

COLONIAL NSW IN THE 1820s TO THE 1840s AND ANNABELLA BOSWELL

Roslyn Russell

A talk given at the Colonial Weekend at the Coolangatta Estate in
May 2009

The convict system

In February 1822 Governor Lachlan Macquarie left the colony of NSW after a 12-year period of administration. The ramshackle streets of Sydney had been tidied up, and substantial buildings in the Colonial Georgian style now created an ordered ambience in the growing urban area. The Blue Mountains had been crossed in 1813, and settlement was spreading out from the central node of Sydney, to the west, north and south. By the mid-1820s a mixed society of free settlers, freed convicts and their children, and those still under a sentence of servitude were engaged in developing a thriving colonial economy.

I don't want to dwell on the convict system here, but it is important to understand its nature, as it underpinned the growing prosperity of the Australian colonies which, in its turn, allowed a more cultivated and diverse society to flourish. While I intend to talk about aspects of that cultivated society – and by a not-so-tortuous process involve a mention or two of Dickens – a brief word on how the convict system



operated for over 60 years in NSW is in order. Historians have developed the analogy of the convict system as 'a stairway on which the individual could move either upwards or downwards'. A convict's position varied with behaviour, and how he or she dealt with the roles they were given by the system. When a convict arrived from the British Isles he or she could either be kept in government service, or 'assigned' to work for a private landholder. If she or he behaved well a 'ticket of leave', a limited form of freedom restricting residence to a defined area, could be granted. The next

step from this, after further good behaviour, was a ‘conditional pardon’. This could be granted on condition that the convict never returned to the British Isles: this is what Magwitch in *Great Expectations* would have been given. An ‘absolute pardon’ could be granted to a few individuals, or their sentences could expire. These were all steps on the way up and out of convict servitude. There were also steps that took a convict downward:



for bad behaviour he might become part of a labour gang on public works such as road building. More bad behaviour could be punished by the convict being placed in an ‘iron gang’, where he was forced to work while wearing chains fastened to both ankles and waist. Recalcitrant women could be sent to the Female Factory at Parramatta, where they carried out work such as picking oakum, laundry, and other mass domestic tasks. If these forms of punishment were unsuccessful in modifying behaviour the convict could be sent to a special penal settlement

whose remoteness and conditions were calculated to make life as unpleasant as possible. The last line of resort was the death sentence, for which the gallows always stood prepared. [This paragraph has been adapted by Graham Connah and a diagram by James Semple Kerr in a chapter entitled ‘The convict contribution: vestiges of the penal system’. in Graham Connah, *The Archaeology of Australia’s History*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1988, pp. 51-52.]

The career of convict artist Joseph Backler illustrates how the convict system I described earlier operated at the individual level. He arrived in Australia in 1832 to serve a life sentence for ‘passing forged orders’. He was 18 years old. By 1834 he was in Port Macquarie serving his sentence as a ‘special convict’ – that is, he was educated and specialised in painting on glass. While in Port Macquarie he painted scenes of the port itself and of prosperous looking people and their carriages gathered outside St Thomas’s Church, and in May 1842 he married an Irish convict, Margaret Magner, at St Thomas’ Church. A year later he received his ticket of leave, which was transferred from Port Macquarie to Sydney, where he was able to develop a professional career as an artist. Over 100 of his portraits and landscapes have survived and are in the Mitchell Library. He died in Sydney in 1895.

The majority of transported felons at least began their period of servitude as assigned servants, and it is this fact that leads to the relevance of the discussion of the convict system to this discussion of colonial society in NSW, especially in relation to the origins of colonial wealth. There were fortunes to be made in NSW if you could stake out a land claim, and have the means to apply for convicts to help you to work it. Those to whom convicts were assigned had to make themselves responsible for their food and lodging, but all profits from the results of their labour accrued to the landholder. And there were undoubtedly many people who profited immensely from the system, and laid the foundations for colonial fortunes such as that of Alexander Berry who created Coolangatta Estate, where this conference is being held.

What sort of society did this create? Two observers who arrived in NSW from England in the mid- to late-1830s gave their verdicts. The first was Charles Darwin, who landed in Sydney from HMS *Beagle* on 12 January 1836:

‘At last we anchored within Sydney Cove, we found the little basin, containing many large ships & surrounded by Warehouses. In the evening I walked through the town & returned full of admiration at the whole scene. – It is a most magnificent testimony to the power of the British nation ... My first feeling was to congratulate myself that I was an Englishman.’ [Charles Darwin, *Beagle* Diary, 29 January 1836]

A fortnight later he was beginning to have second thoughts:

‘On the whole ... I was disappointed in the state of Society. – The whole community is rancorously divided into parties on almost every subject. Amongst those who from their station of life ought to rank with the best, many live in such open profligacy, that respectable people cannot associate with them. There is much jealousy between the children of the rich emancipist & the free settlers, the former being pleased to consider honest men as interlopers.

The whole population poor & rich are bent on acquiring wealth; the subject of wool and sheep grazing amongst the higher orders is of preponderant interest. The very low ebb of literature is strongly marked by the emptiness of the booksellers shops; these are inferior to the shops of the smaller country towns of England ... The balance of my opinion is such, that nothing but rather severe necessity should compel me to emigrate.’ [Charles Darwin, *Beagle* Diary, 14 March 1836]

And when Darwin left Australia in mid-March 1836, he delivered a negative parting shot:

‘Farewell Australia, you are a rising infant & doubtless some day will reign a great princess in the South; but you are too great & ambitious for affection, yet not great enough for respect; I leave your shores without sorrow or regret.’ [Charles Darwin, *Beagle Diary*, 4 January 1839]

Elizabeth Gould, wife and artistic collaborator of the celebrated 19th century ornithologist, John Gould, who visited Australia from 1838 to 1839, echoed Darwin’s accusation that money-making consumed most of the attention of the people she met in colonial NSW:

‘The fact is that most persons come here with a determination to get money and return to England as soon as they can ... This has been a famous place for money making – and I think money spending.’ [Letter from Elizabeth Gould to Mrs Mitchell, 4 January 1839]

The Macleays – a family of educated women

Alexander Macleay had emigrated with his wife Eliza and six daughters to Australia, arriving here in January 1826. Two sons remained at school in England. Macleay’s appointment as Colonial Secretary of NSW, as well as providing the salary necessary to maintain his family’s middle-class lifestyle, also gave him the opportunity to pursue his scientific passions: botany, entomology and zoology. As Colonial Secretary, Macleay (and by extension his family) joined an elite social circle in the growing colony, centred on Government House. Macleay soon set about creating another circle: that of people with scientific passions similar to his own. Secretary of the Linnean Society in London from 1798 to 1825, and a Fellow of the Royal Society, Macleay expanded his already considerable range of scientific interests into ornithology, and began to make the case for developing ‘the basic institutions needed to support a scientific community’ – a colonial museum, botanic gardens and public library. All his demands were eventually met. The Australian Museum began as a tiny room in his Colonial Secretary’s office. The lead he gave soon gathered to the family a circle of like-minded colonists.’ [Elizabeth Windshuttle, *Taste and Science: the women of the Macleay family, 1790-1850*, Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, Sydney, 1988, p65.]

The Macleay daughters enjoyed a broader education than most of their peers, as Elizabeth Windshuttle describes in her book on the women of the Macleay family. She recorded that:

‘In the Macleay household the girls studied not only botany, but entomology, zoology, ornithology, marine biology, conchology, paleontology, astronomy, horticulture and landscape gardening. This

placed them apart from all other women, and from most other men, since these sciences were rarely taught at the time at school or university.’ [Elizabeth Windshuttle, *Taste and Science: the women of the Macleay family, 1790-1850*, Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, Sydney, 1988, p40.]

Central to this side of the girls’ education was the library which, after the natural history collection, was the most prized feature of the Macleay household. Frustrated by the inferior educational standards of home tutors for the girls, Alexander Macleay subscribed to Cawthorns Library to supplement the rich stores of the household library. When the Macleay library was sold in 1845 to pay creditors it had grown to 4000 volumes. Its contents were remarkably wide-ranging and reveal that, at least in this family, Tory politics and Evangelical religion cohabited with progressive thought and catholic tastes. The list of contents provides a rare insight into one of the first family of intellectuals in the colony of New South Wales and the interests of pre-eminent natural scientists of the day.’ Windschuttle lists the contents categories: ‘History, Biography, Natural History, Botany, Mineralogy and Geology, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry and the Arts, Fine Arts and Antiquities, Agriculture, Geography and Topography, Voyages and Travel, Divinity, Education, Belles Lettres, Moral Philosophy, Political Economy, Essays Novels Romances etc. Poetry, Drama, Magazines etc. Atlases and Portfolios.’

It is now time to leave the mother settlement of Sydney, and head up the coast to a newer location of European settlement that also began its life as a penal station – Port Macquarie. On 17 April 1821 a convict settlement was established at Port Macquarie, led by three boats under command of Captain Francis Allman of the 48th Regiment. On 20 November 1826: Archibald Clunes Innes arrived to administer convict settlement as Commandant, but left in April 1827 when recalled to Sydney for indifferent performance. At this point Port Macquarie’s life as a formal penal settlement had less than three years to run: the convict station was closed in 1830 and the area opened up to free settlement. This of course did not mean that there would be no convicts in Port Macquarie: those that were there would be assigned servants, not incarcerated within a convict barracks.

Archibald Innes and Lake Innes House

Archibald Clunes Innes became for a number of years a successful entrepreneur in the Port Macquarie district. As a former Commandant of the penal settlement there, he had foreseen the region’s potential as a gateway to the New England region. Archibald Innes married Margaret

Macleay, one of Alexander Macleay's daughters, in 1829, and on 27 August that year he applied for a grant of 2560 acres in the Port Macquarie area. When Port Macquarie was opened up to private settlement from 13 August 1830 Innes was one of the first to take up his land grant on what was called 'Burrawan' by the local Birpai people, but which Innes promptly renamed 'Lake Innes'. He amassed a number of land grants in the region and in the New England area (the town of Glen Innes is named after him), and for a while made a tidy profit supplying agricultural products to the various commissariats in the region.



The construction of Lake Innes House and Estate by convict labour began in 1830-31 and was completed in 1839. The

Estate had a farm village and a vineyard, bricks were made on the Estate for the various construction projects, and the 'stately home' that was Lake Innes House was the last word in colonial luxury – it even boasted a flushing toilet with a Wedgwood blue-and-white-transfer ware bowl; and an 'Old Master' painting that was attributed by one guest to the Italian Renaissance artist Paolo Veronese (it wasn't actually by Paolo, but has been identified as probably the work of one of his sons). The large and luxuriously fitted stables held horses that were lent to Innes's guests who, if they were single males, had their own accommodation in what was called 'Bachelors' Hall'. Lake Innes House also held a fine library. Archibald Innes's niece Annabella (Innes) Boswell would later describe



the layout of Lake Innes House in her journal:

'I have by me a rough plan of the house and grounds, stables and outbuildings, which gives some idea of their size and extent. There was a wide double veranda to the front of the house, which faced the Lake and the setting sun. A veranda extended along the whole of the south

side. The drawing room was a large square room at the corner, 20 ft by 24 ft, with two French windows to the west, and two to the south, opening on to the veranda...’

Annabella Boswell and Lake Innes House

Annabella Boswell (née Innes), was born on 16 September 1826 at Yarrows, on the Bathurst Plains, the eldest daughter of landholder George Innes and his wife Georgianna neé Campbell. [Ngairre M Souter (1967) ‘Boswell, Annabella Alexandria Campbell (1826-1914), Australian Dictionary of Biography online edition, and, publication note in Morton Herman (ed) (1965/1987) *Annabella Boswell’s Journal*: xvii-xix] The Innes family had settled on *Yarrows*, one of the first land grants in the district, in 1823. The family moved north to *Glen Alice*, a cattle property at Capertee, in 1834. Annabella was educated at Mrs Evans’ boarding school in Sydney and by governesses on *Glen Alice*. In 1839 the family moved again, this time to Port Macquarie where her uncle Archibald Innes had substantial landholdings. George died a short time after and the family moved back south, sold up *Glen Alice* and, after two years at Parramatta resettled at Port Macquarie in 1843. Annabella visited many parts of the colony including Bathurst, Sydney, Liverpool, Capertee, South Creek, Parramatta, Newcastle and Port Macquarie. Her diaries are most detailed in their portrayal of Port Macquarie where they contain a wealth of information about everyday for the ‘genteel occupants’ of this ‘rough, harsh land’. [Morton Herman (ed) (1965/1987) *Annabella Boswell’s Journal*: x-xi] Later in life she compiled extracts from her youthful journal into a publication, *Annabella Boswell’s Journal*.

Annabella Innes, as she was when she first penned her journal from the age of 12, was connected by marriage and social networks to the emergent intellectual and cultural milieu of colonial NSW in the 1830s and 1840s. By disposition and education Annabella possessed a strong spirit of inquiry, which can only have been enhanced by living among members of the Macleay family of scientific collectors and botanical artists, and meeting others on a regular basis.

Annabella Innes had encountered the intellectual environment of the Macleay family well before she lived at Lake Innes House. In 1834 she had gone to school in Bridge Street, Sydney, and out of school time ‘made many happy visits to our kind friends Mr and Mrs Macleay at Macquarie Place ... Miss Macleay, afterwards Mrs Harrington [*sic*], was very kind to me.’ Miss Macleay was Frances Leonora (Fanny) Macleay, herself an extremely capable natural history artist with wide-ranging scientific

interests. [Windshuttle writes of Fanny Macleay: ‘Fanny’s intellectual interest in natural history was unusual for a woman of the period. Few women had a knowledge of these subjects and fewer still engaged in such a wide range of fields. Most women of the time limited their interest in studying nature to botany and horticulture and confined their activities to collecting and drawing plants, pressing flowers and collecting shells. Fanny pursued these normal activities but added the new scientific fields of the period to her interests: entomology, zoology, ornithology, palaeontology, mineralogy, astronomy and landscape gardening ... While the other sisters studied botanical drawing and painting and collected seeds, none were as absorbed in natural history as Fanny. Hence many of the tasks involved in maintaining their father’s collections fell to her. She was his main assistant in his research and in collecting specimens in both England and New South Wales.’ (p48)]

She obviously appreciated Annabella’s lively intelligence, as the latter reported, ‘I have since heard that she wished to adopt me and educate me herself.’ [*Annabella Boswell’s Journal: an account of early Port Macquarie*, edited by Morton Herman, first published Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1965, this edition Angus and Robertson, 1981, p3. Sadly, Fanny Macleay died in 1836 at the age of 43, six weeks after she married Thomas Harrington, her father’s assistant as Colonial Secretary.]

At Easter that year the overflowing Tank Stream flooded the house where Annabella was living; but ‘next day I was sent for by Mrs Macleay, and spent in her house one of the happiest times of my young life: all were so kind and clever, and all their surroundings were so refined and luxurious in comparison to anything I, who had lived mostly in the bush, was accustomed to.’ [*Annabella Boswell’s Journal: an account of early Port Macquarie*, edited by Morton Herman, first published Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1965, this edition Angus and Robertson, 1981, p4]

Nine years later when, as a teenager, Annabella Innes went to live at Lake Innes House, she again came under the Macleay family’s intellectual influence. Her aunt, Margaret (Macleay) Innes, became also her teacher. Margaret Innes, in line with the family ethos, established a good library and, in order to ensure that her own children and nieces were provided with a decent education, supervised their learning herself, as Annabella recalled in later life:

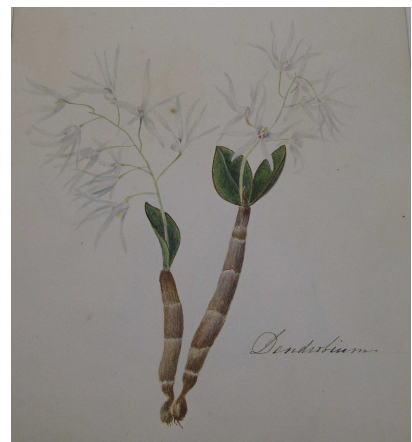


‘She carried on the schoolroom work admirably, and allowed no trifling or idle moments. How she managed to devote the morning so entirely to us, having so many other claims on her attention, is now a mystery to me. We flew to the schoolroom at ten o’clock from the breakfast table; she followed in half an hour and remained till one o’clock.

We at once read together the Psalms of the day, said texts, Collects, a hymn or portion of Scripture; then followed quickly our various lessons, which we had prepared before breakfast or the previous evening; then we did sums for half an hour ... after that we wrote to dictation, our interest in this never flagging, and our anxiety about our mis-spells was never-failing. [Annabella Boswell's Journal: an account of early Port Macquarie, edited by Morton Herman, first published Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1965, this edition Angus and Robertson, 1981, p53]

Annabella also took an educated interest in the natural world. When a comet appeared in the sky for a fortnight in March 1843 she recorded its appearance meticulously in her Journal; and she and her cousin Dido set themselves a target for painting wildflowers gathered in the area, as Annabella recorded:

‘About this time some of my former love of drawing began to revive, and Dido and I resolved to paint at least one wildflower every week ... We collected flowers and berries of every description.’ [Annabella Boswell's Journal, November 1843]



Annabella also gave graphic descriptions of some of the lavish social occasions at Lake Innes House, in particular a grand banquet held on the

occasion of Margaret Innes's father Alexander Macleay's visit for an election, 22 June 1843:

'The table presented a splendid appearance, being laid very handsomely for eighteen persons. The epergne was quite beautiful, and when placed in the centre of the table the flowers were as high as the lamp. I must own I was rather glad when it was removed. There were two silver wine coolers with light wines, and branch candlesticks with wax candles, and four silver side dishes: we had two soups and an immense variety of dishes. Bruce [the piper] and the butler waited, and we had four footmen in livery. I felt quite dazzled, as I had never been at so splendid an entertainment before.'

Dickens at Lake Innes House

Despite Darwin's disparagement of Australians' book-buying culture, Dickens's works were widely circulated in the Australian colonies, and enthusiastically received. In 1938 the *Pickwick Papers* were published in a pirated edition in Tasmania that sold 30,000 copies in the Australian colonies. Pickwick mania took other forms: a Christmas party with a Pickwickian theme was held on Kangaroo Island. And Dickens' other works were just as eagerly seized upon and read. When Dickens died in 1870 his death was mourned in Australia as if he were a national hero. [Roslyn Russell, *Literary Links*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1997, p.39]

Annabella and her extended family at Lake Innes House were among the many Australians who eagerly read the latest novels by Dickens. She recorded a couple of occasions on which the family gathered to hear his works read aloud:

'During my uncle's absence we have dined early, and, having the house to ourselves, have sat in the veranda near the library, which is always shaded and cool. One of party reads aloud while the others work. Our book is *The Old Curiosity Shop*. We are deeply interested in Little Nell, and enjoy it doubly when my aunt reads.' [Annabella Boswell's Journal, 18 December 1844]

'Mr Smith has been reading aloud to us every evening from after tea till ten o'clock, and has finished *Martin Chuzzlewit*. It is just the book for reading aloud, and he reads very well. I think even the author would say he had done it justice. We have had some fun appropriating characters from it. Margaret is Mercy, I am Charity, Dido is Miss Todgers, and

patronises Mr Smith, who is pronounced by all to be her ‘youngest young man (no doubt).’ [Annabella Boswell’s Journal, 31 August 1847]

End of an era at Lake Innes House

The luxurious and genteel life led by the Innes family at Lake Innes House was not to last, as Archibald Innes plunged deeper and deeper into debt during the 1840s. The winding back of the convict system of fixed penal settlements meant that supplying the commissariat was no longer a lucrative option for a man who was by nature extravagant and unable to live within his means. Annabella graphically captures the mood of impending economic depression in her Journal: “‘Bad times’ is at present the too general subject of conversation; everyone takes an interest in it, and it is melancholy to hear of the number of people who are absolutely in want of the necessaries of life, who lately were in affluence. No one seems to have an idea as to how it will all end.’ (75)

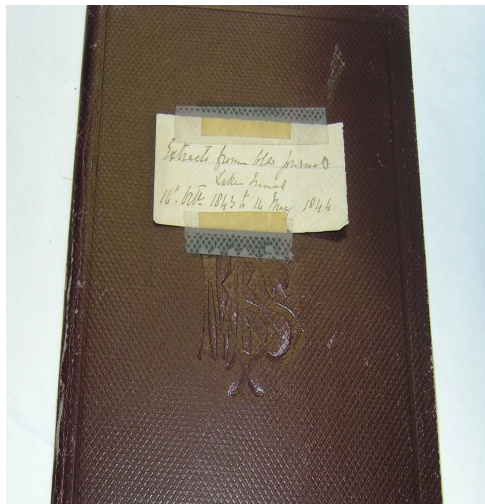


These forebodings were correct. Archibald Innes’s business ventures, such as a road to New England to bring produce from the hinterland to Port Macquarie, failed; as did his shipping interests. The ending of assignment of convict servants in 1838 meant that he struggled to keep the reduced staff he employed. The severe economic depression of the 1840s brought an end to Innes’s career as an independent businessman, and he became a gold commissioner and police magistrate at Hanging Rock, then moved to Newcastle, where he died on 29 August 1857. He was buried in the grounds of Christ Church Cathedral, Newcastle. Margaret Innes died at Lake Innes House on 6 September 1858. Lake Innes House nevertheless remained in Innes family hands until it was leased out by the Innes’ heir, Gustavus, then passed to a series of owners until, in 1905, a bushfire swept the property. It was prey to vandals and fell into ruin, and in 1987 came under the control of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of NSW. The site, for many years surrendered to the encroaching bush, was cleared of invasive vegetation. Archaeological excavation was carried out in the

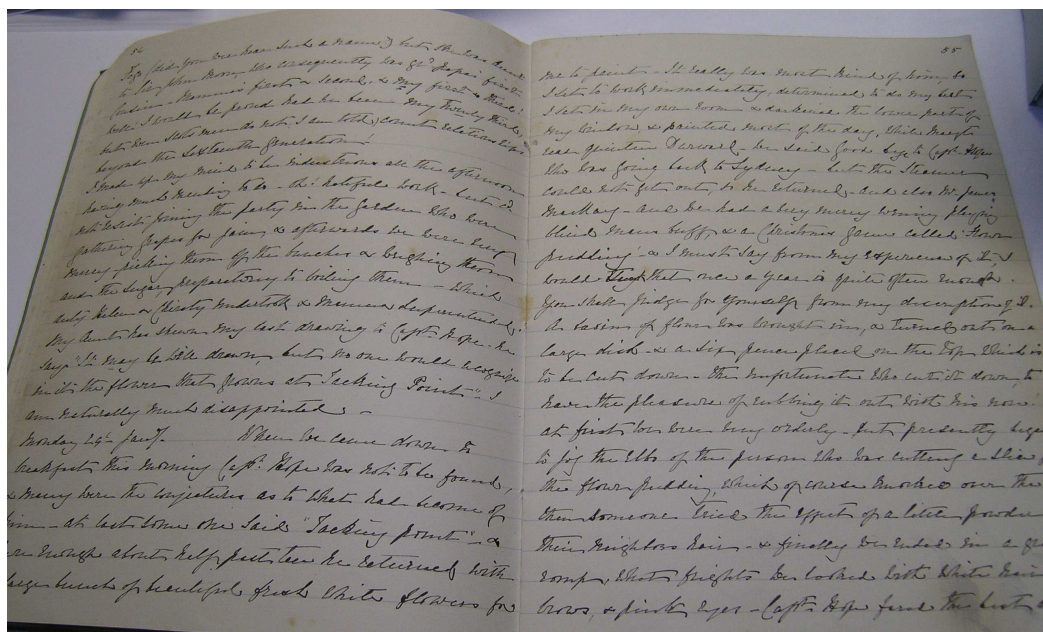
1990s, and the site was stabilised. It can now be visited on guided tours conducted by the National Parks and Wildlife Service NSW.

Annabella Boswell's Journal

Annabella married Patrick Charles Douglas Boswell (1816-92) at Newcastle in June 1856, and the couple had one son and three daughters. Boswell was employed in the Bank of New South Wales as an accountant, later (1858) rising to the position of manager. In 1864 the Boswells travelled to Scotland from where, after inheriting the family estate, *Garrallan*, Patrick resigned from the bank in 1865. Annabella died at *Garrallan* on 25 October 1914. Annabella Boswell's journal was first published in Scotland late in the 19th century as *Early Reminiscences and*



Gleanings from an Old Journal. A copy somehow found its way to the Port Macquarie Bank of New South Wales and was acquired by the Hastings River Historical Society in 1956. Richard Ratcliffe was able to purchase original drawings and watercolours plus a transcribed version of the original diary and a number of other items from a member of the Boswell family. It was republished by Angus and Robertson in 1965, and again in the 1980s, and brought to a wider audience the only journal written in colonial NSW by an intelligent and well-educated teenage girl.



SHIRLEY AND THE LUDDITES

A Talk given to the ABA on 2nd May 2009

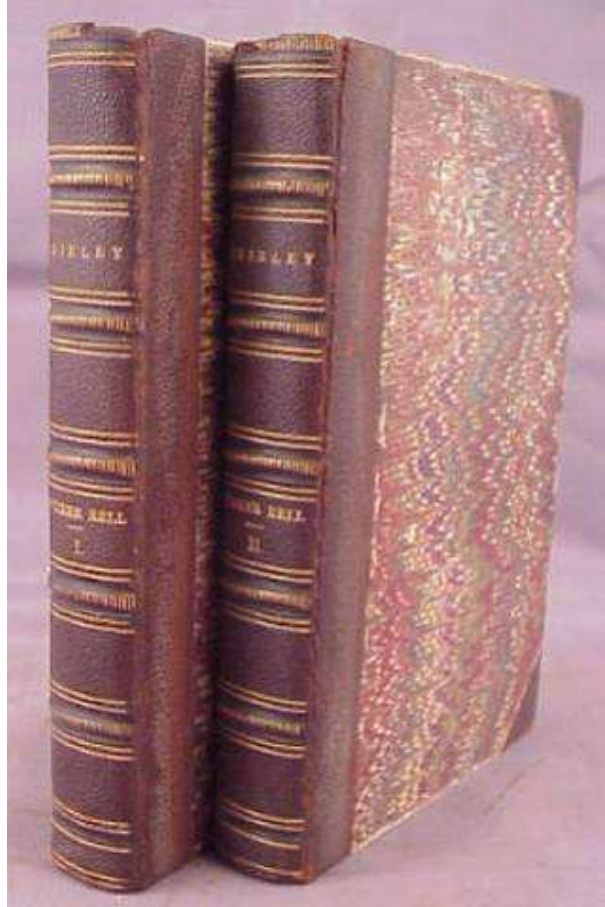
by Christopher Cooper

It's fitting that our book of the year is *Shirley* because it's set in a period of great economic turmoil. In the early 1800s in England there'd been many years of excessive speculation. People had invested large sums in wild schemes in distant parts of the world – railways in Brazil, canals in Africa. The promise of large profits was all that was needed for one to be sure that they were wise investments. Most of these schemes were never completed – many were not even begun.

In 1810 things began to go badly. There was widespread financial panic. Banks failed. Many commercial and industrial companies went into bankruptcy. The government had to inject six million pounds of capital to support the remaining banks. Millions were thrown out of work. Sound familiar?

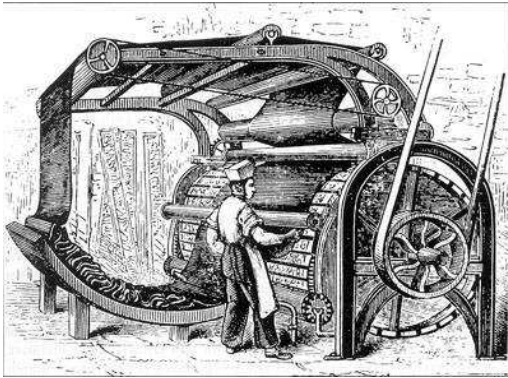
The causes were somewhat different to our present crisis. Sub-prime mortgages hadn't been heard of. One of the biggest reasons was the war with Napoleon. As well as it being costly to wage, it cut off all possibility of trade with the continent. Even trade with America was at a standstill because of the American Non-Intercourse Act that was passed in February 1811. Britain insisted that neutral countries, such as America, should not trade with France. America thumbed her nose at this so Britain cut off trade with America. Up to the passing of this act many firms in England's north had been exporting up to one third of their production to the New World.

Unemployment in Lancashire and Yorkshire reached 20% and those who were lucky enough to still be working had to accept pay cuts of 20%



to 40%. Meanwhile prices of food soared following two or three bad harvests.

The French Revolution was still a recent memory and although the English lower classes were less hot-headed than their French counterparts, when families go hungry and fathers were unable to feed their children, desperation set in.



What added insult to injury were the new machines that were being introduced. One unskilled worker could, with the aid of such machines, do the work of half a dozen skilled textile workers. This led to riots and mobs of workers breaking into factories at night and destroying these hated machines. This uprising was known as the Luddite

movement.

The general in charge of these amateur troops was known as General Ludd. There was in fact no such person. It was a convenient fiction but one that united workers in Lancashire, Yorkshire and some other nearby counties. Mill owners would receive scribbled warnings that unless they removed their frames these frames would be broken, and if there was resistance, the mill owner risked his life. These documents were signed by this non-existent General Ludd.



Here is one such warning:
Sir,

By General Ludd's Express Commands I am come to Worksop to enquire of your character towards our cause and I am sorry to say find it to correspond with your conduct you lately shewed towards us. Remember the time is fast approaching when men of your stamp will be brought to Repentance.

You may be called upon soon. Remember you are a marked man.
Yours for General Ludd,
a True Man

Mr Wynnes
late foreman of a jury held
at Nottingham 16 March - 121
Sir
by General Lubbo Express Express
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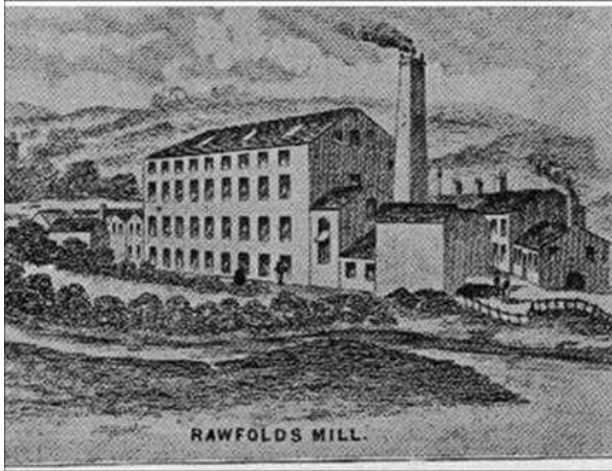
It seemed that the name came from a reckless youth named Ludlam who, when his father, a framework knitter, told him to “square the needles”, took a hammer to them and squared them effectually by beating them into a heap.

Now Charlotte Brontë had no first hand experience of these events. The Yorkshire frame-breaking took place in 1812 and she wouldn't be born till 1816. However her father, Patrick Bronte, was living in Dewsbury in 1812 and that was right in the heart of the Yorkshire

disturbances. It's said that his practice of taking a loaded pistol to bed with him every night dated from this time.

Charlotte also heard first hand reports when she was a student at Roe Head School, within walking distance of Rawfolds Mill, the scene of the most famous Luddite riot.

When she decided to write *Shirley* she sent for copies of the *Leeds Mercury* for 1812 so that she could read the original accounts.



Her first thought, in 1847 when she began writing *Shirley*, was to set it in more recent times and to build it around the Chartist Riots. But she was persuaded that these events were too recent and would be somewhat controversial. So she moved the story back 30 years to the Luddite uprisings of

1812.

The Luddite movement wasn't the first where workers resisted change. But they came after a long period of relative prosperity and a new generation of machines were being introduced.

To put things in perspective this is a summary of the industrial strife of the period:

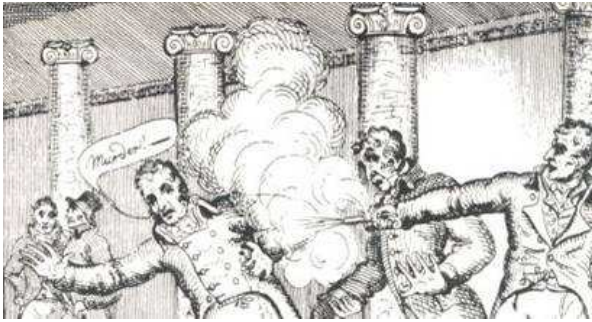
- (1) The Luddite riots of 1812.
- (2) The Assassination of the Prime Minister in 1812.
- (3) The Peterloo Massacre in 1819.
- (4) The Rising at Grange Moor in 1820.
- (5) The Chartist Risings of 1839.
- (6) The Plug Riots of 1842.

(1) We'll be focusing mostly on the Luddites so we'll pass over them at this stage. What were these other disturbances?

(2) In 1812 the Prime Minister was Spencer Percival.



On 11th May of that year he was assassinated in the lobby of the Houses of Parliament.



This was one month after the attack on Rawfolds Mill. It was thought that this was a Luddite outrage.



However it turned out to be the work of a deranged and disaffected merchant, John Bellingham, who blamed the government for his business difficulties.

(3) Although the Luddite Riots had been put down and the leaders hanged, unrest merely went underground. However political agitation kept within the law and took the form of meetings. There were local groups, known as Hampden clubs, devoted to political discussion. Out of these there rose a leader who became the idol of the working classes, Henry Hunt. He was a charismatic orator.

A large outdoor gathering was arranged for 16th August 1819 in St Peter's Fields in Manchester. Workers marched from many outlying towns and converged on St Peter Square. There were over 80,000 working class people present – workers as well as many of their wives and children.

There was a tremendous shout as Orator Hunt, as he was known, arrived. He removed his white hat (a symbol of radicalism) and began to speak. The authorities had been





worried that the intention of the meeting was not the peaceful one that the organisers had intended. The local magistrates had ordered the meeting to be broken up and the militia, including many soldiers on horseback, charged the throng. By the time the crowd had dissipated there were 11 bodies lying on the ground and 500 were injured.

The Peterloo massacre, as it was called, was named after St Peters Fields with the “loo” suffix comparing it to Waterloo.

(4) The uprising in 1820 wasn't intended just as a discussion on freedom and democracy. The workers in the area of Dewsbury, Heckmondwicke,

CHARTIST DEMONSTRATION!!

“PEACE and ORDER” is our MOTTO!

TO THE WORKING MEN OF LONDON.

Fellow Men,—The Press having misrepresented and vilified us and our intentions, the Demonstration Committee therefore consider it to be their duty to state that the grievances of us (the Working Classes) are deep and our demands just. We and our families are pining in misery, want, and starvation! We demand a fair day's wages for a fair day's work! We are the slaves of capital—we demand protection to our labour. We are political serfs—we demand to be free. We therefore invite all well disposed to join in our peaceful procession on

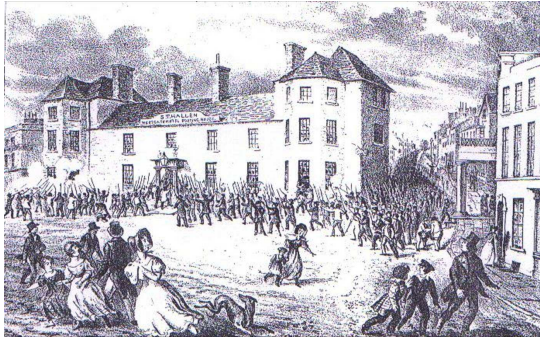
MONDAY NEXT, April 10,
As it is for the good of all that we seek to remove the evils under which we groan.

The following are the places of Meeting of THE CHARTISTS, THE TRADES, THE IRISH CONFEDERATE & REPEAL BODIES:
East Division on Stepney Green at 8 o'clock;
City and Finsbury Division on Clerkenwell Green at 9 o'clock;
West Division in Russell Square at 9 o'clock;
and the South Division in Peckham Fields at 9 o'clock, and proceed from thence to Kennington Common.

Signed on behalf of the Committee, JOHN ARNOTT, Sec.
Water Millner, Print, 1, Edward Street, (near Grand Street)

Birstall and Brighouse assembled on Friday 31st March 1820 and their aim was to capture Huddersfield. They were to converge at midnight on the town. But the numbers who turned up were disappointingly small and it was decided to disband. So by the time the soldiers arrived there was no disturbance to break up.

(5) A few weeks after Queen Victoria's coronation there was a great Reform meeting in Birmingham and that was the beginning of the Chartist movement.



The basis of Chartism was a charter of rights. Chartists believed that many of the injustices of the day could be remedied by reforming parliament. One of the leaders of this movement was Joseph Raynor Stephens. He urged the government to introduce a 10 hour bill, to shorten the working day in the cotton

mills to 10 hours. At the time the usual mill worker started at 5am and didn't finish till 8pm. He also opposed the Poor Law with its associated workhouses. This had the effect of forcing children to work in factories to avoid the evils of the workhouse. Stephens became quite famous and his speeches often attracted up to twenty thousand people.

After one meeting the crowd met with firearms and banners and was described in the press as being "of a most violent and inflammatory character". The crowd marched into the centre of Hyde and, after much shouting and discharging of firearms, the crowd dispersed in the early hours of the next morning. Although there was not much real violence Stephens was arrested and charged with inciting the people to riot and break the peace. He was convicted and served eighteen months in Chester Castle.

The Charter that gave its name to the movement had six points.

- (1) A vote for every man twenty-one years and over provided they were of sound mind and were not in prison.
- (2) Voting by secret ballot.
- (3) No property qualification for members of parliament.
- (4) Payment of MPs so that one didn't have to have independent means to enter Parliament.
- (5) Equal-sized constituencies.
- (6) Annual elections.

A petition asking for these to be implemented was presented to Parliament in 1839 without success. Several outbreaks of violence followed. Several of the leaders were arrested and tried. One of these leaders, John Frost, claimed that he had toured industrial Wales urging the people not to break the law. However he was guilty of using language that could be interpreted as being a call to arms. Frost's stance seemed to be somewhat ambivalent – was he calling for peaceful protest or for violence? Some of the uprisings that Frost seemed to encourage were disasters and ended in loss of life or arrests. Another Chartist described Frost as putting “a sword in my hand and a rope around my neck”.

(6) The year 1841 was a bad one for the cotton and woollen trades. Demand had stagnated and workers were working short weeks with reduced wages. Many more people joined the Chartist movement. As described by one of the leaders the ranks swelled by many workers being recruited by ‘Recruiting Sergeant Hunger’ and ably supported by ‘Corporal Discontent’. While the leaders wanted it to be a peaceful and lawful organisation they lost control and the rank and file members wanted to pursue their aims by more direct means. The Government built barracks in the area so that troops would be on hand to defend mills from violence.

In 1842 the Chartist petition, this time with over 3 million signatures, was again presented to Parliament, and again it was ignored. Discontent continued to grow.

In July 1842 one cotton manufacturer gave his workers notice of wage reductions and soon many other mill owners did the same. On 28th July 1842 a meeting in Lancashire called for a “fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work”. Chartists William Aitken and Richard Pilling made threatening speeches against the mill owners. A few of the mill owners backed down but William Bayley stood firm and his workers went on strike.

On 8th August a mob of nearly 3000 workers marched around the local mills and stopped their production, using violence where necessary. The size of the mob grew to 5000 and the mill owners were so fearful that, when they heard the procession coming, they stopped the engine and turned out all the workers.

The next day the crowd had grown to over ten thousand and marched on Manchester “to meet the Masters as the Masters would not meet them”. A small army of 480 men of the 60th Rifles, 150 soldiers on horseback from the Royal Dragoons and fifty men from the Royal Artillery were there to meet them.

The procession looked peaceful and was led by a large number of decently dressed women. However, while the soldiers were distracted by this large gathering small groups broke away and were busy turning out the mills.

The procession was instructed to march through the city and return peacefully to Ashton-under-Lyne. Many did so but others broke off into small, turbulent mobs who rampaged through Manchester and Salford stopping mills and looting shops.



On 12th August an estimated crowd of twenty thousand men and women marched into Todmorden from various parts of Lancashire, successfully advising mill-owners of the advisability of closing down their factories. The next day they marched into Halifax and were joined by another four or five thousand from the

Bradford area. They converged on the mills that were still operating and emptied the mill dams and removed the plugs from the boilers. Most mills and factories at that time relied on steam power. And to generate steam you need a boiler. And at the bottom of every boiler is a plug, which can be removed to empty the boiler for maintenance.



So the Plug Rioters broke into mills, removed the plug and emptied the water. All they stole was a tiny, inexpensive, plug. But without that plug the mill couldn't operate, and it was not the sort of item the mill-owner thought would need a spare. Production was halted until he could get a new plug made.

In the Todmorden area, mills voluntarily stopped work when confronted by the plug drawers but in the Halifax area troops and militias were brought in. Fifteen thousand protesters gathered on Skircoat Moor and moved off to attack mills. They were eventually dispersed by soldiers and eighteen were arrested. The next day protesters, having failed



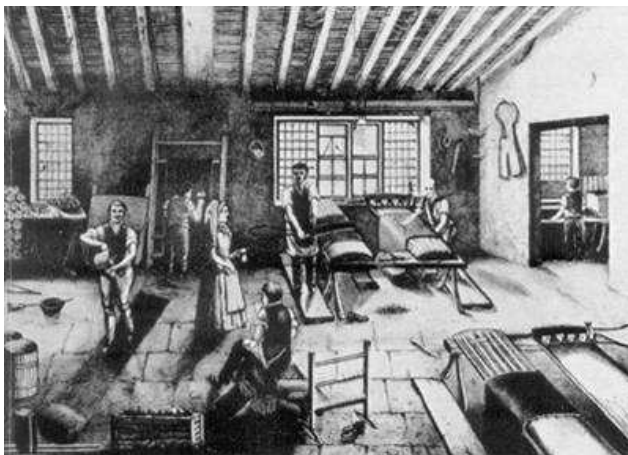
to rescue Chartist prisoners, ambushed a troop of soldiers at Salterhebble and, in a violent encounter, caused serious damage to the troop. They would have been overcome if it wasn't for reinforcements arriving just in time. This was the closest that troops came to being overwhelmed during the disturbances.

For some days afterwards Halifax remained in a state of high alert until the rioters returned home. After these confrontations a kind of peace returned to the region.

At the start of 1848 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published the Communist Manifesto in London, advocating a European revolution. On 10th April 1848 Fergus O'Connor organised a mass meeting on Kennington Common which would form a procession to present another petition to Parliament, asking for their Charter to be enacted. There were probably fifty thousand people present that day. The Government had arranged for eight thousand soldiers to be in London, along with 150,000 special constables. However the meeting was peaceful, though the military threatened to intervene if the Chartists attempted to cross the Thames.

O'Connor was permitted to present the petition. He claimed it to have over five million signatures, though it proved to have a little less than two million. Also many were discovered to be forgeries. Some had signed themselves Queen Victoria or Mr Punch. Although Parliament again ignored the petition it is worth noting that all the reforms sought except for the request for annual parliaments were adopted over the succeeding decades.

But for readers of *Shirley* the original Luddite Riots are of most interest and these I shall now focus on. The beginnings were in

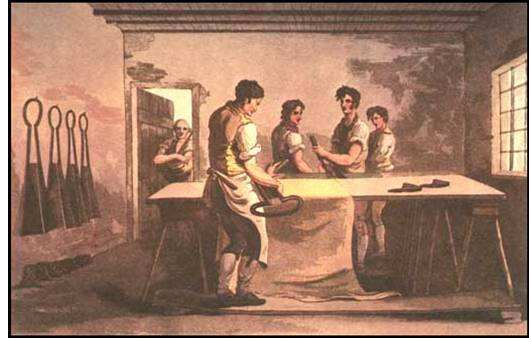


Nottinghamshire in 1811 but by 1812 they'd spread to Yorkshire. The most famous incident was the attack on Rawfolds Mill on 11th April 1812. This mill was owned by Mr Cartwright who had introduced cropping frames which threatened the livelihood of the croppers.

Cropping was a finishing process to certain types of cloth,

whereby the surface is brushed with stiff brushes so that the fibre is raised a couple of millimetres. The cropper's job was to use giant shears and to cut the nap to a uniform height. It was not unlike the process of mowing a lawn – with large scissors!

It was very hard work, involved long hours, and required a great deal of skill. The cropping frames, on the other hand, merely required the cloth to be attached to the frame while steam-driven shears moved across the surface and did the cropping. An unskilled labourer was capable of doing the work of six skilled croppers in much less time. And the finish was almost as good.



Charlotte sets the scene historically in the second chapter of *Shirley*:

The period of which I write was an overshadowed one in British history, and especially in the history of the Northern provinces. War was then at its height. Europe was all involved therein. England, if not weary, was worn with long resistance – yes, and half her people were weary too, and cried out for peace on any terms. National honour was become a mere empty name, of no value in the eyes of many, because their sight was dim with famine; and for a morsel of meat they would have sold their birthright.

The 'Orders in Council,' provoked by Napoleon's Milan and Berlin decrees, and forbidding neutral powers to trade with France, had, by offending America, cut off the principal market of the Yorkshire woollen trade, and brought it consequently to the verge of ruin. Minor foreign markets were glutted, and would receive no more. The Brazils, Portugal, Sicily, were all overstocked by nearly two years' consumption. At this crisis certain inventions in machinery were introduced into the staple manufactures of the north, which, greatly reducing the number of hands necessary to be employed, threw thousands out of work, and left them without legitimate means of sustaining life. A bad harvest supervened. Distress reached its climax. Endurance, overgoaded, stretched the hand of fraternity to sedition. The throes of a sort of moral earthquake were felt heaving under the hills of the northern counties. But, as is usual in such cases, nobody took much notice, when a food-riot broke out in a manufacturing town, when a gig-mill was burnt to the ground, or a manufacturer's house was attacked, the furniture thrown into the streets,

and the family forced to flee for their lives, some local measures were or were not taken by the local magistracy. A ringleader was detected, or more frequently suffered to elude detection; newspaper paragraphs were written on the subject, and there the thing stopped.

December 23, 1811.

WHEREAS

A most violent Attack was made about 8 o'clock last Night, on the House of Mr. JOHN BRETNALL, at Locko Grange, in the County of Derby, by Eight or more Persons, two of whom with their Faces blacked & armed with Pistols, entered the House, but in consequence of the spirited Resistance of the Family, retired without effecting their villainous purposes.

One of the Men about five feet nine inches high and broad set, is supposed to have his Head, Face, and Neck much injured in a struggle; and another Man about six feet high is supposed to be wounded by a Bill Hook; the other Men who did not enter the House, as far as could be distinguished from the darkness of the night, appeared to be above the common size.

A REWARD OF

FIFTY POUNDS

Has been offered by his Royal Highness the Prince Regent on the Conviction of EACH PERSON concerned in any Outrages of the above nature, and a free Pardon in case the Person giving such information as may lead to the Conviction shall be liable to be prosecuted for the same.

(J. Trevelyan, Printer, Derby.)

WHEREAS,

Several EVIL-MINDED PERSONS have assembled together in a riotous Manner, and DESTROYED a NUMBER of

FRAMES,

In different Parts of the Country :

THIS IS
TO GIVE NOTICE,
That any Person who will give Information of any Person or Persons thus wickedly

BREAKING THE FRAMES,
shall, upon CONVICTION, receive

50 GUINEAS
REWARD.

And any Person who was actively engaged in RIOTING, who will suppress his Associates, shall, upon CONVICTION, receive the same Reward, and every Effort made to procure his Pardon.

Information to be given to Messrs. COLDHAM and ENFIELD.
Notary, March 26, 1811.

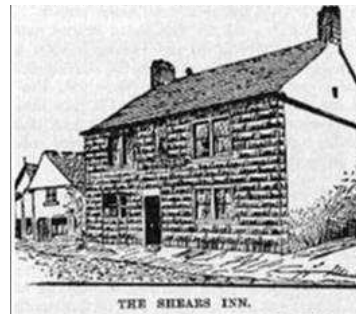
B. Stone, Print. King's

As to the sufferers, whose sole inheritance was labour, and who had lost that inheritance – who could not get work, and consequently could not get wages, and consequently could not get bread – they were left to suffer on, perhaps inevitably left. It would not do to stop the progress of invention, to damage science by discouraging its improvements; the war could not be terminated; efficient relief could not be raised. There was no help then; so the unemployed underwent their destiny – ate the bread and drank the waters of affliction.

Misery generates hate. These sufferers hated the machines which they believed took their bread from them; they hated the buildings which contained those machines; they hated the manufacturers who owned those buildings. In the parish of Briarfield, with which we have at present to do, Hollow's Mill was the place held most abominable; Gérard Moore, in his double character of semi-foreigner and thorough going progressist, the man most abominated. And it perhaps rather agreed with Moore's temperament than otherwise to be generally hated, especially when he believed the thing for which he was hated a right and an expedient thing; and it was with a sense of warlike excitement he, on this night, sat in his counting-house waiting the arrival of his frame-laden wagons. Malone's coming and company were, it may be, most unwelcome to him. He would

have preferred sitting alone, for he liked a silent, sombre, unsafe solitude. His watchman's musket would have been company enough for him; the full-flowing beck in the den would have delivered continuously the discourse most genial to his ear.

In 1812 a meeting was held at the Shears Inn in Liversedge. It comprised croppers from Cleckheaton, Heckmondwicke, Gomersal, Birstall, Mirfield, Brighouse and Elland. One of the men at this meeting was John Walker. John Walker took his mug of ale, began to sing.



THE CROPPERS SONG

Come cropper lads of high renown,
Who love to drink good ale that's brown,
And strike each haughty tyrant down,

With hatchet, pike and gun!

Oh, the cropper lads for me,

The gallant lads for me,

With lusty stroke,

The shear frames broke,

The cropper lads for me!

What though the specials still advance,

And soldiers nightly round us prance;

The cropper lads still lead the dance.

With hatchet pike and gun!

Oh the cropper lads for me,

The gallant lads for me,

Who with lusty stroke

The shear frames broke,

The cropper lads for me!

And night by night when all is still

And the moon is hid behind the hill,

We forward march to do our will

With hatchet, pike and gun!

Great Enoch still shall lead the van.

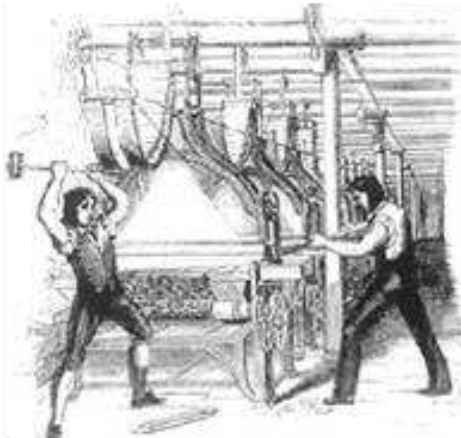
Stop him who dare! stop him who can!

Press forward every gallant man

With hatchet, pike and gun!

Now the specials were the special constables. Pikes can be either picks used for digging, or pitch-forks. The former would seem to be the more effective tool for braking down doors etc.

Great Enoch was the type of large hammer that was used to break the machines. Ironically it was named after a local mill-owner who'd had his machines beaten by these heavy hammers. The Luddites thought it a great joke to use the name of the victim for the weapon of destruction.



The decision of this meeting was to intercept Cartwright's new machines on Hartshead Moor. This took place and the machines were smashed and the drivers were blindfolded and bound. Charlotte used this incident in *Shirley*.

The night was still, dark, and stagnant: the water yet rushed on full and fast; its flow almost seemed a flood in the utter silence. Moore's ear, however, caught another sound very distant but yet dissimilar, broken and rugged – in short, a sound of heavy wheels crunching a stony road. He returned to the counting-house and lit a lantern, with which he walked down the mill-yard, and proceeded to open the gates. The big wagons were coming on; the dray-horses' huge hoofs were heard splashing in the mud and water. Moore hailed them.

'Hey, Joe Scott! Is all right?'

Probably Joe Scott was yet at too great a distance to hear the inquiry. He did not answer it.

'Is all right, I say?' again asked Moore, when the elephant-like leader's nose almost touched his.

Some one jumped out from the foremost wagon into the road; a voice cried aloud, 'Ay, ay, divil; all's raight! We've smashed 'em.'

And there was a run. The wagons stood still; they were now deserted.

'Joe Scott!' No Joe Scott answered. 'Murgatroyd! Pighills! Sykes!' No reply. Mr. Moore lifted his lantern and looked into the vehicles. There was neither man nor machinery; they were empty and abandoned.

Now Mr. Moore loved his machinery. He had risked the last of his capital on the purchase of these frames and shears which tonight had been expected. Speculations most important to his interests depended on the results to be wrought by them. Where were they?

The words ‘we've smashed 'em’ rang in his ears. How did the catastrophe affect him? By the light of the lantern he held were his features visible, relaxing to a singular smile – the smile the man of determined spirit wears when he reaches a juncture in his life where this determined spirit is to feel a demand on its strength, when the strain is to be made, and the faculty must bear or break. Yet he remained silent, and even motionless; for at the instant he neither knew what to say nor what to do. He placed the lantern on the ground, and stood with his arms folded, gazing down and reflecting.

An impatient trampling of one of the horses made him presently look up. His eye in the moment caught the gleam of something white attached to a part of the harness. Examined by the light of the lantern this proved to be a folded paper – a billet. It bore no address without, within was the superscription:

‘To the Divil of Hollow's Miln.’

We will not copy the rest of the orthography, which was very peculiar, but translate it into legible English. It ran thus:

‘Your hellish machinery is shivered to smash on Stilbro' Moor, and your men are lying bound hand and foot in a ditch by the roadside. Take this as a warning from men that are starving, and have starving wives and children to go home to when they have done this deed. If you get new machines, or if you otherwise go on as you have done, you shall hear from us again. Beware!’

‘Hear from you again? Yes, I'll hear from you again, and you shall hear from me. I'll speak to you directly. On Stilbro' Moor you shall hear from me in a moment.’

Later in the novel Moore's mill is attacked by night. This is based on the historical attack on Cartwrights Rawfold Mill in 1812.

To add authenticity to her account Charlotte sent away for copies of the *Leeds Intelligencer* where accounts of the Rawfold riot was given. Here is part of the account that she would have read.

RIOTS

FATAL CONFLICT

We have made it our business to collect a faithful narrative of the sanguinary contest that last Saturday night took place at Rawfolds, between the men calling themselves the army of General Ludd and the persons employed in guarding the property of Mr Cartwright.

It is known to our readers that the use of machinery for raising and dressing woollen cloth has of late become very unpopular amongst the shearmen in this part of the country; and that all mills where machinery of this kind is in use have been marked out for destruction and that in several of them the obnoxious machines have been destroyed.

At Rawfolds, near Cleckheaton, a place at an equal distance from Huddersfield and Leeds, from each of which it is about eight miles, a gentleman by the name of WILLIAM CARTRIGHT has a mill used for the purpose of dressing cloth in the way objected to by the men; on this mill it was understood that an attempt was to be made.

On Saturday night, at about half-past twelve, there was a firing heard from the north which was answered from the south, and again from west to east; this firing was accompanied by other signals and in a few minutes a number of armed men surprised the two sentinels without the mill, and having secured both their arms and their persons, made a violent attack upon the mill, broke in the window frames, and discharged a volley into the premises at the same instant.

Roused by this assault, the guard within the mill flew to arms, and discharged a heavy fire of musketry upon the assailants. The men attempted all the time to force an entrance, but without success, a number of voices crying continually “Bank up!” “Murder them!” “Pull down the door!” and mixing these exclamations with the most horrid imprecations.

Again and again the attempts to make a breach were repeated, with a firmness and consistency worthy of a better cause; but every renewed attempt ended in disappointment, while the flashes from the fire-arms of the insurgents served to direct the guards to their aim. For about 90 minutes this engagement continued with undiminished fury, till at length, finding all their efforts to enter the mill fruitless, the firing and hammering without began to abate and soon after the whole body of the assailants retreated with precipitation, leaving on the field such of their wounded as could not join in the retreat.

On the cessation of the firing, the ears of the guards were assailed with the cries of two unfortunate men, weltering in their blood, and writhing under the torture of mortal wounds. “For God’s sake,” cried one of them, “shoot me – put me out of my misery!”

The *Leeds Intelligencer* account goes on to chronicle the fate of these two unfortunate young men. Both died a few hours after they were removed from the field. The piece concludes with some reflections on the

incident that warn others “engaged in those violent proceedings of the fatal consequences that await them in the unequal contest which they are now waging with the civil and military power of the country – let them reflect that they themselves may be the next victims, and let them stop in this desperate career before it is too late.”

The Luddites had met very little resistance from the other mill-owners, who were reluctant to call in the authorities. They didn’t want further reprisals from the Luddites.

The Luddites were buoyed by their success in smashing the machines at many mills. They called a meeting at St Crispins Inn in Halifax. An upstairs room had been requisitioned for what the landlord thought was simply a meeting for the workers to air their grievances. The men attracted very little attention as they came in, in twos and threes, but a careful observer would have noted that they all headed for the stairs instead of either of the two downstairs bars.

The discussion centred around who should be next. Should it be William Cartwright, or another mill-owner John Horsfall, who should be dealt with next. Both were defiant, but Horsfall particularly annoyed the Luddites by his bragging and threatening what he’d do to them if they dared to attack his mill. It was decided to toss for it and heads came up, meaning that Cartwrights mill, known as Rawfolds Mill, would be next.

Charlotte’s description of Louis Moore’s Hollow Mill and its locality was of a different mill, but the events she describes are almost exactly as those that took place on 11th April 1812 at Rawfolds Mill.

During the previous week the Luddites had been busy collecting arms and other implements. Some time after dark little groups left their homes, giving a variety of excuses to their wives. They assembled near the Dumb Steeple, an upright stone at Cooper Bridge. Here the final orders were given. They were nearly all disguised, some just had their faces blackened, others wore masks. Many turned their coats inside out, some put checked shirts over their clothes and some had even borrowed a couple of items of clothing from their wives.

They were armed in an equally motley fashion. Some had guns, others just had stakes, some carried huge hammers and axes. By about 11:30 their number had grown to about a hundred and about fifty more joined them just before midnight.

Now since his frames were smashed on Hartshead Moor, Cartwright suspected that his mill would be attacked and he’d made several

preparations. Like Moore he'd taken to sleeping in the mill. He had rings and pulleys attached to the large flagstones that formed the floor of the second floor, so that they could be pulled up. This meant that from the safety of the second floor he could fire on any rioters coming in to the ground floor, and even, obliquely, he could fire out through the windows of the ground floor. He'd rigged up a bell on the roof so that in case of emergency he could call the soldiers who were billeted a couple of miles away.

At the top of the stairs he placed vats of acid that could be poured on any assailant who tried to reach the second floor. The doors were strengthened by means of large iron studs that would impede axes. He'd arranged for two of his men to keep watch at the mill gates but whether they were sympathetic to the rioters and turned a blind eye, or whether they were asleep, the fact was that only by the dog barking did Cartwright know that he had visitors.

Apart from the two useless watchers, Cartwright had four of his workers and five soldiers with him. They were quickly roused.

"Hatchet men to the front!" the leader of the attacking party, George Mellor, called out. They tried to break down the door, but the metal studs merely deflected their blows.

So the hammer men were brought to the front. Sparks flew but little impression was made. By this time they were surrounded by gunfire and the alarm bell was ringing.

"To the back, lads," Mellor cried out.

Cartwright heard and defiantly called out "come round, we'll meet you there". Some of them went round the back but it was so close to the mill dam that they were afraid of falling in, in the darkness. Indeed one of them *did* fall in and had to be pulled out, minus his hat.

So Mellor cried "to the counting house". This is the name that was used in those days for the mill office. Again Cartwright called out defiantly "welcome, we shall have you there".

In chapter 19 of Shirley Charlotte puts those exact words in the mouth of Robert Moore.

The rioters started to become discouraged. Mellor rushed about as if he was mad. Then he noticed that the hammer men had succeeded in breaking a panel in the door.

"The door is open," he yells.

But the lock held fast. And one of the soldiers fired through the hole and hit John Booth. A moment later Jonathan Dean, who was wielding a hammer, was struck and the hammer fell to the ground.

The gunfire had now lasted nearly half an hour. The bell had been heard for miles around and the flashes of musket fire could be seen from afar. And yet, strangely the military had not yet arrived. Yet the small resident garrison was effectively keeping the mob at bay. The Luddite leaders were now despairing and their ammunition was nearly gone. The call to retreat was given out. They left in several directions, splitting up into twos and threes and kept off the roads, so as to avoid notice. Two men, mortally wounded, were left behind.

The Reverend Hammond Roberson was a clergyman who supported the mill owners and wanted to be present if Rawfolds Mill was attacked to join in the fight. He'd offered a reward to the first person who would tell him of an attack. A man who'd heard the alarm bell dressed himself and hurried off to inform Roberson. But as he ran through Listing Lane he heard the echo of his own footsteps and thought he was being followed. What if a Luddite caught him? So he hid for a while. He was just about to continue on his errand when he heard real footsteps. So he continued to hide.

Meanwhile that other man ran to Reverend Roberson, gave the alarm and claimed the prize. So with this delay Roberson wasn't the first on the scene.

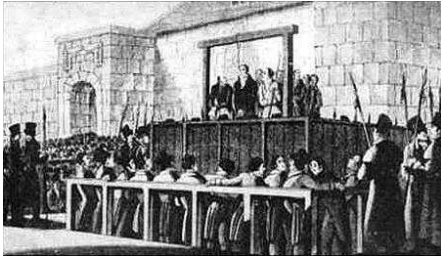
Charlotte has immortalised Roberson as the warlike Irishman Matthew Helstone, who was more at home in a fight than in the pulpit. You recall him interrupting the tea party of the three curates. As he leaves he says that he never felt more in tune for a shindy in his life, and that he wished a score of greasy cloth-dressers might beat up Moore's quarters that night.

One of the young men who'd reluctantly agreed to join the Luddites that night was Raynor. When the mob left Dumb Steeple, and were marching towards Rawfolds, Raynor managed to slip away. He ran back home, cutting across fields to save time. He had a fair way to go but he was the champion athlete of his native village. As he reached the churchyard near his house he saw the sexton. So he changed his pace to a saunter.

"Oh, Raynor it is that thee?" he said as he lifted his lantern to Raynor's face. "Good night lad. Skelton has been mending the church clock and I wanted to check that he had locked up properly." Skelton had

indeed locked up properly but he clearly hadn't finished repairing the clock for just then the clock struck thirteen. They both remarked on this strange occurrence and went their separate ways.

Now Raynor had been seen at the meeting at Dumb Steeple and had been seen slipping away. So he was informed on and brought to trial. Evidence was given that Raynor had slipped away at twenty minutes to twelve. The sexton gave evidence that Raynor was at the church just before midnight, a distance of four miles. There were many other witnesses who'd heard the clock strike thirteen and so it was undeniable that Raynor had indeed been there at the time stated. It was the judgment of the court that it was impossible for a man to run four miles in eighteen or nineteen minutes, so he was acquitted.



Not all were so lucky. In all fifteen of the rioters were executed.

In addition, three others had previously been executed for the murder of John Horsfall. He was shot at while riding home on his horse and was found shortly afterwards having fallen from his horse. You could perhaps have understood if Charlotte had chosen the name Horse Fall, but that was in fact the real victim's name. Charlotte chose Robert Moore to be the one fired on as he rode home. But because she needed him later, to marry Caroline she spared his life, and so a murder was changed into an attempted murder. But in most other respects the story of Moore's close shave follows Horsfall's fatal one.



Now I want you to hear the words of a man who was one of Charlotte Brontë's heroes. See how long it takes for you to guess his identity.

He was of noble birth so you mightn't have thought he'd have been bothered by the lot of the working man. As a member of the House of Lords you might have wondered at his choosing to devote his maiden speech in defence of the Luddites.

A bill was introduced into Parliament by Spencer Percival to make frame breaking a capital crime. Merely breaking a frame, even if accompanied by no other violence, would automatically result in the offender being hanged.

Lord Byron, in his first speech to the Lords, made the following plea.



My Lords, this bill is by no means new to this country. I believe it has occupied the serious thoughts of all descriptions of persons long before its introduction to the legislature.

To enter into any detail of the riots would be superfluous ... But while these outrages must be admitted to exist to an alarming extent, it cannot be denied that they have arisen from circumstances of the most unparalleled distress; the perseverance of these miserable men in their proceedings tends to prove that nothing but absolute want could have driven a large and once honest and industrious body of the people into the commission of excesses so hazardous to themselves, their families and their community.

The police have been by no means idle; several notorious delinquents had been detected; men liable to conviction, on the clearest evidence of the capital crime of – poverty; men who have been nefariously guilty of – lawfully begetting several children, whom, thanks to the times, they were unable to maintain.

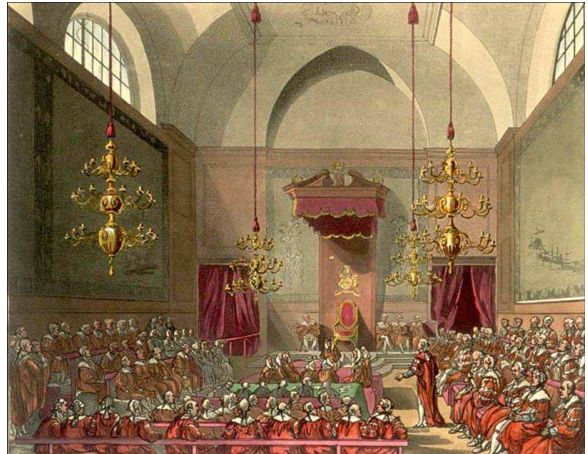
Considerable injury has been done to the proprietors of the improved frames. The machines were to them an advantage, inasmuch as they superseded the necessity of employing a number of workmen who were in consequence to starve. By the adoption of one species of frame in particular, one man performed the work of many, and the superfluous labourers were thrown out of employment.

Yet it is to be observed that the work thus executed was inferior in quality; not marketable at home, and merely hurried over with a view to exportation.

The rejected workmen, in the blindness of their ignorance, instead of rejoicing at these improvements in arts so beneficial to mankind, conceived themselves to be sacrificial to improvements in mechanism. In the foolishness of their hearts they imagined that the maintenance and well doing of the industrious poor were objects of greater consequence than the enrichment of a few individuals by any improvement of trade, which threw the workmen out of employment and rendered the labourer unworthy of his hire.

When a proposal is made to emancipate or relieve, you hesitate, you deliberate for years, you temporise and tamper with the minds of men; but a death bill must be passed off hand, without a thought of the consequences! Sure I am, from what I have heard, and from what I have seen, that to pass the bill under the existing circumstances, without enquiry, without deliberation, would only be to add injustice to irritation, and barbarity to neglect.

But suppose it passed: suppose one of the men, as I have seen them – meagre with famine, sullen with despair, careless of a life which your lordships are perhaps about to value at something less than the price of a stocking frame – suppose this man, surrounded by the children for whom he is unable to procure bread, at the hazard of his existence, about to be torn from a family which he has lately supported in peaceful industry, and which it is not his fault that he can no longer support – suppose this man, and there are ten thousand such from whom you may select your victim, dragged into court, to be tried for this new offence, by this new law; and there are two things wanted to convict and condemn him; and these are, in my opinion – twelve butchers for a jury, and a Jeffries for a judge.



Where did Charlotte's sympathies lie, with the workers or with the mill-owners? What is very clear is that *Shirley* is no social tract, speaking out for the poor, displaced workers. Mrs Gaskell's *Mary Barton* was written at about the same time and it's clear that she felt deep sympathy for the poor and underpaid workers of Manchester. It is true that when Charlotte gets around to setting the political scene, in chapter two, she does express great sympathy for the plight of the workers. She blames the

combination of the Orders in Council, the bad harvests, and the introduction of new machines for the misery of the workers.

But when she gets around to tell the story, she does so from the point of view of the mill-owners. In his book, *Myths of Power*, Terry Eagleton points out that in the scene of the attack on Hollows Mill the massed workers are invisible. It is a dark night and Shirley and Caroline, who creep out to witness the attack, can barely see them. The terror lies in the sounds.

“A crash – smash – shiver – stopped their whispers. A simultaneous volley of stones had saluted the broad front of the mill, with all its windows; and now every pane of every lattice lay in shattered and powdered fragments. A yell followed this demonstration – a rioter’s yell – a North-of-England – a Yorkshire – a West-Riding – a West-Riding-clothing-district of Yorkshire rioter’s yell. You never heard that sound, perhaps reader? So much the better for your ears – perhaps for your heart; since, if it rends the air in hate to yourself, or to the men of principles you approve, the interests to which you wish well. Wrath wakens to the cry of Hate: the Lion shakes his mane and rises to the howl of the Hyena.”

Far from sympathising with the workers Charlotte likens them to hyenas. The only other time Charlotte likens someone to a hyena is Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*. She called her a “clothed hyena”. But it is brilliant the way Charlotte emphasises the sounds rather than the sight of the rioters. There is something more chilling in sound than in sight – it leaves the imagination to conjure up terror.

It is not until the next day, when the sun rises, that anything is to be seen. The result of the affray become visible, but the men have long gone. As Eagleton says, “at this point of its most significant presence in the novel, the working class is wholly invisible.”

When the workers do appear, in a deputation, Charlotte describes them as if they were low demons. One had “cat-like, trustless eyes” and a “leer about his lips, he seemed laughing in his sleeve at some person or thing, his whole air was anything but that of a true man.”

It is true that Charlotte writes sympathetically about William Farren, one of Moore’s ex-workers. But then he was a local, while the rioters came from Halifax.

So while Charlotte pities the local workers who have been caught up by the disturbances she is vicious in the way her characters describe the Halifax workers. Mr Helstone boasts that “to hunt down vermin is a noble occupation”. Charlotte sneers at the lack of education of the Halifax

Luddites. When Moore is cautioned “should you refuse, it is my duty to warn you, in very decided terms, that measures will be had resort to.” Charlotte can’t resist explaining that that of course “he meant recourse”. And when a note is received from the Halifax Luddites Charlotte says “we will not copy the rest of the orthography, which was very particular, but translate it into legible English.”

The Luddite movement fizzled out. There was no revolution such as occurred in France. The machines were introduced and production increased. But so did employment. The end of the war with France and the repeal of the Orders in Council meant that demand improved. What is just as significant, and I think this is what Charlotte had more sympathy with, was the breaking down of the barrier between the landed gentry and the mill-owners. Where once the landowners derived all their income from agriculture and were antagonistic towards the manufacturing class, they now began to put capital into these enterprises. As well as allowing mills to be built on their land they were able to raise large sums, on the strength of their landholding, to invest in mills. For example, in 1805, Lord Dartmouth owned 19 mills in Yorkshire.

One mustn’t forget that Hollows Mill was on Shirley’s land. She had vested interests in Robert Moore triumphing over the Luddites. She admitted that about half her income came from the mill. The Luddites thought of Moore as a capitalist villain, but if there was such a person in the novel it must be Shirley.

She and Moore would have made a fitting match. Yet instead of the two strong characters being united, leaving Caroline and Louis to marry, Charlotte matched a stronger person with a weaker one. There is something reminiscent of *Jane Eyre* in the slightly feminine tutor, Louis, marrying the strong and masculine – in some respects at least – landowner Shirley.

But in the end I think Charlotte was much more concerned to write a love story than to strike a blow for the workers. I don’t believe she had any deep concern for their plight. If she had she would have made a Luddite as her hero instead of a mill owner. Charlotte’s battle with society was on a more personal level as she explored what it was to be a woman in a male dominated society.

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MARY SHELLEY – THE AUSTRALIAN CONNECTION

A summary of a talk given at the Dickens/Brontë weekend at Coolangatta in May 2009

by Susannah Fullerton

Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley's mother, had two sisters, Eliza and Everina, and one brother, Edward (Ned). Ned had two children, Elizabeth and Edward, who rather suffered from the notoriety of their



Aunt Mary who had written the inflammatory *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Edward went into partnership with a man he met in Lisbon, Alexander Berry, and the two men agreed to move to New South Wales and run a timber and tobacco business there, using cheap convict labour. Once established, they sent for Ned's sister Elizabeth to join them. She did, and married Alexander Berry in 1827 when she was 46. One wonders how happy the marriage was – she saw herself as “his monitor and conscience”. Ned died in 1832, unmarried – the Sydney suburb of Wollstonecraft is named after him. Elizabeth Berry corresponded with Mary

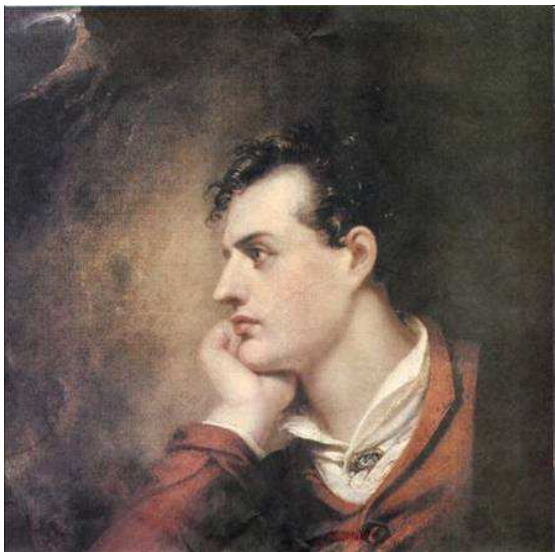
Shelley for many years and after her death, Berry himself continued to write to Mary, then, after her death, to Mary's daughter-in-law, Jane. A copy of the famous Opie portrait of Mary Wollstonecraft was sent out to Australia as a gift to Elizabeth. All this meant that throughout her life Mary Shelley was very much aware of New South Wales and the lives her relatives lived there.

Mary Shelley's life was a sad and tumultuous one. Her birth in 1797 caused her mother's death from puerperal fever and Mary was left with a life-long guilt over being the cause of her mother's death. Soon afterwards, her father William Godwin re-married, a woman called Mary-Jane Clairmont, who was never fond of her step-daughter. She and Godwin had two children.

Mary took refuge in her studies, but her stress brought out eczema and she spent time in Scotland for her health. Some of the scenery there was later used in *Frankenstein*. While she was away, she learned from her father's letters that he had made a new acquaintance – a handsome, radical young poet called Percy Bysshe Shelley. Shelley was married – he had eloped with a 16 year old girl and been cut off by his family for that and for the atheism he had publicly espoused – but he had financial expectations and Godwin, always poor, had hopes that Shelley might be able to lend or give him money.



Mary and Shelley met in 1814. She was 16 years old, but was bowled over by him. Much of their courting was done at the side of her mother's grave in St Pancras Churchyard. In July they decided to elope – Shelley's own marriage was unhappy and, besides, he believed in free love



and not being tied by marriage vows. They fled to France, accompanied by Mary's half-sister Jane (later Claire) Clairmont. This would be the start of a strange and difficult triangular relationship. Claire, desperate for a poet of her own, offered herself to Byron who took advantage of the offer. Soon she was pregnant and bore him an illegitimate daughter. Claire did introduce Shelley and Byron to each other, which proved the start of a wonderfully productive friendship. But

personal relations in the group were often strained and Mary was frequently very jealous of Claire.

The next years of Mary's life were very hard. She had pregnancies, then miscarriages. They were always short of money, always moving on. When she did have living children, three of them died young. Shelleys' first wife Harriet committed suicide, but Shelley was not allowed to take care of his two children by her – he was regarded as an unfit person. He and Mary married, but Shelley's views on free love had not changed and she was often made miserable by jealousy. Then Mary's half-sister Fanny (Mary Wollstonecraft's daughter by an earlier relationship) also killed herself. Her father William Godwin kept trying to borrow money from them, and Shelley was having little success with his poetry.

One evening, at Byron's home Villa Diodati, on the shores of Lake Geneva, the group decided to write ghost stories – Byron, his doctor,



Shelley and Mary would all try their hands. Mary began to write *Frankenstein*, the book for which she is remembered today, a book with the power of myth. Mary would write other novels and articles during her life, but none ever had the same power.

In 1822 Shelley, who was mad keen on boats and sailing, set off in his boat for Genoa. A summer squall broke out – the boat went missing. Ten days later his body was washed up on a beach, recognisable from the volume of Keats' poems still in his pocket. Shelley had never learned to swim. He was buried in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome and Mary returned to England to face her long years of widowhood.

The rest of her life was dedicated to Shelley's memory and to their only surviving child. Shelley was the son of a baronet, so there was money in the family, but old Sir Timothy Shelley did little to help his daughter-in-law or grandson and Mary had a constant struggle with poverty. Her son Percy eventually married a girl Mary loved – there were no grandchildren, but she did finally get to see her son made Sir Percy Shelley and to move with him into her husband's family home.

Mary Shelley died in London on 1 February 1851. She was buried in Bournemouth and the bodies of both her parents were exhumed and taken

to join her there. There is a statue of her, clasping her drowned husband, in Christchurch Priory.

For Further Reading:

“*The Godwins and the Shelleys*”, William St Clair

“*Mary Shelley*”, Miranda Seymour

TESTIMONY TO THE TRUTH: CHARLOTTE BRONTË AND ALEXANDER HARRIS

Talk given at the Coolangatta Conference, May 2009.

The Coolangatta Estate is the site of the first European settlement on the South Coast of NSW

By Anne Collett, Associate Professor in the English Literatures
Program at the University of Wollongong (acollett@uow.edu.au).

When I agreed with Christopher Cooper that a talk which followed up on what would appear to be Charlotte Brontë’s only direct connection with Australia, that being her admiration for Alexander Harris, I had no real idea of what I was letting myself in for – it seemed a good idea at the time. I saw Christopher’s suggestion as providing me with the opportunity to discover something new not only about Charlotte but about a figure in Australian literary history with whom I was unfamiliar, not having read anything by Harris and having no knowledge of his background – personal or literary. So I began by following up Harris’s allegation that ‘he had “received a message” from Charlotte through a mutual friend, saying that his book, *The Testimony to the Truth*, was the only one “which in some states of mind I can bear to read, EXCEPT THE BIBLE.’ [See Note 10 attached to Charlotte’s letter to W.S. Williams, 1st February 1849 in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, Vol II: 1848-1857, ed. Margaret Smith, Oxford: OUP, 2000, p176] In an appendix to *The Secrets of Alexander Harris*, introduced by the author’s grandson, Grant Carr-Harris, a note by Alexander Harris to the *Saturday Evening Post*, USA (30th October 1858) explains the genesis of *The Testimony* and Harris’ correspondence with Charlotte. He writes:

Immediately after the period at which these memoirs close (a reference to last of a series of autobiographical essays Harris wrote for the American weekly that appear under the title, *Religio Christi*, I commenced acting as missionary to the poor, in one of the most populous and deprived neighbourhoods in the city of London. It would scarcely be incorrect to

‘Let young flowers and an evergreen tree
Spring from the spot of her rest;
But no cypress or yew let us see; –
For why should we mourn for the blest?’

[Alexander Harris, quoted in *The Secrets of Alexander Harris*, Appendix I (From *The Saturday Evening Post*, USA, 30th October 1858), Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1961, pp.229-230.]

Harris is clearly chuffed that a writer of such ‘noble’ intellectual and literary credentials as Charlotte, should have singled out his book for special attention – and coupled it with the bible at that! But Charlotte was not quite so unqualified in her regard for Harris. In a letter written to W.S. Williams on 1st February 1849, she writes in appreciation of a parcel of books received from Williams and Smith:

There were two volumes in the first parcel which – having seen – I cannot bring myself to part with, and must beg Mr. Smith’s permission to retain: Mr. Thackeray’s *Journey from Cornhill &c.* and *The Testimony to the Truth*. That last is indeed a book after my own heart. I do like the mind it discloses – it is of a fine and high order. Alexander Harris may be a clown by birth but he is a nobleman by nature. When I could read no other book, I read his and derived comfort from it. No matter whether or not I can agree in all his views, it is the principles, the feelings, the heart of the man I admire. [Letter to W.S. Williams, 1st February 1849, *The Letters*, pp.9-10]

Charlotte too accords Harris’s noble status ‘by nature’, but her appellation of ‘clown’, even if ‘by birth’, seems unduly harsh. What is it about Harris that prompts her to call him a clown? It may be his class, it may be his personality – Charlotte does not explain or qualify (either at this point or in later references to Harris), but perhaps some familiarity with Harris’ life and tendencies will clarify her position. It has to be said, that even in his note expressing his feelings about Charlotte’s endorsement of his work, Harris is not merely content to parade that congratulation (he might have kept it to himself after all) but he feels it necessary to assert, as a reformed atheist and sceptic, the strength of his confirmed belief in the life after death and Charlotte’s assured position in Heaven. So perhaps ‘clown’ is the indication of Charlotte’s rather acute recognition (and dislike) of Harris’ tendency to self-promotion and self indulgence – a tendency if you like to excess, the nature of which will become clear.

According to his grandson, Grant Carr-Harris:

In conventional terms, Alexander's religious background was that of a Congregational 'nonconformist'. His conversion in the Australian wilds, which resulted in the more active and evangelical practice of Christianity, was not inconsistent with such a background. There was little deviation from this pattern throughout the rest of his life, but before he died he had aligned himself more closely with the Baptists ...

The steps leading up to Alexander's conversion begin in the opening chapters of the story (as documented in *Religio Christi*) that follows. In it he gives a detailed description of the circumstances which led him to drift down-hill. Emphasis is placed, in particular on the habits of intemperance which prevailed at the time, and he makes it clear that when he left the parental roof, to seek what he could find in London, he was not slow in following the general pattern of society in that respect. [Grant Carr-Harris, Introduction to *The Secrets of Alexander Harris*, pp.9-10.]

"If I were to say," writes Alexander, "that, at this period, hard-drinking was part and parcel of an education at an English university, I should scarcely speak incorrectly." He goes on to remark that:

Few of the present generation are aware of the immense injury done to the morals of the British people by George the Fourth. From his earliest days there was no extreme of vicious pleasure, incident to youth, into which he did not plunge ... What was likely to be the effect of such an example from the Prince Royal? Was it extraordinary that, in those times, young men grew up inveterate drunkards, gamblers, pugilists and libertines, and thought it no disgrace to be so? However regular my own early life had been by compulsion, I had nevertheless from merest boyhood learned to look on the excesses I have mentioned as indicative of a spirited character, and nothing worse than a liberal acquiescence in the ways of the world. [Alexander Harris, *Religio Christi, Secrets*, pp.54-55.]

Alexander wasn't doing himself much of a favour by 'running away' to Australia – the renowned rum colony. But to continue with his biography as related by his grandson, Grant continues:

The circumstance which led him to lose his last job in London, his enlistment in the Guards, and his subsequent desertion and escape to Australia are described vividly. They are singled out later as factors which

caused him to seek his ultimate salvation. They also explain why, on arrival in Sydney, he avoided the level of society in which he had been brought up. It was these events, apparently, which impelled him to experience at first hand the rigours of life in a penal colony. (p11)

In the 'Preface' to *The Secrets of Alexander Harris*, Alec Chisholm observes that 'The diarist's first allusion to Australia occurs under date 1825, when he gives his age as twenty-one and adds ... "I plunge deeper into evil and enlist, desert, emigrate to New South Wales"' – a case perhaps of jumping out of the frying pan into the fire. An idyllic entry into Sydney harbour is described by Alexander:

One serene, sunny morning, when I came up from my cabin, all hands were at the starboard bulwarks; glasses were pointed and eyes were straining their powers against the far horizon. We were running in N.N.W. on the coast of Australia, at that period commonly called New South Wales. By noon the land loomed high and dark and mountainous. By-and-bye there appeared a great rift or chasm in this mountain wall, and we rounded to and made for the centre of it. It was the entrance to Port Jackson, a noble sea inlet, at the head of which, some eight miles inland, the city of Sydney is located. At that time Sydney was merely a town, its population, free and convict together, not above ten or twelve thousand.

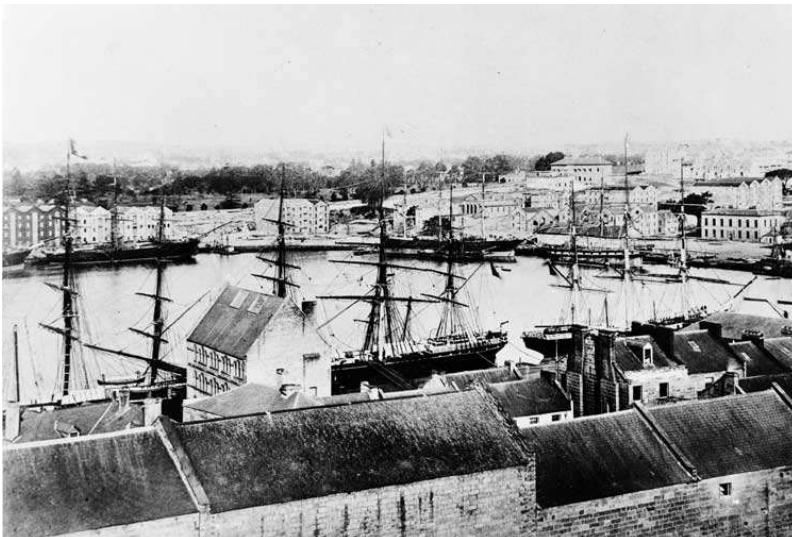
Presently, as we neared the huge and seemingly perpendicular bluffs, there came dancing over the long, undulating swells the pilot boat ... By the time the pilot got aboard, we were well in with the mouth of the harbour. On and in we glided, the ship seeming to dwindle into absolute insignificance between the mighty headlands.

But quickly the character of the scene changed. The land on either shore became low and broken; very lofty only where its outline lay traced in the distance on the faint blue of the cloudless sky. Parrots and paroquets of the most splendid plumage, and large white cockatoos, with their pale yellow crests outspread, swept in flocks of a hundred together across the waters, or sat clustered on the trees of some island rock as the ship sailed past, adorning it like a crop of gorgeous flowers. On the shore would appear a little horseshoe bay, margined all round with yellow sand, and hemmed in with wooded hills, overloaded with the same rich dark masses of foliage; for in this clime all the trees are evergreens ... And so on till, an angle of the port rounded, we were fairly within what is more strictly called Sydney Harbour. (*Religios Christi, Secrets*, pp.71-2)

This idyll is followed by a grim depiction of the Sydney ‘Rocks’ area:

Some wild-garbed women and ruffian-looking men sat with their elbows on their knees, and a short dudeen (short pipe) in their mouths on the door-sills, or passed with a sly leer.

‘This,’ said my companion, as we crossed one row after another of these dens, and passed more than one ill-looking public house where the fiddle was playing, accompanied by the sound of heavy feet on the floor, ‘is what is called ‘The Rocks’. It is a spot where all the rif-raf of the colony have congregated from

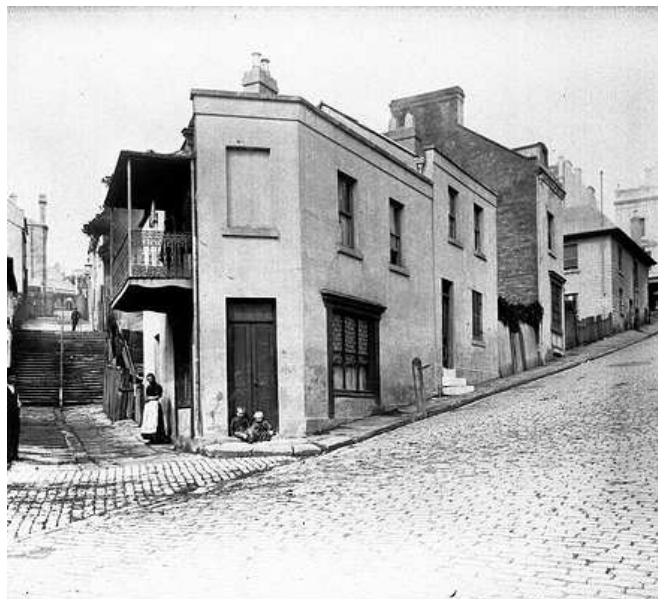


time immemorial. The surface you may observe is so abrupt and uneven, and covered with great masses of loose rock, that it would take a hundred thousand pounds to fit it for business purposes, though from its situation at the very extreme of the

promontory, with deep water to the very face of the shore all round, it really is the most valuable quarter of the whole town for mercantile purposes.

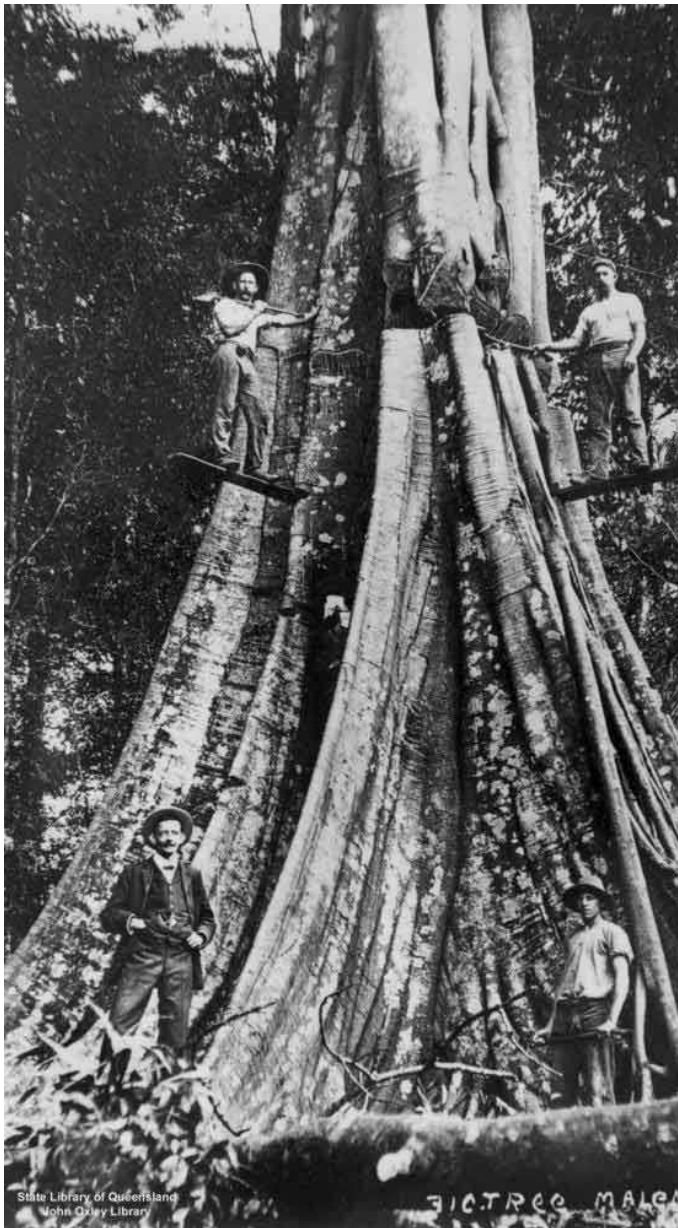
.....

As we crossed the Rocks, the fiddle was marking time to a fiercer revel than before. We entered one of the houses. It was the old Sheer Hulk. They seemed to stand in no fear of the police, for it was the front room that was the scene of the carouse. It was a low but capacious apartment, with a bar at one end. Clouded with tobacco smoke to suffocation, and filled with uproar ...



All round the room were ranged tables, at which sat groups of sailors, and of convicts free by servitude, but unreformed, and speculating anew in their old occupation. Of these, some were sitting with folded arms, smoking in silence but evidently quite at home; others were playing cards; others singing; others drinking; other vociferating. The half-pint glass of rum seemed to be the sole and universal potation. (*Religio Christi, Secrets*, pp.73-75)

Later entries in Harris' diary include references to Parramatta (in 1826), Goulburn, Liverpool, Campbelltown ... Bathurst (all of 1929), and 'the cedar woods and mountains' of the Wollongong area (1930). Harris works as a cedar-getter, farmer and, being well-educated, as a legal clerk.



"Do you know anything of the law," he is asked, to which he replies, "I have read Blackstone's *Commentaries*, Burns's *Justice of the Peace*, and Gifford's synoptical work, *Every Man his Own Lawyer*," and to which his acquaintance responds, "You need nothing more at a country court here, except the *Acts in Council*, which are published from time to time in the *Sydney Gazette*." (*Religio Christi*, p144). The district to which the young Alexander travels in search of clerking work is 'called by the native name of Illawarra, but vulgarly "The Five Islands", from that number of small islands lying a few miles from the shore abreast of it': Alexander's acquaintance describes its vicinity and dominant characteristics:

About fifty miles from here, travelling south, you reach the brink of the coast mountain, and the district lies all along the seaside then for many miles. It is covered both among the mountain-side and on the lowlands of the coast with the most dense woods met within the country. The cedar brushes are the most distinguishing feature. In one of them there are at this time about two hundred pairs of whip-sawyers planking down the trees into great junks of from a hundred to a thousand feet. These fellows are just as wild a set as is anywhere to be met with among white-men. Almost every pair has one or two bushrangers working for them. (*Religio Christi, Secrets*, p145)

– an observation that Alexander Harris himself confirms some pages later: “I found the condition and habits of these lumbermen much as had been represented to me. They were as wild a set of human beings as could well be met with, of any civilized race.” (p152) Alexander resigns from his clerkship, and proceeds to lead an itinerant life amongst the loggers, the trials of which are documented vividly in *Testament to the Truth*. Chisholm observes that Harris’ notes relating to country districts, from 1826 to 1840, indicate considerable distances covered – his suffering at times from famine and thirst, his acute horror of snakes, his frequent narrow escapes from sudden death and, from 1835, his “reflections on the soul’s destinies” and his frequent attempts to refrain from drinking and swearing. (Preface to *Secrets*, p38) Chisholm concludes that:

both his notes and the narrative reveal that the wandering young Englishman had, in various ways, a tough time in New South Wales. At an early stage he told himself that he would have been better off if he had ‘grown up a bare-footed boy of the streets’. Subsequently he walked far, often through rugged and lonely areas; worked hard in various occupations; suffered much through seeing the sufferings of others, and often experienced pain in both body and mind through dissipation. (‘Preface’ *Secrets*, p38)

It is this combination of suffering and frequent escapes from sudden death that led to Alexander’s conversion from a sceptical atheist to an evangelical Christian; of which his grandson remarks, ‘Because this change took place when he was face to face with the stark realities of life, in what to him was “God’s Country”, the event became an absorbing influence’ (Introduction to *Secrets*, p11). Declaring the intention that lies behind the work that documented his conversion, Harris observes that:

The statement may be relied on as a faithful account of the steps by which I was led on from that state of life, in which, by confining our thoughts, our cares, our hopes, to this transitory world, we render ourselves little superior to the merely animal races; to another, where the sphere of our activities is unbounded, and where they may be employed to our equal profit, honour, and gratification. As to the many remarkable interpositions of Divine Providence on my behalf, I offer my most express assurance of their being stated exactly as they occurred. It is possible I may, at times, have misinterpreted the intention of the Divine hand in conducting the events: – who could make sure that he had not? But the events themselves are matters of simple experience on which I could make no mistake. [Alexander Harris, (published anonymously) *Testimony to the Truth; or the Autobiography of an Atheist*. London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1848 p2.]

Testament to the Truth: the autobiography of an atheist is the work that documents the material events, psychological consequences and philosophical reasoning that lead to belief and faith in the promise of eternal life and the forgiveness of sins. When Charlotte remarks that it is a book ‘after my own heart’ she indicates an interest in the mind that struggles with the idea of divine Good in a world of terrible suffering; an interest in a man prone to fits of melancholia that she herself endured and wrote into the lives of a number of her characters; an interest in a faith arrived at not only through reason, but through grace; and last, but certainly not least, an interest in a writer of considerable ability – for Harris is a wonderful storyteller.

But let me first go back to the sympathy Charlotte might have felt for a mind that struggles with the idea of divine Good in a world of suffering, and the sense of isolation, depression and a desperate need for faith that follows. In September of the year before Charlotte read Harris’ *Testament*, her brother Branwell had died ostensibly of bronchitis – but his death was clearly exacerbated by heavy drinking and possible opium consumption; and in December of 1848 (less than two months before Charlotte wrote to Williams of the esteem in which she held Harris’ book) Emily had died (to be followed in May of the following year by her only remaining sibling, Anne). If we think of the losses and terrible suffering endured by Charlotte in her short lifetime, it would not be surprising if she found Harris’ carefully reasoned belief that ‘Of the redeemed recognizing each other hereafter I may confess I have no doubt whatever’ (*Testimony* p265), consoling and affirming.

Testament to the Truth however, might also be understood not only as a declaration of faith, but as a testament to the ‘truth’ of Harris’ depictions of life – a testament to his literary ability: his Testament is ‘true to life’. This is a quality that Charlotte demands in her own writing, and on which she takes a stand against all who believe that mere imitation of the Masters is sufficient to be judged ‘worthy’. In a letter to her publisher (dated September 1848) Charlotte had written:

The standard heroes and heroines of novels are personages in whom I could never from childhood upwards take an interest, believe to be natural, or wish to imitate. Were I obliged to copy these characters I would simply not write at all. Were I obliged to copy any former novelist, even the greatest, even Scott, in anything, I would not write. Unless I have something of my own to say, and a way of my own to say it in, I have no business to publish. Unless I can look beyond the great Masters, and study Nature herself, I have no right to paint. Unless I have the courage to use the language of Truth in preference to the jargon of Conventionality, I ought to be silent.

Charlotte did not admire Harris’ work unreservedly or without discernment – well of course she didn’t. So when I speak of her admiration as relating to Harris’ capacity as a storyteller, it is an admiration quite specific to the *Testament*. In a letter to Williams, dated the 5th April 1849 (poignant for its reference to Anne who is so unwell as to find it difficult to enjoy even reading) Charlotte writes:

The Cornhill books are still our welcome and congenial resource when Anne is well enough to enjoy reading. Carlyle’s *Miscellanies* interest me greatly. We have read ‘The Emigrant Family’; [a three-volume novel by Harris published in February 1849] the characters in the work are good, full of quiet truth and nature, and the local colouring is excellent – yet I can hardly call it a good novel. Reflective, truth-loving and even elevated as is Alexander Harris’s mind – I should say he scarcely possesses the creative faculty in sufficient vigour to excel as a writer of fiction. He creates nothing – he only copies: his characters are portraits – servilely accurate – it appears whatever is at all ideal is not original. The *Testimony to the Truth* is a better book than any tale he can write will ever be – Am I too dogmatical in saying this? [*Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, Vol II: 1848-1857, p197.]

What Charlotte appears to be saying here is that when Harris attempts novelistic portrayal of character, he relies too much on prior *literary* models; she is in fact accusing him of writing in ‘the jargon of conventionality’. When Charlotte claims that Harris ‘creates nothing – he only copies’ she does not recognise the creative literary mind at work behind the *Testament*. Yes *Testament* is ‘an autobiography’, and yes it ‘uses the language of Truth’ but, despite Harris’ own assurances that he relates events ‘exactly as they occurred’, even an autobiography is a creative work that portrays its characters (including the character of the ‘author’) no less creatively because they are drawn from life than were they drawn from the imagination. An auto ‘biography’ is just that – a life story ...

In closing, let me read you ‘a story’ from *Testament* so you can make up your own mind. Harris relates a series of ‘near death’ stories with this preface:

For a series of years, I met with such striking deliverances in imminent hazards of life, that, unless I had done it wilfully, and had obstinately resisted their admonitions, I could not but be aroused to the most distinct feeling of the necessity of determining what was truth, and of acting conformably to it. (p32)

The story that follows is set in the Illawarra. [A section of the *Testament* was read from p.35, ‘Before I ceased to reside on the sea-coast, another and still more startling escape from death than that already narrated happened to me ...’ to ‘My serious common sense began to exert itself on the point at issue, and I may thankfully say, never ceased to do so, month after month, till it was decided.’ (p40)]

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MARIA BRANWELL

By Carmel Nestor

This is the text of a talk given to the ABA on 1st August 2009.

My name is Maria Brontë and I will tell you a little about my life – just a little because I want to remain the “Elusive Brontë”.

I was born in Penzance in 1783, the seventh of eleven children – three boys and eight girls. Unfortunately only one brother and four of my sisters survived infancy.



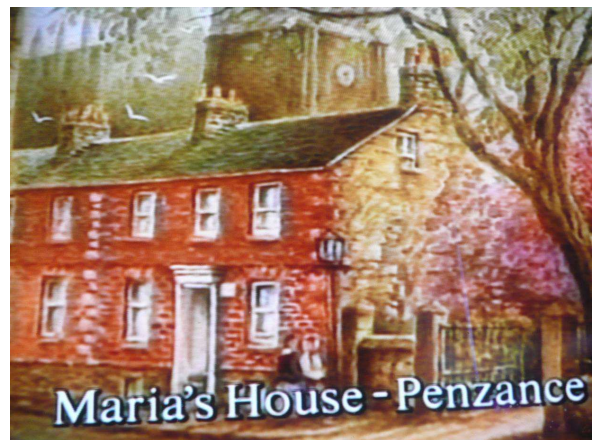
My father was Thomas Branwell, a prominent citizen and a prosperous merchant as had been his father before him. We lived in a busy sea port and he imported luxury goods such as tea, which he sold wholesale and through his Market Square grocery shop. He also owned a brewery, the Golden Inn, and other property. He was able to leave an annuity of £50 to

me and each of my sisters.

Our house was no 25 Chappel Street, set a little back from the water and it was a very comfortable home. I have some vivid memories of life in that house. It was a street for merchants and the fashionable houses had red façades broken by elegant doorways with steep granite steps leading straight onto the street. They were known as the Rotterdam buildings because they were built with bricks taken from a Dutch ship which had been registered in Rotterdam. The house was very close to the sea.

Other things that I remember about my home:

- There was a well in the garden;
- Ship's timbers were used to support doorways;



- There were gun racks above the fireplace and above that there as a very high cupboard where shot was stored (this was war time and my father was responsible for the battery guns).

-A kitchen overlooked the back garden. (Not all cooking was done in the kitchen. Sometimes when the baking was ready a servant took it to the bakehouse where it was baked for a penny. To identify pastries housewives initials were put in the corner.

- A row of cloam bussas stood along the back wall and looked like Ali Babas oil jars each 30cm high

- We had a cellar under our front rooms and it was in these rooms that we received our visitors, held our tea parties and shared gossip.

My father played the violin and entertained family and friends and accompanied singing. It was a bright happy home. Chappell Street was the centre of life – a life that was a whirl of social entertainment and visiting. It was the main thoroughfare from the harbour to the town centre so we watched all the gallants and seafarers, the men in dashing gay uniforms of red, white and blue, dazzling buttons and buckles, ankle length coats flying in the wind, long boots, high beaver hats - these were Nelson's men. This was the time of the Napoleonic wars and life was lively as there were always soldiers and sailors in our town.

Daily the train came through – 70 mules behind a lead horse. They brought the copper from the mines and took back coal. Imagine the condition of the roads after this went past. Streets were ruts and quagmires. I and other ladies wore pattens (wooden clogs) over our shoes.

Parties and dances were frequent and I enjoyed a very lively social life. There was plenty of intellectual and artistic activity – Concert Halls, a Ladies Book Club, Assembly Rooms and balls were held there throughout the winter.

After all Penzance was a busy sea port visited by traders from all over the world. It was a regular port of call for ships passing between the capital, Bristol and Plymouth, a thriving market town of between 3000 – 4000 people and it was an important banking centre.

My family were staunch Wesleyan Methodists and my Aunt Jane married a teacher John Fennel who worked in the Wesleyan School in Penzance. This marriage was to have a great impact on my life. We had a number of Janes in our family. My sister Jane married and had a daughter Eliza Jane and my Aunt Jane named her daughter Jane and far into the future I would call one of my own daughters Emily Jane.

My favourite sister was Elizabeth and she was born in 1776 making her 7 years older than I was. She was pretty, petite, witty and a great dancer. Life was full and happy. Then Disaster struck.

My father died in 1808 and my mother died a few months later. My Uncle Richard, who owned our home, allowed my two sisters and I to remain living there – Elizabeth was 33, I was 26 and Charlotte only 18. Then in 1811 Richard's son drowned and Richard himself died a few months later. This precipitated the breaking up of my family. I decided to leave Penzance and go to my Aunt Jane and Uncle John. He had been appointed Governor of the Woodhouse Grove Wesleyan Boarding School and as my aunt looked after the domestic aspect of the school she needed help.

I set off on my journey. It was 400 miles north and, as I travelled, I wondered why I had decided to give up my comfortable mild Penzance for the depressing austerity of the industrial North.

My first view of Woodgrove School, my next home, was reassuring. My Aunt Jane and Uncle John were genuinely pleased to welcome me. I found my Aunt very busy. The school was becoming more popular and as



the numbers were increasing so was her workload. There was always sewing to be done and a myriad of other tasks I could do. I loved sewing and had a reputation for being excellent with a needle.

My cousin Jane was eight years younger than I and we became very close friends. She had a young man, William Morgan, who visited frequently and one day his friend, Patrick Brontë, an Irishman, came with him. Patrick was also a highly esteemed friend of Uncle John's and he had invited Patrick to the school to examine the boy's knowledge of the classics. This he came over to do very often and I eagerly looked forward to these visits.

Patrick lived twelve miles away but he managed to walk over every second day. We had many discussions and I never felt over-awed by him – in fact I discovered he liked people to test his ideas and debate with him.

Our engagement was most romantic as Patrick proposed in the ruins of a Cistercian abbey on the river Ayre – a beautiful and romantic place. It gave great joy both to my Uncle and Aunt and to my family far away in

Penzance. Jane announced her engagement to William and the four of us had a wonderful time – picnic lunches, tramps around the neighbourhood, visiting and parties.

During our engagement Patrick and I wrote regularly. I well remember my first letter – I laboured long and hard and it was written just after I accepted his proposal. I wished to speak from my heart but I did not want to appear forward.

I told him how I missed leaning on his arm on the long country walks and I told him how I was very used to being independent and how my mother and siblings depended on my judgement as I had organised the household. I stressed how I looked forward to sharing responsibilities with him.

I told him of my disaster. My sister had sent my box containing my books and all my other possessions and the ship had been stranded on rock along the Devon coast. My trunk had been swallowed by the sea. Very little was retrieved so I had none of my possessions. I could bring nothing to our marriage.

Patrick's background was very different to mine. He had experienced very real poverty and this is the house in which he was born. One aspect of family life that we shared was that we both came from large families. Patrick was one of them.

We could not consider going home to Penzance to marry so I was thrilled when I heard that my sister Charlotte was to be married to our cousin Joseph on the same day as I was to marry my Patrick. Our wedding was in the small church of Guiseley, unusual because not only was it a double ceremony with Jane and William but first Patrick married Jane and William and I was bridesmaid and then William married Patrick and me with Jane as my attendant. I was married on the 29th December 1812.

After a very happy celebration together we parted company and Patrick and I set off for Hartshead, where he was curate.



At first we were living in part of the house where Pat had boarded but after a few months of this I became bored. I told Pat that there was nothing for me to do. Mrs Bedford, our landlady, did everything for us.

I wanted to spend my annuity of £50 so we could move into a house of our own but to that Pat would have never agree. He said that my money would never be touched as it was my security if anything should happen to him.

I tried to counter argue, that if I died he would get nothing as the money would return to my family, but to no avail. He simply said “it is Branwell money.”

About this time I also tried my hand at writing and wrote an essay, *Advantages of Poverty in Religious Concerns*. It was my conviction that poverty cannot be evil to those who are spirituality enlightened. In those days I was a little naïve and inexperienced. It was never published.

On my birthday Patrick told me that he had found us a house at Hightown in Hartshead which was empty and we could move immediately. He also wrote me a birthday poem full of love and tenderness. I’d never had a poem written to me before and I was just thrilled.

Our happiness here was crowned when our baby daughter was born. Maria was baptised on the 23rd of April 1814. Our life here continued quietly but I was always worried about Patrick as these were restless times and violence towards the mill owners was on the increase. We had both mill owners and workers in our parish.

Our second daughter, Elizabeth, was born in 1815. I named her after my sister who had come to stay with us. She had written to say that she longed to see her new niece and would be glad to help when the new baby was born. She and Pat got on very well and she asked him to call her Bess as her brothers had.

I was very grateful to my sister as she not only looked after little Maria but often would be the one to wait up for Patrick when he came in



late and made sure he had a hot drink. She was so very kind and generous and we were about to move again. Patrick had exchanged parishes and we were off to Thornton.

This move was quite an event as we had two small children and furniture. I don't think I could have managed without my sister.

Thornton was an experience. It was the first time that I had lived in a proper parsonage provided by the church. It was a small house, close to the street which was a main thoroughfare but it was conveniently close to the church.

I loved living in Thornton. I became very friendly with Elizabeth Firth who came from one of the leading families. She included me in her circle of friends and life was something like the old times back in Penzance. My sister enjoyed the company and having her with us made it



possible for me to live as the parson's wife. I visited the sick, met the ladies of the parish and participated in all their activities. Life here was full and happy.

One memorable event was the day we heard the news that we had won the Battle of Waterloo. Patrick was so excited, he immediately organised a dinner party and became quite drunk. He claimed that he had made Bess drunk as well. It was that night that our very special baby was conceived.

Then on 21st of April our third daughter was born. She was named Charlotte after my younger sister, the one who was married on the same day as I was. This made Bess very happy as she said that we had recreated her childhood with the young Maria, Elizabeth and now Charlotte.

After a year with us in Thornton, and just after our little Charlotte was born, Bess told us that she was anxious to return to Penzance. She missed the climate in particular and also the extended members of our family. Patrick pressed her to return and she said that she most certainly would. She was very upset to leave us – as she said we were such a happy family. She waited until July when the weather was warmer and the seas

calmer and then after rounds of farewells parties and teas she left us. She had been well liked in the parish.

After she left I missed her badly and even though Elizabeth Firth helped me I still had three children under the age of three. I needed help so we took a girl, Nancy Garrs, from the industrial school. Nancy had been well trained in housework, sewing and as a nursery maid. She was always my loyal friend.

At the end of June Patrick's wish for a son was realised and Patrick Branwell Brontë was born. In far away Penzance my sister Elizabeth wrote saying she was so pleased with the name that she asked that he be known as Branwell. We were very happy to grant her this request. Branwell's birth had been a difficult one and I was very weak and sick for some time afterwards.

One wild stormy night another little girl came in to the Brontë household. It was another difficult birth and it was only thanks to the midwife, Mrs Fox, that both my daughter and I survived. When Patrick heard this from the doctor he asked Mrs Fox her name. "Emily," she replied. "A good name," he said, "so that is what we will call her". This time we decided to give her a second name, as we had Branwell, and so she was christened Emily Jane.

Life following Emily's arrival was anything but calm for Patrick. Our little family gave us much pleasure but Pat had been offered a position at Haworth and so became involved in a wrangle between the Bishop and the congregation. Haworth would have been suited to us as it would have meant an increase in pay and a much bigger parsonage.

After Anne was born (she was named after my mother) we heard that Patrick was appointed to Haworth after all. It was a mixed blessing.

Packing for the move was an enormous task. This time we had seven carts and two covered wagons. We had six children and a houseful of furniture, as well as all the personal possessions.

I, Elizabeth Branwell, from this time on was always known to my sister's family as Aunt Branwell. As soon as I realised how ill Maria was I came to Haworth to help Patrick nurse Maria and look after the children. Maria suffered from cancer for seven months before death released her.

Life was difficult. The weather was cold, bleak and grey and Patrick had changed. He had withdrawn and the children were unsettled. Emily

was really difficult. Many parish demands made Patrick even more remote from the household. The servants resented me.

Eventually I decided that it was my duty to stay and run the house. This was not an easy decision but a necessary one as, where else could Patrick turn?

After a little time it was decided to send the older children to school. Patrick was very aware that they would need an education to provide for themselves in the future. He read an advertisement for a school at Cowan Bridge that educated the daughters of clergymen. This seemed the answer.

The two older girls were sent there. Charlotte followed, and Emily a while later. This was the most unfortunate decision he ever made and he never forgave himself for the deaths of his two eldest children. I provided all the comfort and care possible and prayed that he would soon recover.

We decided that the children would never leave home again and I would teach the girls all I could while he would instruct Branwell. I often felt that Charlotte and Emily resented this.

Emily was unhappy because I would not let her have animals in the house but Charlotte fortunately took after me and liked everything to be neat and orderly. Anne was such a sweet little girl. I did try to give them the skills that they would need to prevent them depending on marriage to escape poverty.

I was able to advance them money to help with their education and Charlotte and Emily set off for Brussels.

Now Patrick Brontë has the final say. In 1842 he sent for his two daughters to come home as their aunt was ill. She died from bowel cancer before they arrived. Patrick had outlived yet another member of his family.