

Wanted! Honourable Gentlemen

Select Applicants for the Position of Deputy Registrar for Collingwood in 1864

Jenny Carter

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Jenny Carter is a genealogist, family historian and teacher who visits PROV's reading rooms once a week, sometimes more often when working on a research project. The idea for the present article came about during a visit in early 2007 when she was looking through the Chief Secretary's Department files for information on which to base a talk on researching family history. Fascinated by a group of letters that caught her eye, Jenny soon found herself discovering what credentials were needed when applying for a government position in mid-nineteenth-century Victoria.

Abstract

Among the inward registered correspondence of the Chief Secretary's Department for the years 1863-64 is a group of letters by applicants for the position of Deputy Registrar for the district of Collingwood. This article explores the very different life stories behind three of these applications, including that of the successful applicant, Henry William Mortimer. The episode highlights the qualities that favoured one candidate over another in the selection process at the time, and demonstrates the importance of social, economic and political connections – particularly the need for a personal recommendation by an 'Honourable Gentleman'.

There is a wealth of information concerning ordinary people to be found in the correspondence of the Chief Secretary's department of the Victorian Government, dating from 1851 and spanning over a century until the department's demise in 1979. I have taken great pleasure in searching through boxes of files in the series which have been produced by this 'department of everything', particularly those of the mid to late nineteenth century. In these records it is possible to find evidence about the daily lives of a great many Victorians, many of whom have now been overlooked or forgotten. Among the letters of complaint and letters of application for positions in various government agencies such as police, railways, asylums, industrial schools and the military, in the fine grain of the official record, I found records that contained thumbnail sketches of everyday routines, miniature autobiographies, and revealing social vignettes.

As a case study, this article will focus on one of the many forgotten minor episodes of Melbourne's administrative history: the applications received for the position of Deputy Registrar for Collingwood in 1864. These records are contained in units 61-64 of VPRS 3991 Inward Correspondence II, a series which contains correspondence received by the Chief Secretary's department between the years 1864 and 1884.

By 1864 Collingwood had become a densely populated community with a high number of births and deaths to be recorded. At a pay rate of two shillings and sixpence, the Deputy Registrar's position at Collingwood was more attractive than, for example, in some rural districts where the Deputy Registrar was supported by produce from the residents being left on the doorstep. [1] While reading through the records of this episode, three applicants stood out from the others: David Hume Ross, Caroline Charlotte Allen and Henry William Mortimer.

In addition to the information I found on these applicants in the Chief Secretary's correspondence, I have employed the methods and resources employed in the study of family history to create mini (self-) portraits of the aspirations and ambitions of these three individuals, and to open a small window into the life of their family and community. Above all they demonstrate the way in which social, economic and political connections were used in the 1860s when applying for official positions in government.

Through each of these applicants' records we glimpse a different kind of life story: David Hume Ross's is the story of illustrious origins; Caroline Charlotte Allen's documents family hardship and the invisible barriers confronting women in nineteenth-century Victoria; and Henry William Mortimer's reveals an old colonist's travels around the world and his early involvement in the establishment of the colony.

David Hume Ross

In his application, David Hume Ross gave a great deal of background to his illustrious ancestry. He was born in December 1824 in Edinburgh to Dr Adolphus Ross and his wife Catherine Hume.[2] Writing to the Chief Secretary in 1864, Ross began by expressing his humble yet earnest desire to be appointed to the recently vacated position of Deputy Registrar of Births and Deaths.[3] He stated that he had entered Her Majesty's Service in 1834 at the age of eleven, became an Officer, and was rewarded with two honours and medals for his service in the Royal Navy.

Ross hastened to mention that he was the great-nephew of the historian and philosopher David Hume, grandson of the late Chief Judge of the Exchequer in Scotland, Baron Hume, and cousin to the then Lord Advocate for Scotland the Honourable James Moncrieff. Ross had been Moncrieff's private secretary for a long time and was favourably mentioned in his letters. Unfortunately Ross did not have copies of his cousin's letters at his disposal to support his claim. He did however add that he had 'gained the firm friendship of the Chairman of the Royal Hudson Bay Company by his conduct in their first search for Sir John Franklin in 1847'.[4] Ross also observed that he had first arrived in New South Wales, where he had re-modelled the Water Police in 1854, and later served with the City Commissioners of Sydney.

Ross concluded his application by revealing that on his recent voyage to Scotland he was struck by illness, and consequently suffered financial hardship:

Until last January I was completely bedridden with Chronic Rheumatics. My means are all gone and I crave employment to continue the education of my two sons (all my family), the elder on the death of my aunt and myself comes into an inheritance of £3,600 per annum in an entailed estate viz the Hume Estate Ninewells, Berwickshire.[5]

David Hume Ross died in Melbourne in 1879, aged 55.[6] His widow Charlotte Isabella Ross, née Hallam died in 1903 aged 72.

Caroline Charlotte Allen

Caroline Charlotte Payne, née Lagoe, married Samuel Allen in the parish of Mancetter in Warwickshire, England, in 1841. She was born in Atherstone, a small parish adjacent to Mancetter. Samuel was a native of Birmingham. The 1841 census of Warwickshire lists (Caroline) Charlotte aged 20, with her daughter Charlotte Payne aged 4 and Samuel Allen aged 25.[7] The small family lived separately in their own house in Caroline Street, Birmingham. At this time Allen gave his occupation as clerk.

Samuel improved his situation greatly over the following ten years. The 1851 census of Warwickshire shows the family residing at 11 Great Hampston Street in Birmingham and gives Samuel Allen's age as 39. It records that he was a Florentine button manufacturer, employing fifty-six women and four men. Caroline's age was now given as 33. Living with them at the time were a visitor and an apprentice, neither of whom had an obvious connection to the family. Despite having what was an apparently successful manufacturing business, two years later the Allens decided to migrate to Australia.

Samuel and Caroline arrived in Victoria in 1852 aboard the *Covenanter* as unassisted passengers, that is, they paid their own fares. Samuel gave his age as 41 and occupation as 'farmer'. Caroline, whose age was recorded as 34, was listed as his wife. Travelling with them on the same ticket (no. 130) were John Allen, aged 26, a farmer and brother to Samuel, and Henry Allen, aged 24, also a farmer who may or may not have been related.[8]

Samuel Allen took on the role of Deputy Registrar for Collingwood in June 1853, although his official appointment was not announced until 1854.[9] Following his death in 1864,[10] Caroline applied for the position, stating in her application that for the past twelve months she had, with permission, been filling out the certificates which Samuel, who had been an invalid for five or six years, then signed. Caroline argued that this made her well-accustomed to the procedures and hence competent to fill the role. Her husband's very heavy medical expenses meant that she was now destitute and needed the position for her own maintenance. In her support, the inhabitants of Collingwood drew up a petition, which was presented on twenty-five large pages of signatures. These names included the local members of parliament, councillors, doctors, lawyers and stockbrokers down to the merchants and tradesmen – coachbuilder, publican, saddler, butcher and chemist. Almost seven hundred names are listed, with signatures and addresses.[11]

Caroline's nephew, William John Allen, also applied for the position so that he could support his aunt in her need, '[i]n the unfortunate event of her appointment not being favourably received owing to her sex'.^[12] Allen's comments draw attention to the very real obstacles preventing women from securing employment and the independent means to support themselves in 1864. Between 1854 and 1900 there were nineteen women appointed to the position of deputy registrar in the greater Melbourne area, but none before 1867, two in the 1870s and the remainder in the late 1880s and 1890s. About the same number were given temporary positions in the suburbs of Melbourne, but only after 1880.^[13]

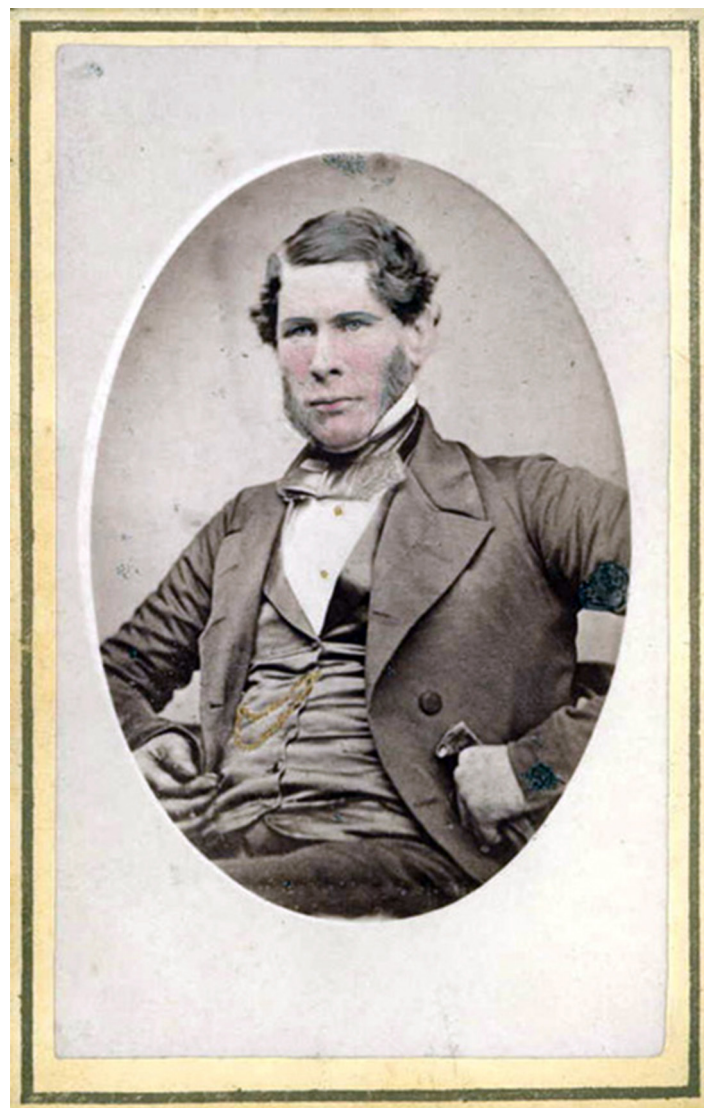
Neither David Hume Ross nor Caroline Charlotte Allen was successful in applying for the position of Deputy Registrar for Collingwood in 1864. The position was filled by Henry William Mortimer.

Henry William Mortimer

When I discovered that Henry William Mortimer was the successful candidate, I wondered at first why he got the job and not the others. He did not have the notable ancestry or, apparently, the wealth of worldly experience that David Hume Ross had. Nor did he have the backing of the local community and job experience of Caroline Allen. However, Henry proved to be a perfect research subject, as every clue followed up and every resource examined provided revealing information. A fellow researcher exploring records about Mortimer's son-in-law observed to me that a whole book could easily be written on him.

Henry was born in London in c. 1797 to Jackson Mortimer and Elizabeth Vaughan, and married Mary Addis in September 1819 in Hereford. By 1825 he had arrived in Hobart with Mary and their sons Matthew Henry and Mark William; daughter Mary Ann died during the voyage. Eight more children were born between 1825 and 1841.^[14] According to family memory, one reason Henry moved to the far-flung colony was the advice of his doctor to relocate to a place with a warmer climate for the sake of his health.^[15]

Two years after their arrival in Tasmania, when Henry was away from home, nine bushrangers came to their house. Mary was sitting with a baby on her knee when the men entered through the door and windows so that there was no escape. Threatening with a pistol they demanded jewellery, men's clothing and drink, of which there was none visible (the keg of home-made beer was in the cellar with the trapdoor covered by a carpet). After ransacking the house they left with their booty, and just when Mary had the kettle boiling one returned to take it from her, saying, 'It's full of water, just what I want'.^[16]



William Henry Mortimer, carte-de-visite with hand-coloured photograph, c.1835-c.1850. Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.

After this incident Henry taught Mary to shoot and she became quite expert at it. As a future precaution she buried the remaining jewellery under a tree near the house, but could never find it again. Eventually the men were caught and eight were hung. The ninth was saved when it was proved that he refused to shoot someone. The family moved to a two-storey house at Battery Point about twelve months later, but they would frequently return to the farm in one of their two yachts, the *Richmond packet* and the *Cockle shell*. In Hobart the children went to a day school with the children of Henry's sister Charlotte Selina and her husband Alexander Bishop Butler. One day Mary went to the door for a delivery of bread and there encountered the ninth bandit, now doing honest work.^[17]

From his time in Hobart, Henry appears on the Tasmanian Colonial Index as an employer of convicts between the years 1825 and 1835; as a witness at a trial in Richmond in 1833; and on the Jury lists from 1835 to 1840.[18] His land grants from 1831 to 1833 were 1000 acres at York and 500 acres at Ralph's Bay Parish.[19]

In 1839 Henry organised for his family and that of his sister, Charlotte, to leave Tasmania on the brig *Caroline*, which was also carrying timber for their homes in Melbourne. On the way the ship was driven ashore on Swan Reef where it was unloaded, salvaged, and allowed to resume the voyage without the timber, arriving in Port Phillip on Monday 16 December 1839. [20] Henry had intended to leave his wife and children with his nephew John Blanch and his wife Sara. However, the next day two young men, Henry Griffin and Charles Deering, newly arrived in town, wandered into John Blanch's gunmaker's shop to purchase caps for their guns. One of them imprudently fired his gun forgetting that it was loaded. The result was an explosion which demolished the two-storey building and killed the young couple, John and Sara. Henry Griffin also died, but Charles Deering survived. Henry took the three Blanch children, who had been out walking with their nurse, to stay with his family.[21]

Henry and the boys had been in town for a week or so and had pitched their first tents on the south side of the river just below what is now Queens Bridge. During a flood their boxes were carried out into the bay, causing them to move to the other side of the river to where the Customs House now stands. Although Henry could not get a room for his own family he managed to find a new stable for his sister and her children. [22] After a month a room was rented for Mary and baby Edmund until a small place near King Street was purchased. When more timber arrived a cottage was commenced in Flinders Lane between Queen and Market streets and the family was thankful to move in. The Blanch children stayed until March 1841 when Henry advertised for someone who was leaving for England to take charge of 'two stout and healthy boys of the ages of 5 and 7'.[23] A handsome reward was offered by Henry to anyone who was willing to escort the lads; he was sending his orphaned great-nephews, John and William, back to England to be with their grandparents.[24]

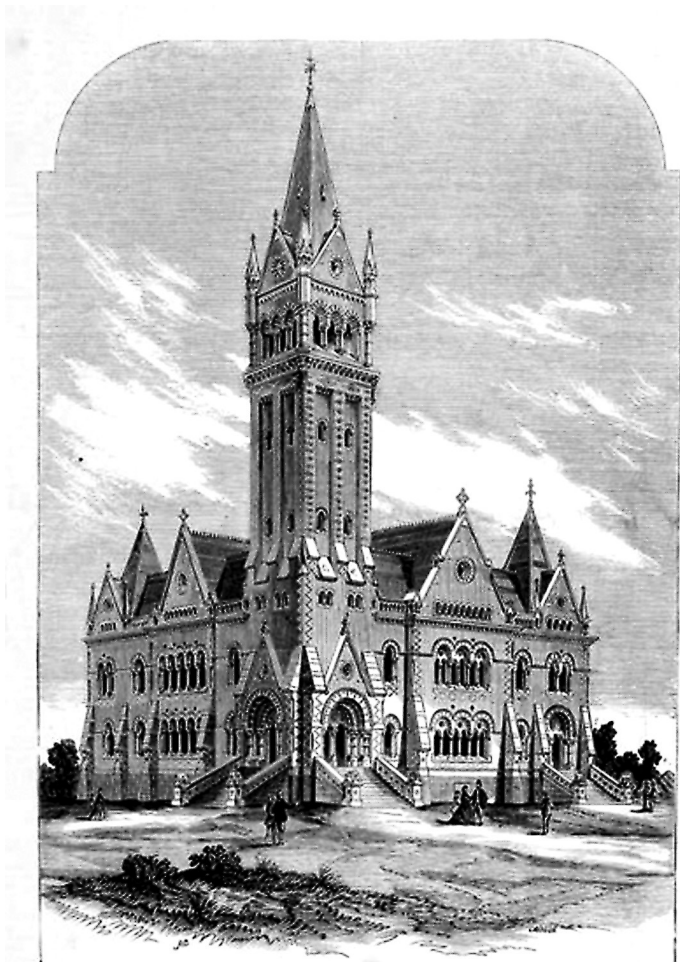
Later Henry built a two-storey house at the corner of Collins and William streets, where the family stayed for several years. It was here that his son Matthew Henry died of fever in 1841.

Henry had a barque *Favourite* built on the Tamar River in Launceston, intending to take the family to England. He sold his property and they began the journey, firstly to see Sydney. Loath to let the ship sit idle whilst the family were enjoying themselves on shore, however, he sent her to Newcastle for a load of coal, but she stuck on a bar and did not return for six weeks. By this time Henry had decided that it would be too cold in England for him, and the family returned to Melbourne and 'Cranley Cottage' in Brighton. Henry later took the boys on a trip to California and when they returned the whole family went to Tahiti where they entertained Pomare IV, Queen of Tahiti, onboard the vessel. On their return from Tahiti, Henry gave the vessel to his son William (Mark William) who sailed first to Timor to buy ponies, and then on to Mauritius to sell the ponies, load up with sugar and return to Melbourne or Sydney.

In 1842 Henry stood as a candidate in the first Town Council elections in Melbourne. The election on 1 December 'was a wildly exciting and keenly contested one'. There were four wards, each with a polling booth in a local hotel. The polling for Lonsdale ward was held at the Royal Hotel in Collins Street and those elected were John Orr, Henry William Mortimer and John Pascoe Fawkner.[25] On 9 December the Council met at the Royal Hotel and, behind closed doors, voted for a mayor and four aldermen. In a close election, Henry Condell was chosen as the first Mayor of Melbourne. Henry William Mortimer was one of two aldermen elected for a three-year term.[26]

'Garryowen' reported in his *Chronicles* that Henry was 'intelligent and conscientious, but had a precise and pragmatism, which prevented him from becoming popular', and that he retired from the Corporation 'to take part in the management of the *Patriot* newspaper'. Henry was one the 'chief projectors' of the Victoria Fire and Marine Insurance Company when it was established in October 1848 with capital of £100 000 in 4000 £25 shares.[27]

Henry was interested in church-building and collected a large sum towards the erection of the Baptist Church in Collins Street. Along with Robert Kerr and John Lush he also started the first school for Aborigines at Merri Creek in 1846.[28] He 'had a good deal to do in the securing of Mr. Ham's [a Baptist Minister] valuable services, and though an Independent himself, Mr. Mortimer's energy and liberality on behalf of the early Baptists were as remarkable as creditable to him'. [29] Henry and Mary Mortimer were accepted into the Independent Church, St Michael's Collins Street, on 4 February 1852.[30]



NEW INDEPENDENT CHURCH, COLLINS-STREET—(J. and B. BARRÉ, ARCHITECTS).

Frederick Grosse, New Independent Church, Collins-Street (engraving), 1867. Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.

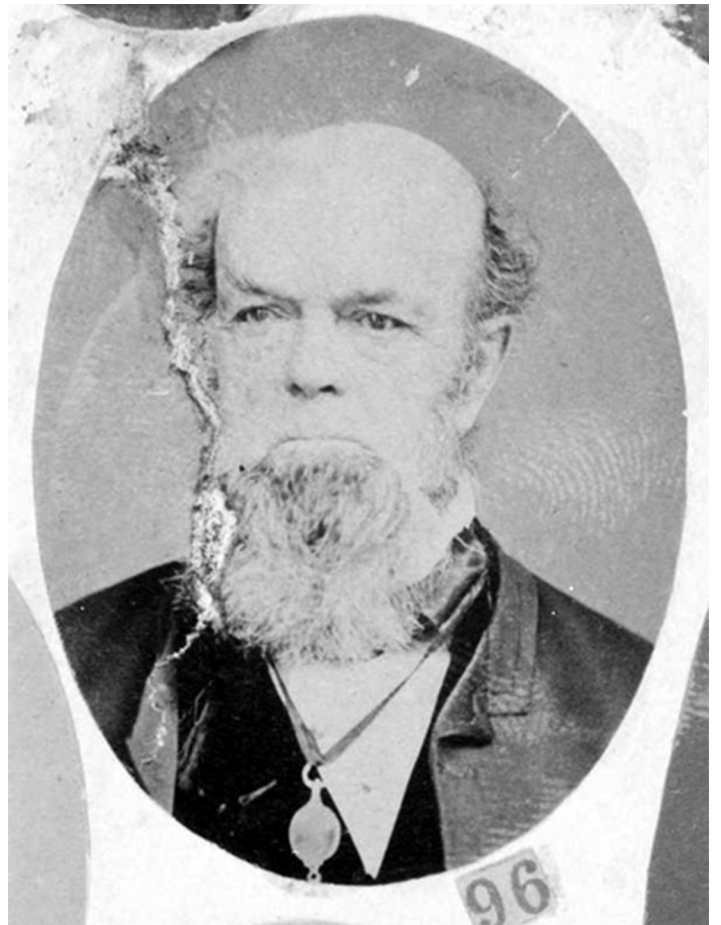
In 1863, when Dr John Dunmore Lang arrived in Melbourne, Henry 'in a few brief, stilted but suitable observations, officiated as the proxy of the ladies, and presented the guest with a minister's elaborately finished gown'.^[31] In 1864 he applied for the position of Deputy Registrar for Collingwood, using references supplied to him for his previous position, that of Inspector of Weights and Measures for the municipality of Fitzroy. In his application he said that

I am an Old colonist of some twenty five years and can refer to most of the men of influence here to say that I have an unblemished character. I have made a considerable fortune but lost it by becoming security for others and in the depreciation of property. At present I am Inspector of Weights and Measures for Fitzroy but the income of £5.18.0 per quarter is too small to live on. If the two positions are incompatible I will gladly resign the former.^[32]

Henry William Mortimer was listed as a new insolvent in 1861. The cause was given as his inability to meet his responsibilities and the depreciation in the value of freehold property. His liabilities were £13 394, his assets

£16 995 and the surplus £3601.^[33] His testimonials show that he was greatly respected and was indeed of an irreproachable and unblemished character. His integrity, energy and general business habits, over a long period in the history of the colony, were remembered, and the first person to sign the testimonial was John Pascoe Fawkner.^[34]

Henry died at the age of 90 in 1887. He was the last of the initial twelve councillors elected in 1842 who formed the Corporation of the City of Melbourne. His obituary records that he was among the earliest of the free settlers in Tasmania, having arrived there in 1825 with the inducement offered by the British Government of a grant of land under land warrants. Once he moved to Melbourne in 1839, 'he commenced a butcher's business, which he carried on successfully for many years, but his favourite pursuit was ship owning. He opened up a lucrative trade in fruit with the South Sea Islands, and subsequently he and his sons were the first to open the sugar trade between Melbourne and Mauritius'.^[35]



Photograph of William Henry Mortimer in T F Chuck, The explorers and early colonists of Victoria, 1872. Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Unhappily the last years of Henry's life were clouded by loss of sight. He was blind for nearly fifteen years and was unable to participate in the active life to which he was accustomed. Yet he retained his mental powers until the last, dying on 21 July at the home of his son-in-law, Mr JR Brennand, JP, Toorak Road, South Yarra.[36]

Conclusion

Most of the twenty-five applicants for the position of Deputy Registrar for Collingwood mentioned their current or previous occupations. Amongst them were two deputy registrars, JE Dobson from Ararat,[37] and John Tulloch from Prahran.[38] DC Forrest had worked in the Department of Roads and Bridges.[39] There were two booksellers: a bookseller/storekeeper and a bookseller/stationer/newsagent. Applicants also mentioned the number of years they had spent in the colony: Mayor TT Greenwood had been resident for fifteen years;[40] Robert Black five years;[41] David Hume Ross twenty-five years; while F Lawrence Webb, late Major 43rd Regiment in India, had been one of the earliest to arrive, in 1842.[42] Names of 'Honourable Gentlemen' were peppered throughout the applications.[43]

Some applicants offered odd endorsements of their suitability, such as 'I am well suited to more arduous duties ... you will believe me when you read my name' (signed William Baxter[44]), and 'it may not be out of place to mention that I am a member of the Collingwood Rifle Club' (signed Thomas Robinson[45]). From the application of JT Tulloch we learn that his son had written his letter of support on letterhead of the Melbourne Railway Company, stating that his father was the 'Oldest Registrar in Melbourne, with a family of young children to support'.

A few applications mentioned a Mr Archer (William Archer was the creator of the Victorian civil registration system). The application of WA Sparling for the position at Prahran is typical: 'Mr. Archer has directed me to apply to you for the application of the Deputy Registrar for Prahran and he kindly promised to use his influence with you to procure for me the appointment'.[46] Mr A Guillaume thought that the job was his when he said 'I was promised the reversion of this position by the late Chief Secretary on the recommendation of Sir Henry Barkly'.[47]

It is evident after examining all the applications for the position of Deputy Registrar of Births and Deaths at both Collingwood and Prahran that while many of the applicants had testimonials or petitions, others only had occupations to boast of and a few stated cases of need, indicating the lack of social services available at this time. Old age pensions did not appear until 1908, and unemployment benefits were not introduced until 1945. However, the most relevant qualification seems to have been the length of time spent in the colony, combined with the importance of the applicant's supporters. Henry William Mortimer certainly had both, hence his successful application. It was then, as it often is today, a case of not what – but who – you know.

Endnotes

[1] 2s 6d was the fee per registration – hence the number of applicants for Collingwood.

[2] David Hume Ross was christened in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1824: information taken from the *Family Search* online database. Details of other British births, deaths and marriages discussed in this article have also been taken from this resource.

[3] The position was for the Deputy Registrar of Births and Deaths, the returns for marriages being sent in by the clergy or authorised marriage celebrants.

[4] PROV, VA 475 Chief Secretary's Department, VPRS 3991/P0 Inward Correspondence II, Unit 62, File G5052, Application of David Hume Ross.

[5] *ibid.*

[6] Registry of births, deaths and marriages, Melbourne, Victoria: David Hume Ross death certificate no. 4320 (1879).

[7] Ages above 15 years were rounded down to the nearest increment of five in the 1841 census, hence the discrepancy in the ages in the 1851 census.

[8] PROV, VPRS 7666/P0 Inward Overseas Passenger Lists (British Ports) 1852-1923 (microfiche copy of VPRS 947), B 023, p. 3, Samuel, Caroline, John and Henry Allen. Although it is likely that Henry was a brother to Samuel and John, who died in 1861, his death has not been identified with the same parents – Samuel Allen and Hannah Crook.

[9] JF Waghorn (comp.), *Index, Deputy Registrars of birth and deaths in Victoria, 1853 to 1901*, JF Waghorn, Thomastown, Victoria, 1991.

[10] Death certificate of Samuel Allen, no. 4232 (1864).

[11] PROV, VPRS 3991/P0, Unit 61, Files H4489 and H4212, Application of Caroline Allen.

- [12] *ibid.*, File H4211, Application of William John Allen.
- [13] In the rural areas the picture was quite different, with large numbers of women appointed to both permanent and temporary positions: see Waghorn, *op. cit.*
- [14] Registry of births, deaths and marriages, Tasmania: children of Henry William Mortimer and Mary Addis.
- [15] Memories of Martha Jane Mouritz, née Mortimer, in a written record created in 1900 and obtained from her grandson, Tom Davison. Martha Jane was Henry and Mary's daughter. She died in Sale in 1911 (no. 3024, mistranscribed as 'Mourtiz').
- [16] *ibid.*
- [17] *ibid.*
- [18] *Tasmanian colonial index*, compiled by the Kiama Family History Centre, Kiama, New South Wales, 1997 (microfiche).
- [19] T McKay (comp.) *Register of land grants, Van Diemen's Land, 1824-1832*, T McKay, Kingston, Tasmania, 1994.
- [20] MA Syme, *Shipping arrivals and departures, Victorian ports, 3 vols*, Roebuck Book, Melbourne, 1984-2006.
- [21] The story of Alexander Bishop Butler can be read on the website of Brother Tony Butler at http://www.teachers.ash.org.au/butlera/alexander_bishop.htm (accessed 30 August 2008); see also *Port Phillip Gazette*, 18 December 1839.
- [22] Martha Jane Mouritz comments that 'they were much more delicate than we colonials' (Memories of Martha Jane Mouritz). It should be noted, however, that Charlotte was heavily pregnant with her seventh child, giving birth to a son on 29 December 1839.
- [23] *Port Phillip Gazette*, 3 March 1841, p. 2.
- [24] John and Sara's infant daughter, Ann Eleanor, is not mentioned in the newspaper advertisement. However, she probably accompanied her brothers back to England, as an 'Ann Blanche', born in Van Diemen's Land, was recorded in the 1851 census for London as living with a couple of the same surname who said she was their grand-daughter.
- [25] *History of the City of Melbourne*, Records and Archives Branch, City of Melbourne, 1997, p. 16, available online at <http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/rsrc/PDFs/History/HistoryMelbourne.pdf> (accessed 30 August 2008).
- [26] *ibid.* See also 'Garryowen' [Edmund Finn], *The chronicles of early Melbourne, 1835-1852: historical, anecdotal and personal*, 2 vols, Fergusson & Mitchell, Melbourne, 1888, vol. 1, pp. 260-2, 264. 'Garryowen' was an alias for Edmund Finn, journalist and author.
- [27] *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 314, 449.
- [28] Memories of Martha Jane Mouritz; ID Clark & T Heydon, *A bend in the Yarra: a history of the Merri Creek Protectorate Station and Merri Creek Aboriginal School 1841-1851*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2004, p. 59f.
- [29] 'Garryowen,' *Chronicles*, vol. 1, p. 170.
- [30] Information provided by Wilma Bain, archivist, St Michael's Church, Collins Street.
- [31] 'Garryowen,' *Chronicles*, vol. 2, p. 863.
- [32] PROV, VPRS 3991/P0, Unit 60, File G4257, Application of Henry William Mortimer.
- [33] *Argus*, 13 December 1861, p. 6.
- [34] PROV, VPRS 3991/P0, Unit 60, File G4257, Application of Henry William Mortimer.
- [35] *Australasian*, 23 July 1887. His son, Mark William, died on one of these journeys.
- [36] *ibid.*
- [37] PROV, VPRS 3991/P0, Unit 60, File G4256 (includes H4386), Application of JE Dobson.
- [38] *ibid.*, File H4171, Application of JT Tulloch.
- [39] *ibid.*, File H4398, Application of DC Forrest.
- [40] *ibid.*, File G5598, Application of TT Greenwood.
- [41] *ibid.*, File H4149, Application of Robert Black.
- [42] *ibid.*, File H4384, Application of F Lawrence Webb.
- [43] At this time it was important to your success to be well connected. 'Honourable Gentlemen' who could be asked for a reference were of great importance in an application, and I am of the opinion that at times there were applicants who could not name these gentlemen and hoped they wouldn't be asked.
- [44] PROV, VPRS 3991/P0, Unit 60, File H4360, Application of William Baxter.
- [45] *ibid.*, File G4459, Application of Thomas Robinson.
- [46] *ibid.*, File J10409, Application of WA Sparling.
- [47] *ibid.*, File H4173, Application of WA Guillaume.