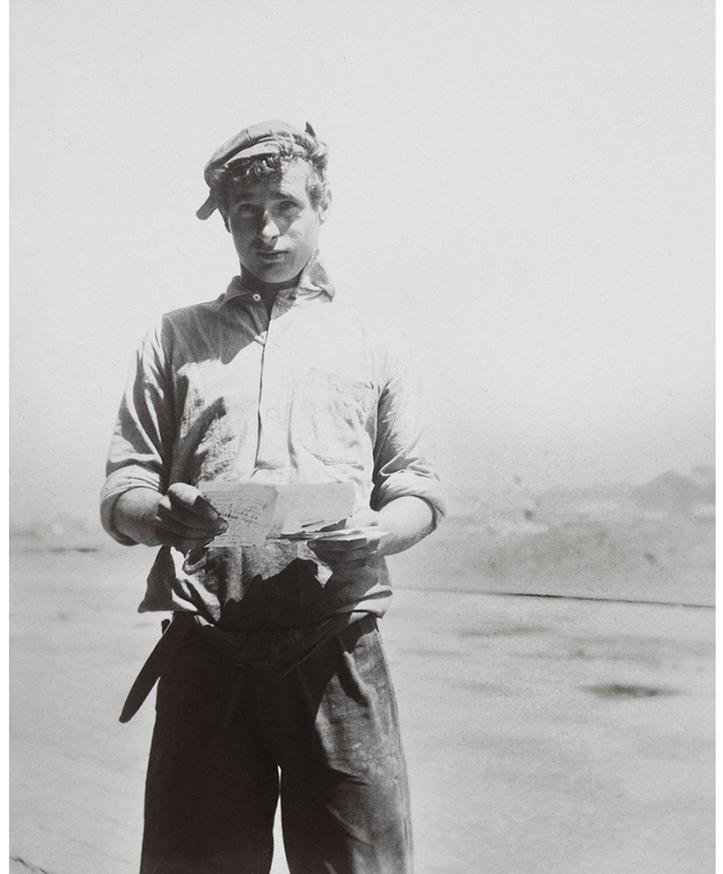


Figure 9: Seafarer holding a letter or flyer, c. 1910. Courtesy of the Mission to Seafarers Victoria.

Subscribers included Lady Fraser, after whose Toorak mansion 'Norla' the Mission's gymnasium was named; philanthropist Helen Macpherson Smith; the Armytages of Como House Toorak; Lady Syme, wife of the owner of the Age; and the Forge sisters of the Forges department store family empire.

Although 'guinea' members may not have set foot in the mission, 'working' members certainly did. They joined subgroups such as the Flower Guild (for decorating), Dusters Guild (for cleaning) and Literature Department (cataloguing and parcelling literature). Volunteers cooked in the mission canteen, served at the Post Office, prepared events and performed music.

Entertainment was a major responsibility of the LHLG, the managing of which was Miss Godfrey's specialty. [36] Sailor entertainments took the form of wholesome pro-temperance 'tea and rock-cakes' socials at which visiting seamen would sing shanties or play drafts.[37] Other events included Sunday evening concerts and regular public holiday picnics and outings, as depicted in those



Figure 10: Stained-glass window to the honour of Miss Ethel Augusta Godfrey, 1935. Photograph by Justine Phillip 2013. Courtesy of the Mission to Seafarers Victoria.

evocative photographs. In 1910, the guild held 313 social events for 18,035 visiting seafarers to the Central Institute.[38]

Encouraged by marketing campaigns devised by Miss Tracy, donations flowed in.[39] These came in the form of gifts of furniture, books, musical instruments and multitudes of hand knitted ‘woollies’ for sailors, but there was also a lot of cash. ‘The Institute couldn’t have kept out of debt but for the “Ladies Harbor Lights’ Guild”’, Miss Godfrey stated with a smile in an article written in 1910. [40]

By 1911, the LHLG counted 300 honorary (‘guinea’) members and 577 working (‘half-crown’) members and had established 21 branches in Victoria, including in four regional towns.[41] Over the next decade this would grow to 51 branches and 10 school branches in Victoria.[42] The subscriber and branches model would be imitated across Australia and in missions around the world.[43]

For historian Kate Darian-Smith, one of the most interesting things about the LHLG’s activity is the people-to-people exchanges that took place between the middle-class Melbourne women of the guild and the seafaring

men from different nations and different backgrounds to whom they offered hospitality. Although ‘this is not something that would be picked up in the minutes of the guild or in any of their archive’, Darian-Smith observed, the women of the guild ‘perhaps stepped outside of their own immediate experience to connect with a range of different cultures, different moments’.[44] ‘They wanted Melbourne to be a hospitable place for strangers’, she remarked, ‘and I think that is a really nice way to think about what was happening in the building.’

Names in the chapel

When WWI broke out in 1914, the LHLG, like many other women’s charitable groups at the time,[45] sprang into patriotic work, making comfort packs for the Red Cross and sending Christmas billy cans to the Australians at Gallipoli.[46] At around this time, the second Central Institute needed to be built. The guild took on the responsibility to raise the money for the chapel. By 1916, they had raised a whopping £1,000, enough for the entire chapel’s build.[47]

In light of the horrific experiences of WWI, the mission decided to dedicate the chapel as a war memorial in honour of the mercantile marine. A call was sent out for donations for memorial items for the chapel, which today has a moving collection of memorial gifts and plaques donated by people directly impacted by the war. Architect Walter Butler lost his only son. A guild member known only as 'Mrs R' died working as a stewardess on a passenger boat sunk by a mine.[48] Dedications included stained-glass windows donated by the Forge sisters in memory of their dead brother, and a memorial font for two child apprentices who died with nine other crew when their ship was torpedoed by a U-boat.[49] The second Central Institute and its chapel was formally opened in September 1917, in an unusually quiet dockland precinct in the midst of a general waterfront workers strike.

Guild activity continued after the war, but, by the 1930s, with the deaths of Miss Godfrey and Miss Tracy, the heyday of its founding membership had passed. The guild would continue, evolving to different circumstances under new leadership, up to the 1960s.

Given the work the LHLG put into that dreamy blue chapel, the stained-glass window memorials to Miss Godfrey and Miss Tracy make complete sense. And, although it took some time to remember them, their deeds stowed away in those dusty boxes under the stage, the work of connecting and piecing together their stories was profoundly satisfying for the mission community.

In my encounter with the mission and its archive, I discovered that the 'what comes next' of exploring an archive of rare significance is anticlimactic. It involves hours of slow, diligent, unsung, mostly boring work. Yet, at the same time, the work is also absorbing and rewarding for those who undertake it. The previously obscure names of people from the past, the ones looking out at you in old photographs, the ones who appear on plaques on walls, become deeply significant. An archive is indeed an adventure that can lead to hidden treasure, unearthing long-forgotten stories of Melbourne's rivers and ports, of hardworking, under-appreciated seafarers and of formidably competent women.

Archives are complicated. The Mission to Seafarers archive is enmeshed in the place it was found, the organisation it belongs to and the work of the people around it. The past is woven into the fabric of the present. Everything waves and shifts, alive to the changing headwinds of an evolving city. When it comes to unravelling the threads of stories here, it feels very much like we are still wound up in them.

Endnotes

- [1] Thank you to the community of the Mission to Seafarers Victoria for their generosity and their help with this project. Particular and special thanks go to Jay Miller, Gordon Macmillan, Sue Dight, Geraldine Brault, Cinda Manins and Nigel Porteous. The writing of this article was supported by a Victorian Government Sustaining Creative Workers grant.
- [2] Liz Hobday, 'Treasure trove of seafaring history goes on display in Melbourne', *ABC News*, 28 July 2016, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-07-28/treasure-trove-of-seafaring-history-goes-on-display-in-melbourne/7670724>>.
- [3] There are 230 mission sites around the world and four in Victoria (Melbourne, Portland, Geelong and Hastings).
- [4] As far as I can ascertain, 'Australian Wharf' was the area of the Yarra River on the north-western bank approximately opposite where Polly Woodside is today. Flinders Street and Siddeley Street adjoin this area of the Yarra bank.
- [5] The mission's annual report for 1917 recorded 13,617 attendances to the Central Institute that year. This was fewer than usual because of the effects of the war. In comparison, 22,612 sailors had attended the institute in 1913. See *Victoria Missions to Seamen, Annual Report, 1913*, p. 8, and *Annual Report, 1917*, p. 7, Mission to Seafarers Victoria Heritage Collection.
- [6] *The 'Flying Angel' Story: The History of the Mission to Seafarers*, Mission to Seafarers, London, c. 2015.
- [7] The ship was called *The Emily*.
- [8] History sourced from WHC Darvall, *Victorian Seamen's Mission and Rest origin and epitomised history of matters of interest in connection herewith*, c. 1906, and *Victoria Missions to Seamen, Annual Reports 1910–1917*, both from the Mission to Seafarers Heritage Collection. See also 'Seamen's floating church in Hobson's Bay', *Argus*, 2 July 1857, p. 5.
- [9] RJ Alcock & WHC Darvall, 'Victoria Missions to Seamen', letters to the editor, *Age*, 1 June 1906, p. 8.
- [10] An original 1897 petition by the captains of 21 ships to the Victorian Seamen's Mission for a facility to be built nearer the Yarra River wharves is part of the Mission to Seafarers Victoria Heritage Collection.
- [11] Gordon Macmillan, personal communication, 2019.
- [12] Victorian Heritage Database, Missions to Seamen, Heritage Council of Victoria, available at <<https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/756>>, accessed 23 October 2022.
- [13] 'Gymnasium of novel design to be lighted from dome', *Herald*, 23 October 1919, p. 13.
- [14] Chris McConville, interviewed by Lucinda Horrocks, Wind & Sky Productions, Melbourne, 10 June 2019.
- [15] Jill Garner, interviewed by Lucinda Horrocks, Wind & Sky Productions, Melbourne, 4 August 2019.
- [16] Catherine McLay, 'Supporting seafarers: Mission to Seafarers Victoria', *Signals*, no. 110, March–May 2015, pp. 57–61.
- [17] Since our visit in 2019, the Melbourne Mission to Seafarers has undergone a renovation and the archives room has subsequently been moved to a different location, though I understand the collection is still largely worked on on-site.
- [18] Mission to Seafarers Victoria, available at <<https://victoriancollections.net.au/organisations/mission-to-seafarers-victoria>>, accessed 23 October 2022.
- [19] Uma Kothari, 'Seafarers, the mission and the archive: affective, embodied and sensory traces of sea-mobilities in Melbourne, Australia', *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 72, 2021, p. 74.
- [20] *Victoria Missions to Seamen, Annual Report, 1907*, p. 5, Mission to Seafarers Victoria Heritage Collection.
- [21] *Victoria Missions to Seamen, Annual Report, 1911*, p. 3, Mission to Seafarers Victoria Heritage Collection.
- [22] For reasons unknown, the Siddeley Street Institute building was not demolished. The building's profile can be seen in photographs up to at least 1959.
- [23] The 1906 (Siddeley Street) design by Walter Butler is held at the State Library of Victoria but the 1917 Flinders Street building design has not been preserved, although a floor plan is held at PROV (VPRS 7882/P0001, 2071).
- [24] The gymnasium would have to wait until 1920 to be opened. See *Victoria Missions to Seamen, Annual Report, 1918*, p. 8, and *Jottings from Our Log*, no. 58, Easter, 1920, Mission to Seafarers Victoria Heritage Collection.
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- [25] Some jurisdictions called them ‘Lightkeepers’. See AAW, ‘Miss Godfrey of Melbourne’, *Church and the Sailor*, July 1930, p. 85, Mission to Seafarers Heritage Collection.
- [26] The text of Miss Tracy’s window dedication says it was erected in 1933 after her death in 1932. Miss Godfrey’s dedication states it was erected in the year of Miss Godfrey’s death. Miss Godfrey died in July 1935. See Victoria Missions to Seamen, Annual Report, 1935, p. 11, Mission to Seafarers Victoria Heritage Collection.
- [27] These years (1900s–1930s) were as far as our research frame extended.
- [28] Jay Miller, personal correspondence, 2019.
- [29] Geraldine Brault & Jay Miller, ‘The soprano and the seafarers: a woman with a mission 1906–1930’, *Genealogist*, vol. 17, no. 2, June 2020, pp. 19–21.
- [30] *Ibid.*
- [31] Jay Miller, interviewed by Lucinda Horrocks, Wind & Sky Productions, Ballarat, 29 June 2019.
- [32] AAW, ‘Miss Godfrey of Melbourne’.
- [33] Jay Miller, interviewed by Lucinda Horrocks.
- [34] Information in these paragraphs is drawn from a sample of Annual Reports, 1906–1920, in the Mission to Seafarers Heritage Collection.
- [35] Events reported in 1906–1920 include picnics for seafarers, fundraising fetes and drawing room meetings held at mansions in Toorak, St Kilda, Armadale, Brighton, Malvern, Hawthorn, East Melbourne, Kew and Canterbury, as well as zoo and river excursions.
- [36] Miss Godfrey, who was the daughter of the prominent businessman and pastoralist FR Godfrey, studied singing in Europe in the 1870s and 1880s. She was more a society than a professional singer but sang at public events in various town halls and churches around Melbourne in the 1890s–1900s and is credited as the organiser of other entertainments. In 1896 composer Albert Mallinson wrote a song for her, and in 1903–1904 she performed a public concert series with the pianist Alice Spowers. See Brault & Miller, ‘The soprano and the seafarers’: ‘A grand concert’, *Healesville and Yarra Glen Guardian*, 14 November 1903, p. 5; ‘Garden party at the zoo’, *Punch* (Melbourne), 31 October 1901, p. 21; ‘Chamber concerts’, *Argus*, 2 April 1904, p. 15; ‘Miss Ethel Godfrey’, *Table Talk* (Melbourne), 19 March 1903, p. 15.
- [37] ‘Miss Godfrey—Harbour Lights Guild—Wayfaring Men’, *Weekly Times*, 3 September 1910, p. 10.
- [38] Victoria Missions to Seamen, Annual Report, 1910, p. 7, Mission to Seafarers Victoria Heritage Collection.
- [39] Reports often mention Miss Tracy’s fundraising schemes. See, for example, the collecting card initiative in 1916, *Jottings from Our Log*, no. 44, Michealmas, 1916, Mission to Seafarers Heritage Collection.
- [40] ‘Miss Godfrey—Harbour Lights Guild—Wayfaring Men’.
- [41] Victoria Missions to Seamen, Annual Report, 1911, pp. 11–12, Mission to Seafarers Victoria Heritage Collection.
- [42] Victoria Missions to Seamen, Annual Report, 1924, p. 8, Mission to Seafarers Victoria Heritage Collection.
- [43] AAW, ‘Miss Godfrey of Melbourne’.
- [44] Kate Darian-Smith, interviewed by Lucinda Horrocks, Wind & Sky Productions, Melbourne, 10 June 2019.
- [45] According to Kate Darian-Smith, women’s organised charities became extensive by 1915. This included such groups as the Red Cross and the Women’s Comfort Fund as well as local women’s fundraising groups. Kate Darian-Smith, interviewed by Lucinda Horrocks.
- [46] *Jottings from Our Log*, no. 40, Michaelmas, 1915, Mission to Seafarers Victoria Heritage Collection.
- [47] *Jottings from Our Log*, no. 47, Midwinter, 1917, Mission to Seafarers Victoria Heritage Collection.
- [48] Jay Miller, personal correspondence, 2019.
- [49] *Jottings from Our Log*, no. 47.
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The story of Mrs H, case number 35

a victim of smallpox or fear?

'The story of Mrs H, case number 35: a victim of smallpox or fear?'; *Provenance: the Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, issue no. 20, 2022. ISSN 1832-2522. Copyright © Meaghan McKee

Meaghan McKee has worked as a librarian and archivist for many years. Her main interest is in Gippsland history. She inherited her investigative nature from her mother who was a keen genealogist. She holds postgraduate qualifications in Library and Information Studies as well as Heritage and Museum Studies. She recently provided research assistant on a book project on logging and cartage history in Gippsland.

Author email: immckeeconsulting@gmail.com

Abstract

Sarah Hanks, a newly married 21-year-old woman, died in Walhalla, Victoria, during the 1868–1869 smallpox outbreak. In 2019, a lonely gravesite discovered in the vicinity of Walhalla was claimed as Sarah's resting place. Doubts about the likelihood of the grave belonging to Sarah inspired the research for this article. While the investigation confirmed such doubts, it was Sarah's diagnosis and treatment, as well as scholarly debates around the impact of smallpox versus chickenpox and the blame assigned to the Chinese population for the spread of diseases such as smallpox, that proved most interesting. It appears that the effect of chickenpox on the colonial Australian population has been misrepresented. By looking at a wide range of sources, such as local recollections from the time, news articles, public records and the chief medical officer's correspondence, a clearer picture emerges of the fear and notoriety that came with a smallpox diagnosis in colonial Victoria.

The historic town of Walhalla is a popular and picturesque destination for day trippers and campers. Located in a steep valley in the Great Dividing Range south-east of Melbourne, Walhalla, today, is an echo of its former self, its glory days having occurred in the late 1800s when the region enjoyed a short but prosperous gold rush. Just north of the town is a steep walking trail that leads to a unique cricket ground situated on a flattened hilltop. A lonely grave rests beside the trail with a sign that provides the visitor with a short history of an outbreak of smallpox in Victoria from 1868 to 1869. The sign states, 'this is believed to be the grave of Sarah Hanks who died in Walhalla on March 23rd, 1869', followed by an account of poor Sarah's short time in Walhalla and a gruesome picture of a smallpox victim. The words 'this is believed' draws the reader to speculate. Believed by whom? Most people will pass by the grave with a brief thought for Sarah, then move on. But who was Sarah Hanks before her life ended so tragically? The sign describes a town that reacted—as was typical of the time—with fear at the news of Sarah's illness. The townspeople were in a frenzy over the possibility that smallpox had come to Walhalla and the hysteria surrounding Sarah's illness created misinformation that continues to this day.

The bushland on the steep hill beneath the cricket ground was burnt out during the February 2019 fires. In the subsequent clean-up, a volunteer claimed to have found the grave of Sarah Hanks in the form of a pile of rocks in a cleared area.[1] Within a few months, the possible grave

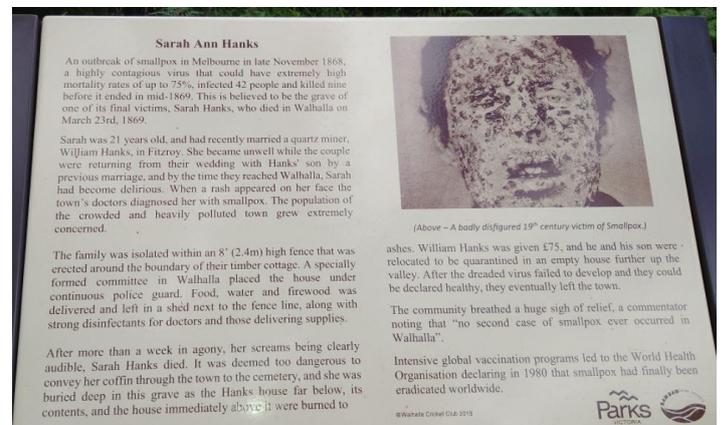


Figure 1: Sarah Hanks information sign, Walhalla Cricket Club (2018). Photograph: M McKee personal collection.

was tidied up, a sign erected, a religious ceremony held and media articles written about the rediscovery of the grave of Sarah Hanks, the lady who brought smallpox to Walhalla.[2]

Conversation followed among local history experts about the likelihood of the site being Sarah's grave; doubts were expressed because the location did not meet with some of the recollections passed down from the era. The uncertainty of the grave site prompted the research that led to this article. Many of the recent publications that mention the story of Sarah Hanks use the same two primary sources: a book by long-time Walhalla resident Henry Tisdall (1836–1905), and a news article published

in 1869 by a local correspondent who wrote for the *Gippsland Times*.^[3] Both describe the newly married Sarah arriving at Walhalla with her husband William and a son from William's previous marriage. Within a few days Sarah became unwell and was diagnosed as having smallpox by the local doctor, Henry Hadden.

According to Tisdall and the correspondent, the heroic and decisive actions by the doctor and local authorities saved the town from an outbreak of smallpox. However, both narratives deviate in parts from what is in the public record, leading one to question whether Sarah had smallpox. Such doubts align with broader disagreements among Melbourne's medical fraternity over other smallpox cases in Melbourne in 1868–1869. Indeed, the prevailing opinion of historians is that, throughout Australian colonial history, many smallpox cases were likely to have been chickenpox. Sarah may have simply been a victim of bad timing. The people of Walhalla had suffered the devastation of several contagions in the town and were no doubt nervous of any new disease entering the settlement. Whatever affliction Sarah Hanks had, it is certain she experienced a painful death in an unfamiliar place while suffering the indignity of being the talk of the town in her final days. Is it fair, then, that today Sarah is once again known as the woman who brought smallpox to Walhalla?

Sarah Hanks was one of 43 people who were reported to have contracted smallpox in Melbourne between 1868 and 1869.^[4] Chief Medical Officer William McRea was able to determine that the outbreak originated from a ship's crewman who arrived in Melbourne in November 1868.^[5] Chief Mate William Webster brought the disease ashore from the barque *Avondale* that anchored in Hobsons Bay on 22 November 1868. The *Avondale* had departed the port of Foo Chow Foo on 2 September with a brief stopover at the Indonesian port of Anyar. Captained by William Ogilvie, the ship carried Ogilvie's wife and family and a small crew, as well as chests and half chests of tea.^[6] Foo Chow Foo was the anglicised version of the port of Fuzhou in the Fujian province of China.^[7]

Webster was admitted to the Melbourne General Hospital, located on the corner of Swanston and Lonsdale streets, two days after the *Avonlea* arrived. According to McRea, medical experts at the hospital were not convinced that Webster was suffering from smallpox as his symptoms did not fit with those usually associated with the virus.^[8] Webster was treated at the hospital and then moved to a residence in Bourke Street West that had been converted to a temporary hospital. Sadly, on 8 December 1868 Webster died. McRea and Town Clerk EG Fitzgibbon were alarmed that the patient had been moved to the residence.



Figure 2: Melbourne General Hospital, 1860. State Library of Victoria, Pictures Collection, image no. b20032.

They had good reason to be worried, as an outbreak was detected soon after in nearby Shamrock Alley, a densely populated poorer area off Bourke Street.^[9]

Meanwhile, William Bessell, who had shared a room with Webster, also contracted the disease and was moved to the Immigration Hospital near Little Bourke Street. Several outbreaks occurred in the streets surrounding the Immigration Hospital and cases were soon appearing in houses in Little Bourke Street and Shamrock Alley.^[10] The chief secretary wrote to the chief medical officer suggesting that patients be moved to an isolated building in Royal Park, but McRea replied that the existing premises were quite suitable.^[11]

McRea requested that all doctors in Victoria advise him of cases showing symptoms of smallpox. As cases appeared, there followed some disagreement among doctors as to whether the outbreak was, in fact, chickenpox (varicella) rather than smallpox (variola).^[12] At the time it was not possible to identify the difference pathologically and diagnosis was based on the observation of symptoms. Hunter and Carmody suggest in their 2015 paper, 'Estimating the Aboriginal population in early colonial Australia: the role of chickenpox reconsidered', that many smallpox cases reported in colonial Australia may have been chickenpox. Chickenpox is far more contagious than smallpox (up to five times) and provides a reasonable explanation for the rapid transmission of the disease through remote populations, particularly indigenous communities.^[13]

McRea took a cautious approach to the 1868 Melbourne outbreak; even though some of the patients who contracted the disease had previously been vaccinated for smallpox, and even though there was a known outbreak of chickenpox in Melbourne at the time, McRea knew that, regardless of whether it was chickenpox or smallpox, it was dangerous. Chickenpox in the nineteenth century was a nasty disease to contract, particularly for adults.

The 43 cases that occurred from November 1868 to June 1869 were mostly located in the Bourke Street area around the Immigration Hospital. One boy was responsible for taking the virus to Greensborough, resulting in around 12 cases, but it was successfully contained.[14] Another case appeared at Tarnagulla near Bendigo but did not spread any further. By the early months of 1869, after a dry summer, McCrae had formed the opinion that a good downpour of rain would help flush the virus away from built-up areas. He also believed that a strong effort to re-vaccinate the public would help contain the outbreak.[15]

After the outbreak ended in June 1869, an enquiry was held to determine whether the 43 cases were all smallpox, a variant of smallpox or chickenpox, but no consensus was reached. An article in the 1869 *Medical Journal of Australia* stated that there was 'an inordinate craving of notoriety' when it came to announcements of smallpox outbreaks.[16] This may have been a factor in the case of Sarah Hanks.

Blissfully unaware of the outbreak, 22-year-old Sarah Jones married 24-year-old William Hanks on 19 February 1869 at St Marks Church of England in George Street Fitzroy.[17] Sarah's early life appears uneventful. She was born Sarah Ann Jones on 18 August 1846 to William and Janette Jones (née Buchanan) in the parish of St James, Bourke County, Melbourne.[18] Her parents had married the year before she was born. The spelling of 'Jones' as 'Sones' in the births, deaths and marriages indexes causes confusion, but the consistent appearance of Janette Buchanan on all certificates provides confirmation of these details.[19]

In 1867, aged 21, Sarah was boarding in a house on La Trobe Street East, probably for work purposes.[20] She met William in the Fitzroy area and they married in a church near her parents' home. William was a miner from Walhalla; according to news reports, he had had a lucky escape the previous October when an empty bucket fell down a shaft and hit him on the back.[21]

On their marriage certificate William and Sarah both stated their places of residence as Fitzroy, although William put his usual residence as Stringers Creek. Both

were literate and able to sign their names. The witnesses were Jane Jones and Henry Frise. Both sets of parents were in attendance for the happy day. William's parents were listed as Job and Elizabeth Hanks (née Cooper); Job worked as a mason.[22]

On 8 March, 17 days after their marriage, the young couple commenced the long journey to Walhalla, stopping at Shady Creek on the way. Gippsland was covered in thick, dense scrub at the time and the journey to Walhalla was long and arduous. The first part of the journey was by coach and the remaining section was on horseback. The couple would have been exhausted upon their arrival on 10 March. McRea stated that Sarah did not show symptoms until five days after her arrival in Walhalla.[23] She may well have felt fine during the incubation period. As they celebrated their honeymoon at Walhalla's Grand Junction Hotel, the couple would have been unaware that Sarah was carrying the virus.[24]

Sarah saw the local medical man Henry Hadden on the day her rash appeared. Hadden claimed he had witnessed smallpox in his native Ireland and so diagnosed the lesions as smallpox.[25] For reasons unknown, it was not until the following day that Hadden asked his partner Dr Boone to confirm the diagnosis, which he did, and the diagnosis was then reported to the magistrate.[26] Sarah Hanks is known as 'Mrs. H case number 35' in McRea's report. In the report, McRea stated that 'Mrs. H' had been residing at La Trobe Street East, Melbourne. He believed this was where she was likely exposed to the virus, as a young boy who lived two doors away displayed symptoms on 12 March and died on 20 March.[27]

Factoring in the boy's incubation period, Sarah was likely to have been exposed between 27 February and 2 March. Her infectious period commenced either a day before the rash appeared or as soon as the rash appeared on 15 March. Given this, it is remarkable that no-one else was exposed to the virus.

In 1869 the goldmining town of Walhalla was a small but densely populated settlement of approximately 700 inhabitants located at the bottom of a steep valley. The settlement was still quite young. Ned Stringer had discovered alluvial gold in a nearby creek in 1863, and gold was found at Cohen's Reef soon after, bringing an influx of people. Prior to the use of rainwater tanks, the residents had sourced their water from Stringers Creek. By 1869 the creek had become heavily polluted, and the townsfolk had experienced cholera and various respiratory and gastric diseases.[28] It is understandable that the people of Walhalla would have been nervous about any new diseases arriving in the town.

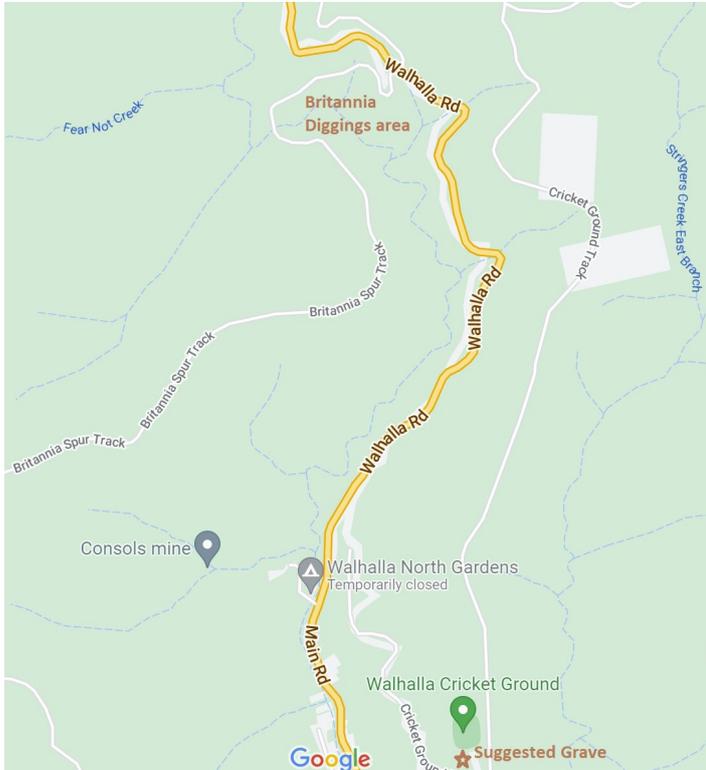


Figure 3: Google map showing Britannia diggings (top) and suggested grave (bottom), 2022.

The news that smallpox was present sent the local town leaders into action. The magistrates placed the Grand Junction Hotel under police guard. Local police were also dispatched to find a house isolated enough to use as a small pox hospital. The recently deserted Britannia diggings north of town were considered suitable.[29] The diggings were isolated and empty with several buildings still in good repair.

On Wednesday 17 March, Mine Warden Foster arrived at Walhalla. Mining wardens had a high level of judicial authority across the goldfields of Victoria.[30] Foster's role was to keep the government informed of how the mining town was handling the outbreak. Meanwhile, William steadfastly refused to allow the authorities to take Sarah to the Britannia diggings. He must have been worried that Sarah would be forcibly removed, so, during the night, the couple escaped through the window of their hotel room to William's own cottage. William's cottage was located on a quarter-acre allotment in the centre of town on the left-hand branch of Stringers Creek.[31] This action placed all the residents of Walhalla at risk of exposure.

Hadden went to the hotel to visit Sarah on Thursday morning only to discover that the newlyweds had absconded. Local miners were furious with the landlord, John Parry, and had to be restrained lest they damage his hotel. The couple were soon discovered in William's cottage. The magistrate ordered that the premises be placed into quarantine and an 8-foot paling fence be erected around the perimeter with a police guard. Two small sheds were erected at the end of the allotment, one inside and one outside the fence. If anyone was brave enough to visit to provide supplies or aid, they could enter one shed, strip off their clothes and step through to the next shed and change into clean clothes stowed there. The process would then be repeated on the way out. The disinfectant of choice at the time was carbolic acid, which was used liberally.[32]

William attempted to look after his wife without assistance but after a few days she became so unwell that a nurse had to be sought. Sarah's condition had worsened so much that her screams could be heard around the vicinity of the cottage.[33] Mary Kybred, a local, elderly widow who spent her time fossicking for gold, was selected to be Sarah's nurse. An illiterate cockney woman, she had worked in London hospitals before immigrating to Australia. Her nine-year-old grandson, John Buchanan, took clothes back and forth to the premises in a pillowcase to be laundered and disinfected by his mother. [34] Versions of Sarah's story often refer to William having an older son from a previous relationship.[35] However, no son or previous marriage is mentioned in William's records. Perhaps nurse Kybred's young grandson was mistaken by some as belonging to William?

Sarah died on Tuesday 23 March 1869, eight days after her symptoms appeared. Boone signed her death certificate, which was witnessed by William Callow, the undertaker. [36] William and Sarah were only married for a few weeks. Alexander Bell, Esq., JP, at once convened a meeting of the men of the town to consider the next steps.[37] Sarah was to be buried the following day on 24 March; however, no-one was willing to carry the body through Walhalla. After lengthy discussion, four men agreed to carry the corpse to a grave on the crest of a steep hill a good distance north of the town. Callow supervised Sarah's burial, after which the pall bearers bathed and changed outfits.[38] A strong picket fence was placed around the deep grave to keep people away. Possibly due to the haste and confusion surrounding Sarah's burial, some of the information entered on her death certificate by the doctor and undertaker was incorrect, further adding to the indignity of her demise.[39]



Figure 4: 'Out you go, John! You and your smallpox', *Illustrated Sydney News*, 1881, State Library New South Wales.

On the same day Sarah was buried, the Hanks's cottage was burned to the ground. William and nurse Kybred were taken to the Britannia diggings and placed in strict quarantine under police control for a further six weeks. The committee agreed to give William 75 pounds and build him a new home; Mary Kybred was given a 20-pound ticket to sail to Tasmania as payment.[40]

The spread of alarm through the town was typical of the time. Nicola Cousen's 2018 *Provenance* article, 'The smallpox on Ballarat' highlights a similar reaction from 10 years previously. For example, in 1858, eight-year-old Miss Lecki was diagnosed first with chickenpox, then smallpox and later cowpox. The *Star* newspaper went to great lengths to discredit the cowpox diagnosis, which had been made by doctors at Ballarat Hospital, warning the public that an outbreak of smallpox was imminent and demanding that schoolchildren be kept at home. Thankfully, the public placed its trust in the hospital's doctors or else the *Star* may have succeeded in its campaign to have the girl's home destroyed.[41]

Walhalla's resident newspaper correspondent pursued a similarly alarmist approach. According to his article published on 30 March 1869 in the *Gippsland Times*, all residents were asked to get themselves vaccinated and carbolic acid was distributed to all who needed it. Further, all Chinese residents were compulsorily ordered to attend

the office of the government vaccinator.[42] It appears that the Chinese residents, although not to blame for the outbreak, were considered a risk simply because of their race. The local correspondent's opinion of Walhalla's Chinese residents was made clear in a subsequent article in which he warned of the risk of smallpox spreading through the local Chinese population who were 'clean, so far as regards frequently washing themselves, and the use of the bath, yet they are by no means careful in either their garments or in their huts'. The correspondent pointed out that Boone had raised similar fears about the Chinese population at the Bendigo goldfields in 1855. Apparently Boone had requested that the Chinese be compelled to take the vaccination but had been advised by the chief medical officer that this would be illegal. The correspondent strongly suggested that the matter of compulsory vaccination of the Chinese be reconsidered. [43] There is no firm evidence that Chinese residents were compulsorily vaccinated at Walhalla in March 1869. [44] Regardless, singling them out in this way illustrates the suspicion held by many towards them at the time. [45] Fear of smallpox was widely used by newspapers to promote discrimination against the Chinese population even though smallpox was present in Australia before their arrival.[46]

The other doctor in town, Henry Hadden, had trained as an apothecary in Ireland and emigrated to Australia in 1853. Hadden was soon practising as a doctor on the goldfields near Castlemaine at Daisy Hill.[47] In 1855 he was convicted of neglect and manslaughter and sentenced to three years hard labour after a mother and baby had died during childbirth under his care. A news article on the court case referred to Hadden as a 'medical man' rather than a doctor. It was reported that he had attended the woman during her labour and, after becoming extremely drunk, had fallen asleep next to her.[48] Two medical witnesses later found the mother with the deceased baby still in the womb. The mother died soon after.[49]

Hadden was registered as prisoner 2,738 but disappeared from the Castlemaine area.[50] He reappeared in Walhalla in 1866 still practising medicine and still regularly intoxicated. A few months after the death of Sarah Hanks, Hadden died while travelling by coach to Walhalla on 29 May 1869. The inquest detailed that he had boarded the coach in a very intoxicated state and soon fell asleep. After a time, his fellow travellers became concerned and discovered that he had died. No signs of violence were found and the cause of death was recorded as unknown.

Walhalla's local correspondent was incredulous at the outcome of the inquest for such a 'dear friend' as Hadden. In numerous articles over the following weeks, he tried to raise suspicion about the circumstances of Hadden's death, even suggesting that he was poisoned. The matter did not go any further and Hadden now rests at Shady Creek in another lonely grave. Boone relocated to the Bendigo area soon after and is recorded as being buried at Donald, having died there in December 1877.[51]

The 2019 discovery of the possible grave of Sarah Hanks brought her story back into public view. The grave in question rests beside a track to a sporting ground that commenced construction two years after Sarah died.[52] Curiously, the sign that claims the grave is Sarah's features a 2018 copyright date, earlier than the discovery of the site in 2019.[53] The location of the new grave does not quite tally with the description by the local correspondent in the *Gippsland Times* nor with the note in the book *Lonely Graves of Gippsland* that locates it near the Britannia Reef.[54] The choice of the Britannia Reef area for Sarah's burial seems likely, as the Britannia diggings were located 3 km north of the town.[55] The diggings, which had been abandoned several months earlier, were located far enough away from the population to be a safe quarantine and burial area. A 1915 recollection of a previous resident stated the original grave sat on a zigzag track on the

way to the cricket ground heading left towards the gully.[56] This gives some credibility to the newly proposed gravesite, but the track would not have existed in 1869 because the levelled cricket ground did not exist. News of the rediscovered grave appeared on television and in print and social media, bringing to mind a comment from the 1869 enquiry that perhaps 'an inordinate craving of notoriety' still exists around smallpox. 'The woman who brought chickenpox to Walhalla' doesn't have the same impact as 'the woman who brought smallpox'. With doubts about the new grave in mind, a simple solution would be to undertake a geophysics scan to verify whether the site is, in fact, a grave. The cost of the service could be recovered through a grant.[57]

It is important when we research historical events to take the time to investigate beyond one or two sources. Official public records provide an impartial view of historic events compared to personal recollections or local newspaper reports; however, all these sources are important to get a view of both facts and opinions. We now live in an era in which a story can enter the public arena with very little fact checking. News is spread across electronic media at breathtaking speed. The conflicting information about our current COVID-19 pandemic dwarfs the discussion around smallpox versus chickenpox in nineteenth-century Victoria. This shows that, in future, our public records will be even more vital to sift fact from fiction. In the meantime, it is good practice to question what we are told and investigate stories such as Sarah Hanks's. By doing so, we provide a voice to those who are no longer able to speak.

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