

The First Residents of Brunswick Street

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Introduction

An advertisement in the *Port Phillip Herald* on 19 June 1840 for the sale of suburban allotment No. 71,¹ and another in the same newspaper on 30 October 1840² for building allotments in Brunswick Street and Lonsdale Street East referred to the proximity of the land to the residences of various Melbourne identities. The houses were variously described as being magnificent, elegant, and truly beautiful. They were amongst the earliest in Fitzroy, and their occupants were some of Melbourne's most prominent early residents.

Those to be discussed here are Charles Ebden, Anthony Beale, Arthur Kemmis, Robert Webb, Thomas Strode and James Montgomery. Their backgrounds and careers varied considerably. Ebden, Kemmis, Webb and Montgomery were part of the business, political and official elite and were amongst the leaders of the community. Anthony Beale, as a retired East India Company official, had social standing but played little part in the wider community, and Thomas Strode, while not of the same social standing as the others, nevertheless wielded influence as a newspaper publisher. Their fortunes after settling in Fitzroy also varied considerably.

Charles Hotson Ebden

The house owned by Charles Hotson Ebden (1811-1867) was located in Little Brunswick Street (now Fitzroy Street).³ Ebden was a man of many accomplishments – squatter, businessman and politician. He was born in the Cape Colony of a family prominent in banking, politics and the professions, and was educated in England and Germany.

Ebden settled in Sydney as a merchant in 1832, and was one of the first squatters to overland cattle to Port Phillip. He established stations on both sides of the Murray River near the present site of Albury-Wodonga, and also on the Campaspe River, where he named Karlsruhe Station after his alma mater in Germany. He was constantly trading in stock and stations, eventually controlling over half a million acres in the Kerang district.⁴

Ebden was one of the earliest and most successful land speculators in Melbourne. In one transaction he purchased land in Collins Street in 1836 for £136 and sold it two years later for £10,000. This was the cause of his famous remark 'I fear I am becoming disgustingly rich'. In the fullness of time he did.

In his political life, Ebden was elected three times to the Legislative Council of New South Wales, and was active in the anti-transportation and separation movements. He was Auditor-General in the first Victorian government formed after separation. This was a difficult post in which he performed well, considering the enormous revenue generated by the gold rush and the extensive public works on which it was spent, all of which required his supervision.⁵ Ebden's appointment was probably due to his cultural and educational background, which he would have shared with the Lieutenant Governor, Charles Joseph La Trobe.⁶ His business acumen as demonstrated by the success of his own financial affairs must have also marked him as a man capable of handling public finances. However, despite his obvious ability, Ebden did not get on well with La Trobe, due to what La Trobe described as Ebden's 'peculiarity of temperament', and it was a relief to him when Ebden resigned in 1852 over the government's policies towards the squatters, whose interests Ebden stoutly defended.⁷

¹ *Port Phillip Herald*, 19 June 1840, p 3.

² *Port Phillip Herald*, 30 October 1840, p 3.

³ JJ Mouritz, *Port Phillip Directory* (Melbourne 1847).

⁴ Geoffrey Serle, 'Charles Hotson Ebden (1811-1867)', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

⁵ Serle, 'C H Ebden'.

⁶ D R Drury, *La Trobe: the Making of a Governor* (Melbourne 2006), p 218.

⁷ Serle, 'Ebden'.

Ebden's business interests embraced railway promotion, banking and insurance. He was chairman of the St. Kilda and Brighton Railway Company and a director of the Bank of New South Wales.⁸ His community activities included participation in the establishment of the Melbourne Hospital and the Benevolent Society, and assisting in the introduction of German migrants to Victoria.⁹

He was a member of the inner circle of Melbourne society, a small group of men who operated businesses, exercised political influence, served on the committees of charities and organised social activities, using their influence to exclude those they deemed unworthy. In this capacity Ebden was at different times secretary and president of the Melbourne Club.¹⁰

Although successful in politics and business and regarded by some as the epitome of a gentleman, Ebden was also noted for his eccentricities. His pompous manner, and affectations of speech and dress, where he contrasted a dandified appearance in town with a deliberately contrived ragged and unkempt appearance in the bush, made him one of Melbourne's notable personalities, described by Paul de Serville as having 'something of the ripe vulgarity of the Regency, something of the Victorian heavy swell'.¹¹

From 1840 until the early 1860s Ebden and his family lived in Little Brunswick Street.¹² Unfortunately no images or accurate descriptions of the house have been discovered. They then moved to an imposing two-storey columned mansion in Collins Street East.¹³ Ebden's seaside house, Black Rock House, which gave its name to the suburb, still stands. Although not completed to its original design the battlemented stone kitchen wing gives an indication of the aspirations of its owner.

After living in England from 1861 to 1866 in failing health, Ebden returned to Melbourne in time to die, in 1867, appropriately for him, across the road from his former house, in the Melbourne Club. To his wife Tamar (nee Harding) and three surviving children, he left an estate valued at one hundred thousand pounds.¹⁴ After his death they returned to England.

Anthony Beale

Amongst Ebden's neighbours was the Beale family. Anthony Beale (1790-1865)¹⁵ landed at Port Phillip with most of his large family in November 1839, having visited a short time previously to erect their prefabricated house at New Town, where the seventeenth child of the family was born in 1841.¹⁶

Beale had been paymaster of the East India Company on the island of St. Helena, with the rank of major, by which title he was commonly referred. The island was an important port for trading vessels, as well as a convenient place of exile for deposed emperors. In 1815 Anthony Beale married Katherine Rose Young, who had come to the island to visit her uncle the governor, Colonel Mark Wilkes.¹⁷

The Beale family had lived on the island since 1672, as employees of the East India Company. However, in 1836 control of the island passed from the company to the British Government, and

⁸ Paul de Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees* (Melbourne 1991), p.293.

⁹ Serle, 'Ebden'.

¹⁰ Serle, 'Ebden'.

¹¹ Paul de Serville, *Port Phillip Gentlemen* (Melbourne 1980), p.46.

¹² Mouritz, *Port Phillip Directory*.

¹³ *Argus*, 4 September 1920, p 1. It was designed by his relative Arthur Ebden Johnson, and was later 51 Collins St:

¹⁴ Serle, 'Ebden'.

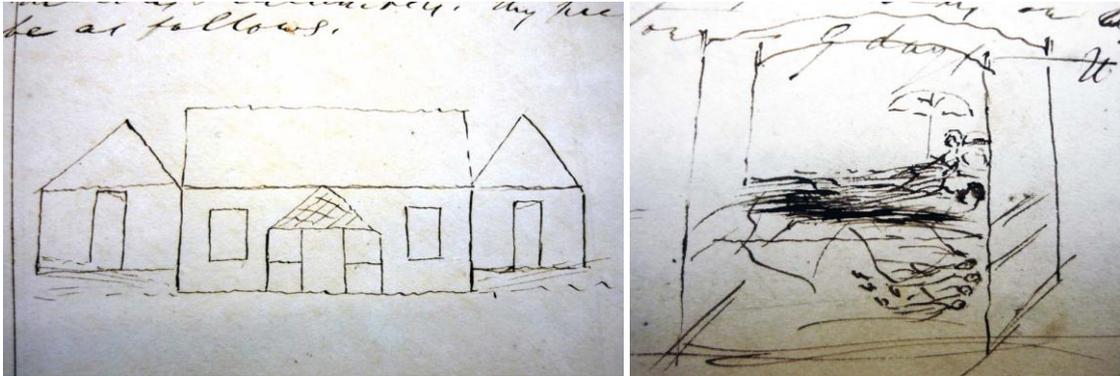
¹⁵ Inscription on tombstone of Anthony Beale and Katherine Rose Beale, St Katherine's Church of England, St Helena, Victoria.

¹⁶ Yvonne Stadler, 'The Beales of St. Helena Victoria Australia' biographical notes and introduction to a transcript of selected entries to the Beale diaries lodged with the diaries at the State Library of Victoria.

¹⁷ Stadler, 'The Beales of St. Helena', p 1.

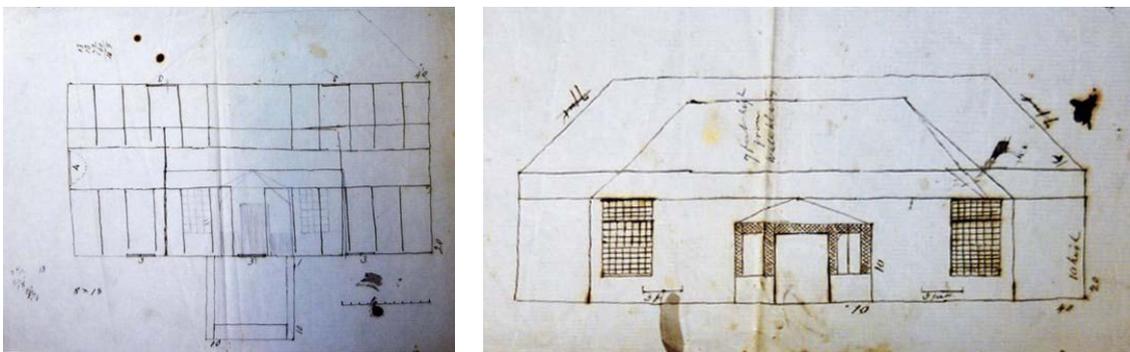
Beale's employment was terminated. The family went first to England, but finding his pension inadequate to support such a large family, Beale decided to sell his pension rights for a payment of £500, and with this capital sailed to Van Diemen's Land. Two of his sons remained in England to pursue their careers in medicine and the army.

Unfortunately their oldest son, Onesiphorous, was drowned in the Tamar River shortly after their arrival at Launceston. This misfortune, as much as the developing prospects of Port Phillip, may have prompted the move across the strait.¹⁸ Leaving his family in Launceston, Beale brought over to Melbourne the prefabricated cottage they had brought from England and erected it on 4.7 acres [1.9 ha] on the east side of Brunswick Street, near the later site of the Fitzroy Town Hall, which he purchased for £250. It was named St Helena Cottage.¹⁹



Intended appearance of the St Helena Cottage when completed; first night in bed under umbrellas. Beale diary 17 November 1839.

This house was one of the 'magnificent residences' referred to in the advertisement in the *Port Phillip Herald*, but this glowing description is not borne out by the references to it in Beale's diary and the plans and drawings that illustrate it.²⁰ On the family's first night in the house, 14 November 1839, the roof leaked so badly that Anthony and Katherine had to go to bed under umbrellas, as shown in one of his drawings. Their children lay on the floor beside the bed. Their bedding did not arrive, as Anthony lost his way while looking for it, so they had to borrow some from their neighbour Mr King. Not even Katherine's nightgown could be found. Anthony wrote: 'she had to stow herself away in one of my coloured shirts'.²¹ Despite the discomforts, the Beales never seemed to lose their sense of humour at the situations they found themselves in.



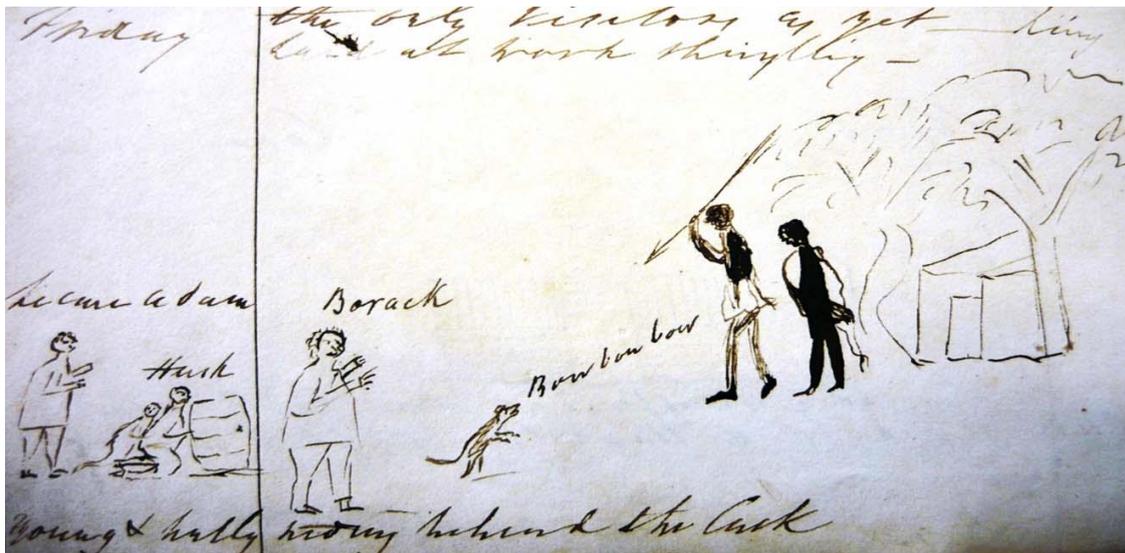
Actual form of St Helena Cottage. Loose drawing placed in the Beale diary at the entry for 27 October 1842.

¹⁸ Stadler, 'The Beales of St. Helena', p 1

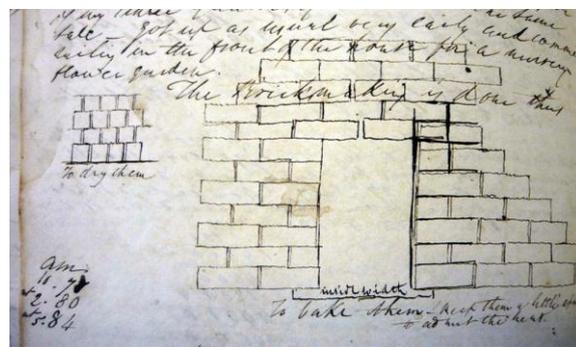
¹⁹ Stadler, 'The Beales of St. Helena'. P 1

²⁰ Anthony Beale, Diary 1839-1840, State Library of Victoria. The plans are loose in the diary.

²¹ Beale, Diary, 14 November 1839.



'A visit by two naked natives, the only visitors as yet'. Beale diary, 29 November 1839. The dog is barking 'bow bow bow'. Two of the Beale children, Willy and Young (Katherine Beale's maiden name) are hiding behind the cask. The identity of 'Borack' is not known – it is unlikely to be the Aboriginal artist William Barak, as he was given that name only in 1844.

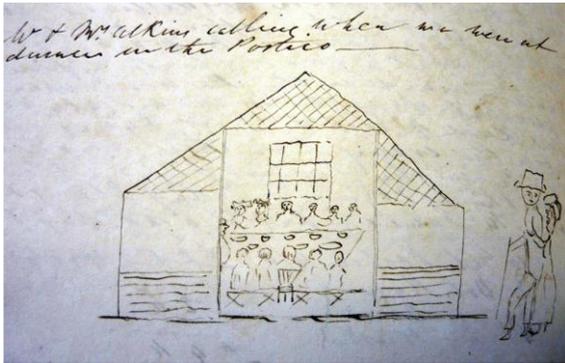


The stable & brickmaking. Beale diary, 26 November 1839, 18 February 1840.

Not only was the house not waterproof, but also extremely small for the large family it had to accommodate. From the drawings in the diary it appears to have been a rectangle of about twelve metres by six, with a portico about three metres square at the centrally located front door. The ceilings were three metres high. The portico was later adapted for dining in the warmer months.²² The portico bears a strong similarity to the porch at Longwood, Napoleon's house on St. Helena, with which the Beales would have been familiar, although they were not amongst the families on the island known to be on friendly terms with the former Emperor.²³

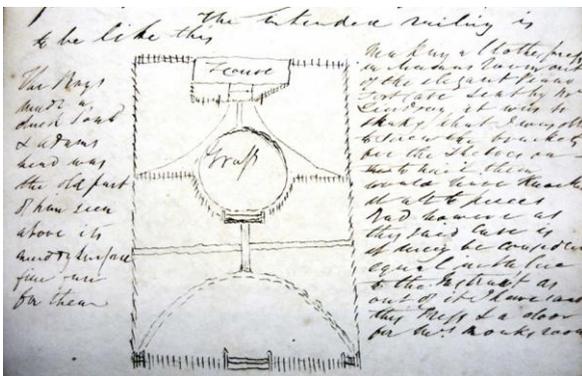
²² Beale, Diary, loose plans.

²³ Stadler, 'The Beales of St. Helena', p 1



'Mr. and Mrs. Atkins calling when we were at dinner in the Portico'. Mr Jamieson dining with the Beales in the portico: 'My legs being long stuck out at the door, At which poor Margaret did heartily roar', Beale diary, 7 & 24 April 1840.

Additional rooms were added, as well as a detached kitchen, where their 'man', Edwards slept. Anthony spent one day building Edwards a shelter beside the chimney to sleep under until a roof could be built. Behind the house was a stable, which from the drawings appears to have been constructed of logs. It was large enough for four horses and a month's supply of hay. In front of the house was an elaborate garden with geometrically planned paths, lawns and flowerbeds.²⁴



The garden layout (for the purpose of constructing a railed fence), and 'Used the cross cut saw and got a fine chopping log placed in the kitchen', Beale diary, 19 February 1840, 11 March 1840. The diagram shows pit sawing.

By the time the house was built most of the Beales' capital had been spent.²⁵ However, Anthony was soon clearing the land to plant vegetables and he made one pound a day from the sale of eggs from the poultry they brought with them.²⁶ Beale had the foresight to bring from Van Diemens Land a water cart, drawn by a bullock and driven by Edwards.²⁷ This was also a fairly profitable business in a settlement without a reticulated water supply, and Anthony earned about twelve pounds a month from it.²⁸ He estimated that if he could keep a dozen cows, he could generate an annual income of £1000, after which he would turn his attention to a sheep station.²⁹ One of the Beale's customers for milk from the one cow he already owned was their neighbour Charles Ebdon. Inserted in the diary is a receipt to 'Mr. Ebdon' for the sale of thirty-one quarts [a quart is about 1.1 litres] of milk.³⁰

²⁴ Beale, Diary, 19 February 1840.

²⁵ Beale, Diary, 1 February 1840.

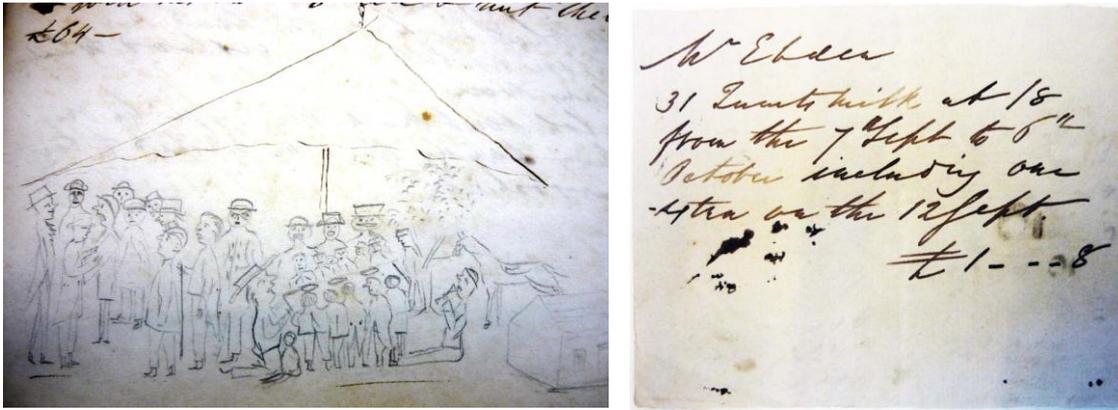
²⁶ Stadler, 'The Beales of St. Helena', p 1; Beale, Diary, 1 February 1840.

²⁷ Stadler, 'The Beales of St. Helena', p 1, Beale, Diary, 1 February 1840.

²⁸ Beale, Diary, 1 February 1840.

²⁹ Beale, Diary, 1 February 1840.

³⁰ Beale, Diary, loose.



The auction of Mr. Williams's house & Ebden's milk bill. Beale diary, Friday 3 April 1840 and loose insert.

The diary gives an indication of how heavily wooded the immediate environs of Melbourne still were in the early years of settlement. On 15 March 1840, Anthony and Katherine became lost in the bush coming home from church. When eventually they saw a house in the trees, which they assumed was theirs, they suddenly discovered that they had arrived at the La Trobe's house instead. On another occasion dingoes, which still roamed Newtown, attacked their fowls, and Beale frequently used his shotgun to augment their diet from the wildlife, which also abounded near the house.³¹

The Beale family enjoyed an active social life during their time in Newtown. They called twice on the La Trobes, finding Madame La Trobe 'a very pleasant person', but the superintendent looked 'very poorly'.³² They entertained extensively, usually dining in the portico, which from Anthony's drawings, must have been rather cramped. Many of Anthony's trips to 'town' were to visit Mr James, his wine merchant, his most usual purchases being Cape wine, whisky and sherry. In calculating the household expenses, he estimated that he spent one guinea a week on 'drinkables', which he noted: 'ought to be made to be enough'.³³

Maintaining the provision of 'drinkables' on occasion took priority over the education of his children. On 27 May 1840 Beale recorded that he had engaged a tutor for his sons (presumably not required for the daughters). He was Mr Brooke, the son of a St Helena clergyman. The diary reads: 'they are not on any account to be taken off their books'. By 9 June he records 'set the boys to work washing bottles', to be filled from a ten gallon barrel he had just purchased.³⁴

It is refreshing to note that Beale did not leave all the cooking to his wife and daughters. On 25 September 1840 he proudly recorded making 'a fine dish of macaroni' for dinner. He also included the recipe.³⁵ The Beales' entertaining included the receptions for the weddings of three of their daughters, which took place while they were living in Newtown.

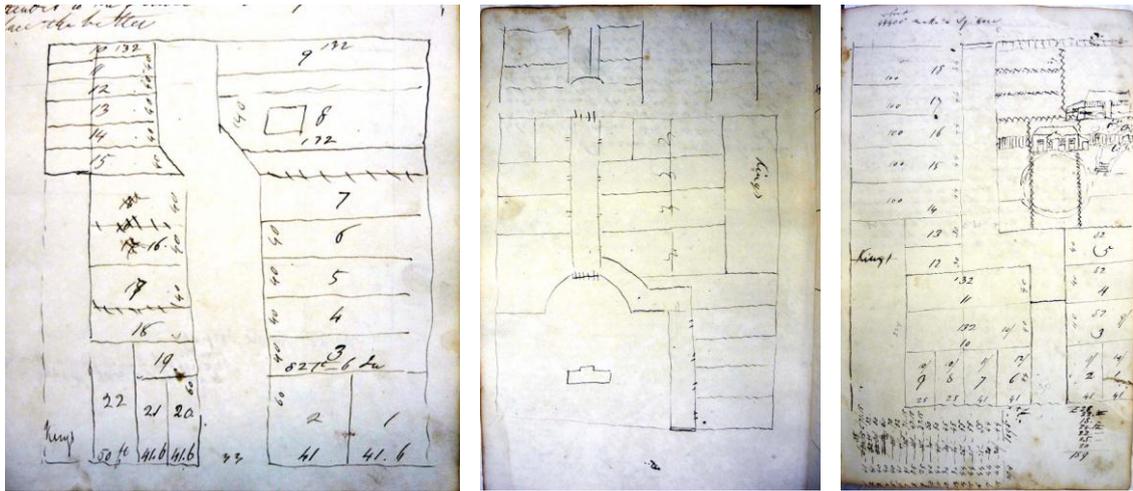
³¹ Beale, Diary, 31 March 1840.

³² Beale, Diary, 28 December 1839.

³³ Beale, Diary, 15 August 1840.

³⁴ Beale, Diary, 9 June 1840.

³⁵ Beale, Diary 25 September 1840.



Two subdivision plans for the property: 'Mr. Foot called and was asked to make a plan for the sale of the 3/4 acres.....', Beale diary 11 March 1840. The final subdivision plan: 'Went to town after breakfast and took a sketch of Mr. Foot's chart of my land for saleI have made a calculation of what may be realised by the sale of my land which if effected will bid fair to give me a small fortune in a short time', Beale diary, 20 March 1840. The reference is to the surveyor H B Foot.

By late 1840 the need for more land to farm led Beale to obtain a pastoral lease on a property on the Plenty River near present day Greensborough, which was later converted to freehold. It was named St Helena Park. The cottage was moved from Newtown and became the nucleus of the homestead he established there. Anthony was declared bankrupt in 1843 but was discharged in 1844.³⁶ The land at Newtown was eventually sold for the sum of £1200.³⁷ The diary contains many references to proposals for subdivision and sketch plans.³⁸

Katherine Beale died at St Helena in 1856, and in her memory Beale built a chapel in the garden of the homestead. He died in 1865. The chapel was extensively renovated over the years and later given to the Church of England and consecrated as St Katherine's Church. Anthony and Katherine are buried in the adjacent cemetery, part of which is reserved for members of the Beale family. In 1957 the church and the homestead, together with some Napoleonic relics which it contained, were destroyed in a bush fire. The ruins of the church were rebuilt to the same design, but not the homestead.³⁹ The St Helena Islanders gave the church a new collection plate.⁴⁰

As well as the rough sketches with which he illustrated his diary, Anthony Beale was also a talented painter, and his works included a portrait of his wife and a view of St Helena Island.

Arthur Kemmis

In contrast to Anthony Beale's cottage, the house occupied by Arthur Kemmis and his family did live up to its description in the newspaper advertisement.⁴¹ Arthur Kemmis (1806-1842) was one of the first merchants to settle in Melbourne. He was the second son of a Church of Ireland clergyman, Rev Thomas Kemmis. The family claimed descent from one of the companions of William the Conqueror, and had been settled in Ireland since the early eighteenth century. By the early nineteenth century they were living at Shaen, Queens County.⁴²

As a second son, Arthur was not entitled to his father's landed estate, but on his father's death

³⁶ De Serville, *Port Phillip Gentlemen*, p.217.

³⁷ D H Edwards, *The Diamond Valley Story* (Melbourne 1979), p.17.

³⁸ Beale, *Diary*, 11 March 1840.

³⁹ Edwards, *The Diamond Valley Story*, p17.

⁴⁰ Guide brochure, St. Katherine's Church of England St. Helena Victoria.

⁴¹ *Port Phillip Herald*, 30 October, 1840 p 3.

⁴² Pat Dargin, *Arthur Kemmis Esquire A Life Unfulfilled* (Dubbo [New South Wales] 2000), p 8.

in 1827 he received a bequest of several thousand pounds. With this capital he sailed to New South Wales in 1828.⁴³

His initial business ventures were disappointing. A whaling ship he purchased was wrecked and the first land grants for which he applied were refused. He was eventually granted land south of Sydney on which he attempted to set himself up as a squatter, but with little success or enthusiasm.⁴⁴

It was at this time that Arthur became associated with the Raymond family. James Raymond, his wife Aphrasia and their children, who eventually numbered twelve, had been granted free passages to New South Wales to compensate them for the destruction of their property in Ireland caused by anti-landlord riots. Raymond was first appointed coroner and later became the first Postmaster General of New South Wales. He introduced prepaid post there before the introduction of the penny post in Britain in 1840.⁴⁵

Raymond and his sons also had extensive squatting interests. One son, William Odell Raymond, established Strathfieldsaye Station in Gippsland.⁴⁶ Arthur Kemmis married James Raymond's daughter Aphrasia (named after her mother, and usually known as Aphra) in Sydney in December 1831, which added to the pressure to succeed in some line of business.⁴⁷

Further attempts at squatting in the Bathurst district also failed and the letters between Arthur and Aphra reflect the irritation this caused, as well as Aphra's depression caused by their separations, when he was in the bush and she was staying in Sydney with her parents. Her exhortations to Arthur in her letters 'be a man my Arthur', would not have helped his sagging confidence.⁴⁸

It was against this background that in October 1839 Arthur arrived in Port Phillip with the remains of his capital to establish himself as a merchant. He brought with him goods for sale and quickly had a double-storey brick and stone store built at Queens Wharf, as the business premises of 'Arthur Kemmis and Co', as the business was known.

Arthur then arranged to have a house built for his growing family who were still in Sydney. The house was located on the corner of Fitzroy Street and Victoria Parade, on land owned by Henry Bowerman, who paid for the construction of the house, which he then leased, back to Arthur for £130 per annum.⁴⁹ One can't help feeling that Arthur felt the Raymonds looking over his shoulder to ensure their daughter was being supported in a manner worthy of her.

The house must have been one of the most impressive in Melbourne. It was of brick, two storeys, and comprised a drawing room 7.5 by 5.4 metres, parlour 5.1 metres square, hall three metres wide, storeroom, butler's pantry, four bedrooms upstairs, the largest being 7.5 by 5.4 metres, and detached kitchen and servants rooms. The view extended over the whole town and as far as Williamstown.⁵⁰

In 1841 Arthur noted that 'almost all the villas stand in the shadow of giant trees ... like the ornamental timber in a park'. At that date there were one hundred houses in Newtown, which had a population of six hundred.⁵¹

Arthur rapidly built his firm into one of the leading businesses in Port Phillip. He travelled constantly around Port Phillip and to Sydney establishing business contacts and expanding his activities to include wool broking and steam transport.⁵²

⁴³ Dargin, *Arthur Kemmis*, p11.

⁴⁴ Pat Dargin, *The Kemmis Letters 1827-1844*, (Dubbo [New South Wales] 2007), p 52.

⁴⁵ Text accompanying the portrait of James Raymond, National Portrait Gallery Canberra.

⁴⁶ R V Billis & A S Kenyon [revised Paul de Serville], *Pastoral Pioneers of Port Phillip* (Melbourne 1974 [1932]), pp.129, 281.

⁴⁷ Dargin, *Arthur Kemmis*, pp 23, 26.

⁴⁸ Dargin, *Arthur Kemmis*, p 70.

⁴⁹ Dargin, *Arthur Kemmis*, p.84.

⁵⁰ Dargin, *Arthur Kemmis*, p.84.

⁵¹ Dargin, *Arthur Kemmis*, p.96.

⁵² Dargin, *Arthur Kemmis*, p.89.

In 1840 he was one of the founders of the Port Phillip Steam Navigation Company, of which he was secretary and treasurer. The company owned one steamer, the *Aphrasia*, and leased another, the *Corsair*, and carried passengers and cargo between Melbourne, Geelong and Sydney.⁵³

Like Charles Ebdon, but unlike Anthony Beale, Arthur Kemmis was one of the inner-circle of Melbourne society. His Irish ascendancy background, family connections, education and manners marked him as one of the gentlemen of the town, as did his other activities apart from his business. He was a director of the Port Phillip Bank, a member of the committee set up to investigate an alternative water supply to the town, a magistrate and a member of the Melbourne Club.⁵⁴

Once his business was established Arthur and Aphrasia led a quiet and reserved life, although blighted by the deaths of two of their children, from which it would appear, Aphrasia never recovered.⁵⁵

However, the affairs of the extended Raymond family were not so tranquil, and Arthur was requested by his father-in-law James Raymond to intercede with Samuel Raymond in what James regarded as his disreputable way of life.⁵⁶ Sam (as he was generally known) had followed his family to New South Wales after completing his law studies in Ireland. In 1841 he accompanied Judge Willis to Melbourne as the first deputy sheriff. He later practised as a barrister in Melbourne and Sydney and was prothonotary of the Supreme Court of New South Wales.⁵⁷ Sam was extremely popular in Melbourne society and his romantic career soon reached the ears of his father, at whose request Arthur urged Sam to reform. Sam made many promises, which were not kept.⁵⁸

As the economic slowdown of 1841 deepened into a depression Arthur's business was as badly affected as that of most merchants. His venture into woolbroking made him especially vulnerable to falls in wool prices, and the affairs of the Port Phillip Steam Navigation Company were also a cause of anxiety, especially allegations that money received by Arthur as treasurer had been paid into the account of Kemmis and Co.⁵⁹

In February 1842 after catching a severe cold, Arthur died suddenly at his home. His illness was exacerbated by his business concerns, which worried him to the end. He was only 36 years old. He was buried in the Old Melbourne Cemetery, and later moved to the Pioneer Section of Fawkner Cemetery.⁶⁰

Arthur's estate was later declared insolvent. Aphrasia and the children returned to Sydney to live with her parents. In 1852 she married John Maughan, a squatter and an old friend of Arthur and her family. She went to live with Maughan at his property Dundullimal Station near Dubbo, now preserved by the National Trust (NSW.). They lived there until 1858. Aphrasia died in Sydney in 1863.⁶¹

The final word on Arthur Kemmis comes from Edmund Finn (Garryowen) in his *Chronicles*, written in the 1880s. He described him as being 'of scholarly attainments, unspotted integrity, and the doer of many kindnesses in a private and unobtrusive manner. His death was a public loss.'⁶²

⁵³ Dargin, *Arthur Kemmis*, p.98; *Port Phillip Gazette*, 10 February 1842.

⁵⁴ De Serville, *Port Phillip Gentlemen*, pp 179, 211; Dargin, *Arthur Kemmis*, pp 90, 91, 92.

⁵⁵ Dargin, *Arthur Kemmis*, pp 90, 91, 92.

⁵⁶ Dargin, *Arthur Kemmis*, p.94 and 97.

⁵⁷ *Argus*, 22 June 1871, p 4.

⁵⁸ Dargin, *Arthur Kemmis*, p.98.

⁵⁹ Dargin, *Arthur Kemmis*, p.96.

⁶⁰ Dargin, *Arthur Kemmis*, p.110.

⁶¹ Dargin, *Arthur Kemmis*, p.116.

⁶² 'Garryowen' [Edmund Finn], *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne, 1835 to 1852: Historical, Anecdotal and Personal*, by 'Garryowen' (2 vols, Melbourne 1888), II, p 896.

Robert Saunders Webb

Other than being, according to the advertisement in the *Port Phillip Herald* 'magnificent',⁶³ there are no recorded details of the residence of Robert Saunders Webb, which was also in this neighbourhood.

Robert Webb and his wife Ann (*née* Fisher), who he married in 1833, were amongst the earliest settlers to arrive in Port Phillip from Sydney in 1836. Their first child Ann, born on 13 December 1836, is believed to be the first female child of European parents born in Melbourne. In September 1836 Webb was appointed the first sub-collector of customs and sub-treasurer of Port Phillip, with the additional powers to grant licences to auctioneers and publicans.⁶⁴

On the arrival of Charles Joseph La Trobe as superintendent in 1839 Webb was given the task of reading aloud to the assembled residents La Trobe's commission from the Queen, setting out his powers and duties.⁶⁵

Along with Charles Ebdon and Arthur Kemmis, Robert Webb was regarded as belonging to the inner circle of Melbourne Society. Apart from his official functions he was also one of the first aldermen when Melbourne was incorporated as a town, a member of the committee of the Melbourne Fire and Marine Insurance Company and a committee member of many of the social, philanthropic and cultural bodies which gradually developed in Melbourne.⁶⁶

In February 1839 Webb bought for £560 land originally bought by Thomas Walker at the first land sale, which Webb later subdivided and sold. Webb's land transactions were the cause of considerable embarrassment to him and led to an official inquiry into his administration of the customs department.⁶⁷ As the speculation in land mounted, there was disquiet in government circles that some officials were using their positions to unjustly enrich themselves. It was alleged that Webb had 'borrowed' £17,000 from the customs department to purchase land.⁶⁸

In 1843 C H Barnes, the collector of customs in Hobart, assisted by James Cassell, arrived at Port Phillip to investigate the customs department in general and Robert Webb in particular. In 1845 Cassell returned as acting sub-collector of customs to prepare his report. Cassell was himself suspended for refusing to give Webb a copy of the report on the charges against him.⁶⁹ However, there is no record of any charges ever being laid against Webb.

The Webbs later moved to Brighton. Webb died in 1855 and his wife in 1862. Of their six children, the most prominent was the youngest, Thomas Prout Webb (1845-1916). He was born in Newtown and studied law at Melbourne University, King's College London and Lincoln's Inn. After practising as a barrister in London he returned to Melbourne where he had a distinguished legal career.⁷⁰

He was also a gifted amateur painter, possibly inheriting his mother's skill. He moved in the same artistic circles as Georgiana McCrae, who had plans to marry him to her daughter Maggie. To her dismay, Maggie announced one day that she was engaged to someone else. However, Thomas Webb and Georgiana remained on friendly terms all their lives.⁷¹

Thomas Strode

Thomas Strode and his family occupied another of these impressive residences.⁷² Strode was born in Sydney in 1812 and was married there in 1835. In 1838, in partnership with George

⁶³ *Port Phillip Herald*, 19 June 1840, p 3.

⁶⁴ Charles Francis, 'Thomas Prout Webb', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Melbourne 1976.

⁶⁵ Drury, *La Trobe*, p 141.

⁶⁶ De Serville, *Port Phillip Gentlemen*, pp 212-13.

⁶⁷ Susan Stringer, 'James Horatio Nelson Cassell (1814-1853)' *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

⁶⁸ A G L Shaw, *A History of the Port Phillip District* (Melbourne 1996).

⁶⁹ Stringer, 'James Cassell'.

⁷⁰ Francis, 'Webb'.

⁷¹ Brenda Niall, *Georgiana* (Melbourne 1994), p 243.

⁷² *Port Phillip Herald*, 19 June 1840.

Arden he established the *Port Phillip Gazette* newspaper.⁷³ This was the first licensed newspaper in Port Phillip. John Pascoe Fawkner had commenced publishing the *Melbourne Advertiser* in January 1838 without obtaining a licence from the government in Sydney and was forced to suspend publication in April 1838.⁷⁴

Arden had previously visited Melbourne, which he described as being like the villages he had visited in the interior of India, 'a nucleus of huts embosomed in a forest foliage'.⁷⁵ Like so many early residents, Arden noted the heavily wooded aspect of the town.

Thomas Strode had been the manager of the publication department of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. When he first arrived in Melbourne to commence the new venture with Arden he was so disheartened by the apparent lack of prospects that he almost abandoned it. As he told the historian James Bonwick years later 'he could not see what kangaroos and blackfellows wanted with a newspaper.' He was however persuaded by Arden to give it a trial, and commenced printing in premises in Queen Street, his assistant being his wife. The first issue of the *Port Phillip Gazette* appeared on 27 October 1838.⁷⁶ It was shortly after this that Thomas and his family set up house in Newtown.

The stated intention of the *Port Phillip Gazette* was to 'assist the enquiring, animate the struggling, and sympathise with all'. Supported by two of Melbourne's leading merchants, John Hodgson and William Rutledge, it was to be the voice of the conservative elements in the community, and be distinguished by a 'quiet and gentlemanly tone'.⁷⁷

Arden was the editor. Well connected, from an ancient family whose origins pre-dated the Norman Conquest, and moving in fashionable society, he would have seemed well qualified to achieve these aims. Unfortunately he was also impetuous and of an unstable temperament, so that the paper was soon attacking those whose interests it claimed to support, as well as government officials.⁷⁸ Subsequently Fawkner obtained a publishing licence and the respective proprietors of the two papers spent much of their energies attacking each other. Arden eventually withdrew from the paper and disappeared from public view. In 1854 his body was found on the Ballarat goldfields.⁷⁹

Strode managed the printing and publishing of the paper, and ran it alone for a period after the departure of Arden. Strode did not move in society like Arden, but was older and steadier, though this did not prevent him from offending many influential residents, including Judge John Walpole Willis. This of course was not difficult to do, as the judge was notoriously irascible and unpredictable, and was eventually recalled. Strode was amongst many who were jailed by the judge for contempt.⁸⁰ In his capacity as editor, after the departure of Arden, Strode was outspoken, though not always objective, especially in relation to Fawkner. It was probably due to the risk of libel proceedings from Fawkner that Strode never published the memoirs he wrote.⁸¹

Under Strode's management the *Port Phillip Gazette* introduced copper plate printing and lithography to Melbourne and printed the advertisement for the first book published in Melbourne, appropriately written by Arden, *Latest information with regard to Australia Felix*, published in 1840.⁸²

Strode was a member of the 1st Masonic Lodge formed in Melbourne in 1840 and in 1841 was the prime mover in establishing the first lodge of the Independent Order of Oddfellows in Port Phillip.⁸³

⁷³ *Geelong Business News*, interview with Tim Anderson, February 2005.

⁷⁴ *Argus*, 27 July 1918, p 6.

⁷⁵ *Argus*, 26 June 1926, p 6.

⁷⁶ *Argus*, 26 June 1926, p 6.

⁷⁷ De Serville, *Port Phillip Gentlemen*, p 19.

⁷⁸ De Serville, *Port Phillip Gentlemen*, p 19.

⁷⁹ *Argus*, 26 June 1926, p 6.

⁸⁰ *Argus*, 26 June 1926, p 6.

⁸¹ De Serville, *Port Phillip Gentlemen*, p.141; *Geelong Business News*, interview with Tim Anderson, February 2005.

⁸² P L Brown, 'George Arden (1820-1854)' *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

⁸³ *Australasian Sketcher*, 22 May 1880, p.99.

James Montgomery

Another of the 'elegant and truly beautiful residences' referred to by the *Port Phillip Herald* was that belonging to James Montgomery.⁸⁴ This house, named Erin Cottage, would have stood close to that of Arthur Kemmis on the corner of Victoria Parade and Little Brunswick Street (now Fitzroy Street), and Charles Ebdon, also in Little Brunswick Street.⁸⁵

James Montgomery was the first crown solicitor in Port Phillip.⁸⁶ He was appointed in 1841 at the same time as John Walpole Willis and Sam Raymond, the first resident judge and the deputy sheriff, both of whom we have met previously.

Like nearly every lawyer, government official, newspaper editor and also many litigants before the court, Montgomery soon clashed with the judge. The final straw came when the judge rebuked Montgomery in court over his private financial dealings, which were neither unlawful nor discreditable, and had no relevance to the case. In protest, all the barristers present walked out of court, and Montgomery resigned as crown solicitor, to be replaced by Henry Field Gurner.⁸⁷ Willis's erratic behaviour eventually led to his removal from office, as he had been from his two previous appointments in Canada and British Guiana.⁸⁸

Montgomery's next venture also ended in conflict. He joined the solicitor Andrew Murison McCrae, the husband of the diarist Georgiana McCrae, in setting up a legal practice in Melbourne.⁸⁹ At first this was a profitable arrangement. It was estimated that they initially made £2000 per annum until the depression began to make itself felt.⁹⁰ This would have been a substantial increase on his salary of £200 per annum as crown solicitor.⁹¹

However, with the onset of the depression, declining business and increasing debts, the relationship between the partners deteriorated. The situation was not helped when in 1843 the Union Bank called in their overdraft, the reason being that James Montgomery had acted against the bank on behalf of one of his clients.⁹²

Montgomery complained that he was left to do most of the work while McCrae was 'amusing himself'.⁹³ At what must have been a lively dinner at the McCrae's house, when the gentlemen had drunk rather too much, Andrew McCrae alleged that Montgomery had been taking more than his fair share of the profits of the firm.⁹⁴ McCrae justified what may have been regarded as excessive socialising on the grounds that he had created the firm and kept it going by extending 'civilities' to the clients. Georgiana records that as the argument grew heated, she discreetly withdrew to her room. Of course, as hostess at the dinners she gave for the clients, Georgiana probably did more than Andrew in providing the 'civilities'.

The firm was finally dissolved in 1845 amidst much acrimony over clients, accounts and debts. When Montgomery locked McCrae out of the office, he received interesting advice from friends as to how to assert his rights. Henry Moor, solicitor and mayor of Melbourne advised him to use a crow bar on the door, and Edward Eyre Williams, the future Supreme Court Judge advised him to pick the lock.⁹⁵

⁸⁴ *Port Phillip Herald*, Melbourne 19 June 1840.

⁸⁵ Mouritz. *Port Phillip Directory 1847*, p 33.

⁸⁶ McCrae, *Georgiana's Journal*, p.93.

⁸⁷ McCrae, *Georgiana's Journal*, p.93.

⁸⁸ John Barry, 'John Walpole Willis (1793-1877)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

⁸⁹ Hugh McCrae [ed], *Georgiana Journal 1841-1865* (Melbourne 1996), p 93.

⁹⁰ Niall, *Georgiana*, p 142.

⁹¹ McCrae, *Georgiana's Journal*, p 93.

⁹² McCrae, *Georgiana's Journal*, p 92.

⁹³ McCrae, *Georgiana's Journal*, p 88.

⁹⁴ McCrae, *Georgiana's Journal*, p 88.

⁹⁵ Niall, *Georgiana*, pp 149, 172.

An interesting commentary on the state of law and order in Newtown is recorded in the *Port Phillip Herald* on 23 April 1841. Three applications for liquor licences in Newtown had been made to the court, but the crown solicitor James Montgomery, who was also a resident of Newtown, opposed them all. A memorial signed by most of the 'respectable inhabitants' supported him. The court considered granting one licence, so that the 'labouring class, many of whom resided there would not have to go to Melbourne to buy their beer'. However, as there was 'no constabulary force to overlook, much less to look after the publican', all three applications were refused.⁹⁶

Perhaps the absence of policemen and the presence of the labouring class, even without ready access to alcohol, made James Montgomery pine for a more secluded home. By the end of 1841 he was living at Brighton. He named the new house 'Erin Cottage' after the Newtown house.⁹⁷

Conclusion

Of all these early residents of Fitzroy, Charles Ebdon most successfully fulfilled his aspirations in the colony. Coming from a prominent family in South Africa, he created a similar position for himself in Port Phillip. Arthur Kemmis, with a background and aspirations similar to Ebdon's, made a promising start but was facing ruin at the date of his untimely death, overwhelmed by the depression which claimed so many of the early colonists. Robert Webb, James Montgomery and Thomas Strode achieved respectable if unspectacular positions in their occupations, and Anthony Beale managed to live out his life as a small scale squatter, in the easygoing manner one suspects he was accustomed to from his earlier life as an official on the Island of St. Helena.

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⁹⁶ *Port Phillip Herald*, 23 April 1841.

⁹⁷ Weston Bate, *A History of Brighton* (Melbourne 1962), p 44.