

## The Bunbury Letters from New Town

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‘Nothing in life is certain’<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

It is fortunate for those of us interested in recreating the past of Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, that some wonderful archives exist. Among these are letters written by a young married couple, Hanmer and Sarah Bunbury, who chose to migrate to the colony of Port Phillip in 1840, only a few years after its establishment.<sup>2</sup> These letters are remarkable for the detail they provide on many matters, and the earlier of them are even more special because they reveal the reasons for migration, the life and family left behind, the voyage, their expectations of Port Phillip and their first impressions of the climate, the scenery, the vegetation, the native inhabitants and of course New Town (Fitzroy). The letters from New Town provide an insight into the enormous changes which this young couple from England’s upper class had to make in their daily lives, at a time when social boundaries were more clearly defined. In addition they describe the physical and mental hardships endured during the first few months in New Town, when they were working to establish a new life for themselves. More poignant are the feelings of homesickness apparent in their naming of their properties.

<sup>1</sup> The Coat of Arms of the Bunbury family has three chess rooks on a black diagonal line on a white shield. Above this is an open iron helmet, indicative of knights and baronets, and above this is the family crest: two swords saltire-wise passing through a leopard’s face. The backdrop is the mantling or lambrequin, the drapery tied to the helmet above the shield which represented the cloth worn over helmets to protect the wearer from the weather and battle blows. Consequently it is often shown tattered.

<sup>2</sup> All letters here cited are from the papers of the Bunbury family at the State Library of Victoria, MS13530, unless stated otherwise.

## Destination Port Phillip

With all the confidence of youth, at having done all he could to obtain the best possible advice and information about migration to Australia, Captain Richard Hanmer Bunbury RN embarked on the *Argyle* for the new colony of Port Phillip with his heavily pregnant wife, his pregnant sister-in-law, his infant son, his wife's brother, a pet monkey and ten or twelve tonnes of luggage.<sup>3</sup> The decision to migrate to Australia had not been made on impulse; the twenty-five year old Bunbury, then still a lieutenant, had mentioned it to Sarah Susanna Sconce when he proposed to her in 1838. This had obviously worried her father; for he wrote to his future son-in-law's father, Sir Henry Bunbury, noting that Hanmer seemed determined to leave the navy and that perhaps a consular position could be found for him.<sup>4</sup> Sir Henry himself expressed helplessness in this matter, writing that Hanmer 'has been seized with this epidemical rage for colonisation, and I find it to my sorrow impossible to divert him from his scheme of settling in Australia.'<sup>5</sup>

Hanmer himself never clearly specified his reasons for leaving the Royal Navy or for emigrating to Australia, so these can only be surmised. His naval career had been exemplary: when only thirteen years old he had been sent to sea as midshipman and, later that year, while on the *Asia*, the flagship of Admiral Sir Edward Codrington, he lost his right hand in the Battle of Navarino against the Turks.<sup>6</sup> The young man received a further blow nearly one year to the day when, still on active service in the Mediterranean, he received a detailed and loving letter from his father telling him of the illness and death at Genoa of his young mother. In this letter Sir Henry urges his youngest son 'never to forget or fail to cherish' her memory, giving thanks to God that his hope in Hanmer is strong, and that he 'has every ground to trust' that he will be 'his pride and comfort', calling him his 'good and gallant boy'.<sup>7</sup> Hanmer certainly showed signs of living up to this trust: he received a letter of commendation, written to Vice-Admiral Josius Rowley from Captain W F Wise, on 14 September 1835 and, on 18 January 1836, a certificate from the Royal Humane Society for rescuing (despite his disability) a seaman who had fallen overboard, an act of 'distinguished courage and humanity'.<sup>8</sup>

By the time of his marriage on 19 December 1838 to Sarah Susanna (1816-1872),<sup>9</sup> whom he called Sukey, he had served in the Royal Navy for eleven years. Then, having reached the rank of captain, Hanmer decided to leave the service.<sup>10</sup> The need for further advancement in his career, and his junior place in the family, made it imperative that he should seek his livelihood

<sup>3</sup> R H Bunbury [at Barton] to R C Sconce, 24/29 September 1840: series 4, box 1/9 [55G].

<sup>4</sup> R C Sconce [in Malta] to Sir Henry Bunbury, 17 October 1838: series 13, box 2/11 and R H Bunbury [at Castelmare, Sicily] to R C Sconce, 5 July 1839: series 4, box 1/9 [55A].

<sup>5</sup> Sir Henry Bunbury to Ellice, contained in a letter of Sir George Gipps to La Trobe, 23 April 1841, La Trobe Papers, La Trobe Library.

<sup>6</sup> Hanmer's parents were in Marseilles when they heard of his injury (it was reported that he had lost his right arm). His mother was in the final stages of a terminal illness and the news was an enormous blow both to her and his father, who fell ill immediately. His parents hoped that Hanmer would join them as soon as possible: H E Bunbury & C J F Bunbury, *Memoir and Literary Remains of Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Edward Bunbury Bt.* (London 1868), pp 123-126.

<sup>7</sup> Sir Henry Bunbury to R H Bunbury [on HMS *Rattlesnake*] 19 October 1828, series 10, box 2/8 [1]. Hanmer's mother was Louisa Amelia Fox, a descendant of Charles II through her maternal line: J Venn & J A Venn [eds] 'Edward Herbert Bunbury' *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (10 vols) (online ed.) (Cambridge University Press 1922-1958). She was the daughter of General the Hon Henry Edward Fox (older brother of Charles James Fox) and Marianne Clayton. The eighteen-year old married Henry Edward Bunbury (later Lt-Gen Sir Henry Bunbury, 7<sup>th</sup> Bt), on 4 April 1807, *Memoirs* p.32. Louisa's two siblings were Henry Stephen Fox (1791-1846), later the UK envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to the USA, and Caroline Fox, who married her cousin Lt-Gen. Sir William Francis Patrick Napier KCB (1785-1860).

<sup>8</sup> 'Richard Hanmer Bunbury Letters' Princeton University Manuscripts Division, Princeton, New Jersey. C0707: letter of commendation, folder 11; Royal Humane Society, folder 12.

<sup>9</sup> Bunbury Letters, Princeton: marriage certificate, folder 13. She was the elder daughter of Robert Clement Sconce of Plymouth, Devon, Chief Commissary of the Navy at Malta.

<sup>10</sup> Hanmer's promotion came on 10 May 1839: R H Bunbury [Castelmare, Sicily] to R C Sconce, 5 July 1839, series 4, Box 1/9 [55A].

elsewhere.<sup>11</sup> Hanmer was the fourth and youngest son of Lt General Sir Henry Edward Bunbury, 7<sup>th</sup> baronet,<sup>12</sup> soldier and military historian, and his first wife Louisa Amelia Fox.<sup>13</sup> His older brothers were Charles, Edward and Henry.<sup>14</sup> It seems likely that Hanmer was enthused by Henry's experiences in the Australian colonies during the years 1834 to 1837, when he served as a lieutenant in the 21<sup>st</sup> regiment.<sup>15</sup> Hanmer's letters to his father-in-law also show that he and Sconce's son Robert often discussed the merits of South Australia (where land was cheaper) versus Port Phillip (where there was more water), and that Henry was one of their main sources of advice, even offering Hanmer introductions for Port Phillip.<sup>16</sup> The decision was finally made in favour of Port Phillip, a settlement only a few years old. It was also decided that his wife Sarah Susanna would accompany him, despite her pregnancy and her reservations about migrating, and notwithstanding Hanmer's original wish for her to stay in England until he was settled. In addition her brother Robert and his wife Lizzie decided to join them.<sup>17</sup> Just before leaving London for Plymouth, Hanmer wrote anxiously to his father about the monetary situation at Port Phillip and the bills of credit he required before sailing.<sup>18</sup> His concern would prove to be well-founded.

### New Friends, a New Baby and a New Life

Sarah soon needed to call on all her strength and determination to cope with her coming ordeal. Shortly after leaving Plymouth the *Argyle* passengers endured an extremely violent storm in the Bay of Biscay, Sarah was so ill that Hanmer suspected poisoning.<sup>19</sup> During the storm the *Argyle* came to the rescue of the Italian crew of the sinking *Joachim*. This act of mercy extended to taking the shipwrecked sailors to the port of Praia (Praya). It was a blessed respite for the storm-battered *Argyle* passengers, who were able to have a blissful week on Santiago, one of the Cape Verde islands, enjoying the local sites and fresh produce before continuing their long voyage. Within a week of leaving Praia, Sarah went into labour. Fortunately for her one of their fellow cabin passengers was the talented artist Georgiana McCrae (travelling with her four sons to meet up with her husband in Port Phillip), who stayed with her throughout the birth.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Paul de Serville, *Port Phillip Gentlemen* (Melbourne 1980), p 28.

<sup>12</sup> Sir Henry 7<sup>th</sup> Bt. (1778-1860). The first baronet was Thomas Bunbury who received the title in 1681. Peter Townsend [ed] *Burke's Genealogical history of the Peerage, Baronetage and Knightage* (London 1970).

<sup>13</sup> Hanmer was born on 18 December 1813 at the family home, Mildenhall. When his father succeeded to the baronetcy the family moved into Barton Hall, Suffolk. His father's second wife was Emily Louisa Napier (1783-1863), daughter of Col George Napier, whom he married at Pau, France, in 1830.

<sup>14</sup> Charles James Fox, 8<sup>th</sup> Bt. (1809- 1886); Edward Herbert, 9<sup>th</sup> Bt. (1811-1895); Henry William St Pierre (1812-1875), later Colonel.

<sup>15</sup> In New South Wales 1834-35, in Tasmania 1835-36 and in Western Australia 1836-37 where he was first stationed in the York, Pinjarra and Busselton districts. In December 1836, he travelled overland from Pinjarra to Busselton making detailed notes of the landscape, flora, fauna, native inhabitants and geology (noting in particular the mineral content of the sands of the region). When Sir James Stirling established a military base in the Busselton region, Lt Henry Bunbury was put in charge and the town named Bunbury after him in 1843. W S P Bunbury & W P Morrell [eds], *Early Days in Western Australia, being the Letters and Journal of Lieut. H. W. Bunbury* (London, 1930); Cara Cammilleri, 'Henry William St Pierre Bunbury (1812-1875)' *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

<sup>16</sup> R H Bunbury [at Barton] to R C Sconce, 31 January 1840, series 4, box 1/9 [55B]; [at Freshford] 13 March 1840 [55C]; [at 31 Arundel Street, Strand] 5 June 1840 [55D]; [at Barton] 28 August 1840 [55F].

<sup>17</sup> R H Bunbury [at Barton] to R C Sconce, 31 January 1840, series 4, box 1/9 [55B].

<sup>18</sup> R H Bunbury [London], to Sir Henry Bunbury, 27 October 1840, series 2, box 1/4 [1]

<sup>19</sup> R H Bunbury [on the *Argyle*], to Sir Henry Bunbury, 23 November 1840, series 2, box 1/4 [1A]

<sup>20</sup> Within half an hour, she writes 'a fine boy' was handed to her. It was the first time she had been present at a birth but 'being accustomed to infants, I did all that was needful'. Hugh McCrae [ed] *Georgiana's Journal Melbourne 1841- 1835* (Sydney 1934), p 46.

A love of painting was shared by the Bunburys and Georgiana, who wrote in her journal that ... 'we played whist, or looked at some capitol landscapes painted by Captain Bunbury with his left hand, he having parted with his right one, so he said "to feed the Turks at Navarino".'<sup>21</sup> Hanmer, like many midshipmen, may have received training in art,<sup>22</sup> but artistic ability was clearly in the family: his grandfather was the famous caricaturist, Henry William Bunbury, whose friend, Joshua Reynolds, painted several members of his family including Hanmer's father and grandparents.<sup>23</sup> The friendship between Sarah and Georgiana would blossom in the Port Phillip colony, Georgiana would help Sarah with her painting, the families would socialise, and the wives would maintain contact for the rest of their lives.<sup>24</sup>



The *Argyle* and the wreck of the *Joachino*, 1840, by Richard Hanmer Bunbury  
Mitchell Library, Sydney: SSV / Ships / Argy / 1.

### Arrival at Port Phillip Bay

Having survived 110 days at sea, the voyage nearly ended in disaster when the *Argyle* entered Port Phillip Bay; no pilot was available and the ship became temporarily stranded off Swan Island, dragging its anchor before refloating and sailing safely into Hobson's Bay (off Williamstown) on 1 March 1841.<sup>25</sup> The tiny settlement of 1835 on the fertile lands of Port Phillip Bay had grown steadily. Before the end of 1836 a police presence had been established and surveys had begun. In 1837 parts of central Melbourne and Williamstown had been surveyed and sold. In September 1839, Charles La Trobe was appointed as the Superintendent of the Port Phillip District.

<sup>21</sup> McCrae, *Georgiana's Journal*, p 44.

<sup>22</sup> One of the first to train midshipmen was the great Royal Navy artist John Thomas Serres.

<sup>23</sup> Hanmer's grandmother was the famous beauty Catherine Horneck. She and her sister Mary were 'portrayed by Reynolds and eulogized by Oliver Goldsmith': Paul Knolle [ed], *Henry William Bunbury 1750-1811: The Raphael of Caricaturists* (Rijkmuseum Twenthe Series 1, Enschede 1996), p 25.

<sup>24</sup> Georgiana McCrae [Melbourne] to Sarah Bunbury [Kensington, London], 13 February 1860 series 11, box 2/9 [2].

<sup>25</sup> Georgiana was present when Captain Gatenby and Captain Bunbury were discussing the seriousness of this situation: *Georgiana's Journal*, p 48. Florence Chuk *The Somerset Years* (Ballarat [Victoria] 1987), pp 51-2. Brenda Niall, *Georgiana* (Melbourne 1994), p 122.

## A New Home at New Town

Leaving the women and children on board, Hanmer Bunbury and Robert Sconce went ashore on Thursday, 4 March 1841 to settle their banking details and look for accommodation. Sarah wrote to her father on Friday 5 March of the excitement when she and Lizzie heard that they had rented a weatherboard cottage in New Town<sup>26</sup> called Forest Hill Cottage, which had been advertised that day in the *Port Phillip Gazette*.<sup>27</sup> She had not expected to have a roof over her head 'for months' and now they had a four-roomed weatherboard cottage, plastered inside with a kitchen and a closet for six months at £155 pa.<sup>28</sup> She heard from all those who had gone ashore that it was a wonderful town, even though it was only three years old, and wrote that they were 'enchanted with the Town and country' and she was pleased with what she could see from the ship, with the climate and the fact that they have arrived in autumn and escaped the heat of the summer. She expected to 'like the sort of life we shall lead here exceedingly'.

By 9 March Sarah, her children, the contents of their cabins and all their goods were at Forest Hill Cottage. She writes that she was amazed to be conveyed to the 'villa' in an open carriage past 'chemists, drapers, milliners and all sorts of shops!' She declares herself 'perfectly enchanted with the scenery': the sunset more beautiful than anything she had ever seen, the river was like a looking glass and its banks were thickly wooded. The countryside was so beautiful that she longed for more leisure time to draw. Around New Town 'the turf is beautifully green and it is thickly wooded', although mostly with gum trees with very little bark. She found it hard to believe that she was in Australia, as she had not yet seen a kangaroo or a native! Hanmer writes that 'altogether we are thoroughly satisfied with our position – comfortable and happy'.<sup>29</sup>

They furnished their house with their cabin furniture. One room was the sitting room (which 'Lizzie calls the Drawing Room'), the other front room was Robert and Lizzie's bedroom and she and Hanmer and the children had the two rear rooms. There was also a little brick floored kitchen and a closet in the rear. Tents had been put up for the servants and the rest of their goods from the hold. Sarah notes that she has 'scarcely seen any flowers yet' and longs to find her seeds and begin planting the front garden... 'I believe there is no such thing as a flower garden in this country - the people here are far too mercenary to take pleasure in anything that brings them no gain'.<sup>30</sup>

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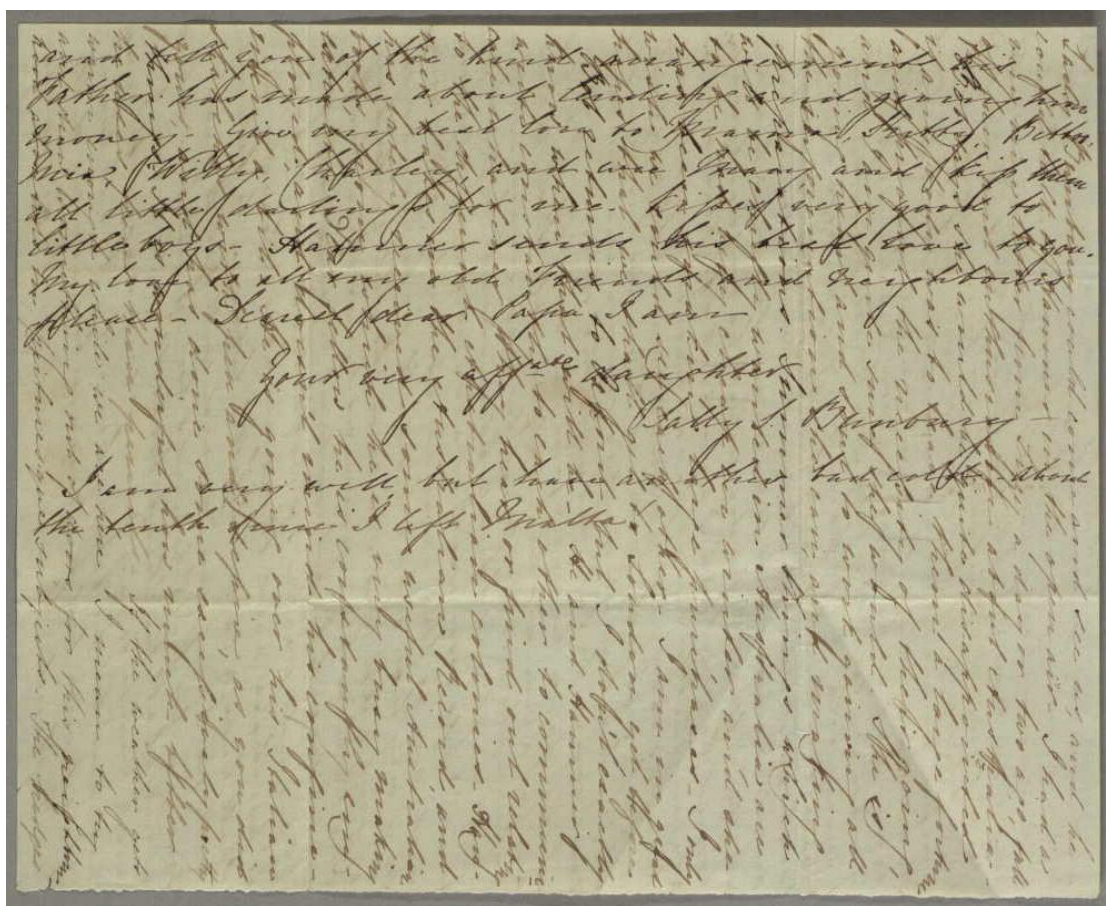
<sup>26</sup> The continuation of a letter begun on board the *Argyle* and finished at Forest Hill Cottage in New Town: Sarah Bunbury to R C Sconce, 20 December 1840 to 5 March 1841, series 6, box 2/1 [2].

<sup>27</sup> The area at the southern end of Brunswick Street was initially known as Forest Hill, being on the high ground now known as Eastern Hill, and with most of the original vegetation still remaining there until the early 1840s.

<sup>28</sup> R H Bunbury [Port Phillip], to Sir Henry Bunbury, 17 March 1841, series 2, box 1/4 [2]. The rent of the cottage in New Town should be understood in light of current wages: Hanmer's stockkeeper at the Barton Run was expected to earn £130 p.a.: R H Bunbury [New Town], to Sir Henry on 27 April 1841, series 2 box 1/4 [3]; 'shepherd, hutkeepers wages are already down to £30 -£35 pa with lodging & rations'. R H Bunbury [Melbourne] to Sir Henry Bunbury, 5 July 1843, series 2, box 1/5 [24].

<sup>29</sup> R H Bunbury [Port Phillip], to Sir Henry Bunbury, 17 March 1841, series 2, box 1/4 [2].

<sup>30</sup> Sarah Bunbury to R C Sconce, 20 December 1840 to 5 March 1841, series 6, box 2/1 [2].



Letter of Sarah Bunbury to her father showing cross-hatching. State Library of Victoria, no pp 0142-003x2001: Cross-hatching was used to keep the weight of letters to a minimum.

### Keeping healthy in New Town

Fortunately healthy, and looking the better from the voyage, the boys, now seventeen and three months, were both quite fat. Frank was christened on 7 March 1841 at the wooden church of St James.<sup>31</sup> After the long voyage Harry either didn't remember trees or else 'the trees around New Town were unrecognisable as trees to him!'<sup>32</sup> Overall their feelings were that this was a 'splendid country', more 'respectable and superior' than they expected and they were comfortable with excellent servants and food. They were dry and healthy in their 'snug' cottage (apart from Hanmer, whose health was not good) and were pleased to be  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile [1.2 km] from the Town, where the lack of sewers and the marshy ground make it unhealthy.<sup>33</sup>

This situation deteriorated as the weeks went by and Hanmer recalled that they had decided against Adelaide because of the dysentery and ophthalmia there, and now they found that not only was not only dysentery and ophthalmia, but also malaria in the Port Phillip region. Harry, fortunately, recovered from a slight attack of dysentery.<sup>34</sup> Otherwise the children were well: 'I do wish you could see my two dear boys - they are glorious fellows. Harry drives about in the wheelbarrow, which he thinks great fun - and chatters at a great rate all the time. Black eyed Frank is a much stouter child than Harry was, and has never yet known what a pain or an ache is, so he is always in good humour'. They received smallpox vaccinations from Dr Meyer.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> The stone walls were being built at the time of the christening of Francis Argyle Bunbury for whom Georgiana stood as proxy godmother. McCrae, *Georgiana's Journal*, p 50.

<sup>32</sup> Sarah Bunbury to R C Sconce, 20 December 1840 to 5 March 1841, series 6, box 2/1 [2].

<sup>33</sup> R H Bunbury [New Town], to Sir Henry Bunbury, 17 March 1841, series 2, box 1/4 [2].

<sup>34</sup> R H Bunbury [New Town], to Sir Henry Bunbury, 27 April 1841, series 2, box 1/4 [3].

<sup>35</sup> Sarah Bunbury [New Town], to R C Sconce, 25 March 1841, series 6, box 2/1 [3].



The only real regret was the absence of friends and relations.<sup>36</sup> Homesickness is evident in Sarah's comment that 'though we seem to be very happy and contented, as long as it is desirable for us to remain here, we shall never consider Australia as our home, and before we are rich enough to drive four in hand, as some of our neighbours do here, we shall take leave of the money-making place where few have any ideas beyond sheep and cattle, and rejoin our dear ones in England.'<sup>37</sup>

How much housekeeping Sarah and Lizzie ever had to do before migration is unknown, but Sarah refers to them both as 'beginners'. They were not without household help: Mary, whom Lizzie had engaged on the *Argyle*, turned out to be 'a hardworking cheerful creature'; 'she scrubs all the floors, keeps everything beautifully clean, does the two rooms, and cooks for the whole household most capitally'. Sarah and Lizzie 'superintend everything, keep accounts and give out stores' and Sarah helps to take care of the children. The need for economy made them intensely aware of price, and while meat was relatively cheap, the cost of a loaf of bread was such that Sarah began baking at home three times a week.<sup>38</sup> It is almost certain that she had never attempted this before and at first the results were disastrous: in her own words 'we won't say much about the bread - for owing to bad yeast, bad oven, or want of skill in the maker it has turned out awfully heavy hitherto',<sup>39</sup> but she improved. After a few weeks Hanmer wrote that: 'she makes better bread than she did at first - this last bake was very respectable I can assure you'.<sup>40</sup>

### Drawing and Painting

Sarah hoped for more leisure for drawing and conveyed her intention to send some sketches of their neighbourhood, although the local scenery was not picturesque.<sup>41</sup> To his credit Hanmer was always very supportive of her drawing and writes to his father that 'she has been drawing a little for the last few days and is making a very pretty coloured sketch of some of the neighbouring cottages from our house veranda'.<sup>42</sup> Three of her watercolours are reproduced in Mike Moore's paper in the present volume.

By May the family had been at New Town for two months, and at last Sarah was happy to report that she had been able to do some sketching of the neighbourhood and would send some of her sketches home. She longed for spring when she had been told that 'the ground everywhere will be covered with beautiful flowers' and she had already seen many interesting flowers and birds with lovely plumage; 'parquets, parrots, cockatoos, bellbirds and robins'.<sup>43</sup>

### Socialising in New Town and Town

They had constant callers at Forest Hill Cottage, whom they were forced to acknowledge, as the cottage had no bell or knocker, and as they believed that they should be careful with whom they associated, they were reluctant to return visits (which they suspected had upset some

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<sup>36</sup> Sarah Bunbury [near Melbourne] to Sir Henry Bunbury, 3 April 1841, series 7, box 2/5 [2]; Sarah Bunbury [New Town], to R C Sconce, 26 April 1841, series 6, box 2/1[5].

<sup>37</sup> Sarah Bunbury [near Melbourne] to Sir Henry Bunbury, 3 April 1841, series 7, box 2/5 [2]. A typical attitude of many early colonists: Paul de Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees* (South Melbourne 1991), p 222.

<sup>38</sup> 'Meat is the cheapest thing, only 5d and 6d a pound, bread awfully dear: 1/6 for a ...loaf': Sarah Bunbury [New Town], to R C Sconce, 20 December - 9 March 1841, series 6, box 2/125].

<sup>39</sup> Sarah Bunbury [New Town], to R C Sconce, 25 March 1841, series 6, Box 2/1 [3].

<sup>40</sup> Congratulate me on having at last succeeded in making the most delicious bread - I never mean to buy another loaf Sarah Bunbury [New Town], to R C Sconce, 25 March 1841, series 6, box 2/1 [3].

<sup>41</sup> Sarah Bunbury [New Town], to R C Sconce, 25 March 1841, series 6, box 2/1 [3].].

<sup>42</sup> R H Bunbury [New Town], to Sir Henry Bunbury, 27 April 1841, series 2, box 1/4 [3].

<sup>43</sup> Sarah Bunbury [New Town], to R C Sconce, 26 April-14 May 1841, series 6, box 2/1 [3].

people).<sup>44</sup> They socialised only with the La Trobes, Dr and Mrs Meyer, Georgiana McCrae, Mr & Mrs Lyon Campbell and Major & Mrs St John. The Lyon Campbells had a 'very pretty cottage' with beds of flowers on either side of the path to the river, and the St. Johns also had a pretty cottage and were planting 'lettuces, cabbages, artichokes, peas, Indian corn, dahlias, geraniums and mignonette'.<sup>45</sup>

### Investing in the Colony

Within two weeks of their arrival Hanmer expressed horror at the amount of speculation in land, and was given good advice by Superintendent La Trobe to 'keep quiet, look around you, don't be in a hurry, but keep your money in your pocket'.<sup>46</sup> Despite La Trobe's advice, Robin [Robert Sconce] has made some 'good investments' and, although Hanmer still had his land orders, by 17 March they had acquired a homestead at Darebin Creek, seven or eight miles [0.4-0.45 km] from Melbourne with 150 or 200 acres [60-80 ha] on which to establish a regular dairy and poultry farm.<sup>47</sup>

The plan was to move the family from New Town to the 'farm' as Darebin Creek was considered to be a healthier place to live. Hanmer named it 'Stanney' making a connection with his family in England, and perhaps with the idea of establishing the Port Phillip branch.<sup>48</sup> When they bought the property there was an almost complete house of seven rooms, and Bob assumed the responsibility of finishing it. Their hope was to move from New Town by July. The women had not seen the property as Lizzie's pregnancy was well advanced and Sarah could not ride without a horse, and seven miles was too far to walk. She wrote, however, that 'by all accounts the country is very pretty there'. She still liked what she has seen of the country, and thought the scenery around New Town very like a park, 'although the foliage [was] not so varied'.<sup>49</sup>

Sarah expressed continual concern over her husband's health, especially, a few weeks after their arrival, when he was about to leave on a lengthy journey to visit a station in the Grampians (beyond Portland Bay) 180 miles [330 km] away. There were three hundred head of cattle for sale there at £5 a head, in all amounting to about £2000. Robert had already invested nearly all his money elsewhere and so he would only take a third of the cattle station.<sup>50</sup> Another stockman would be required at the station as the natives were a problem in the Grampians area. Even so, the general opinion is that if you treated them well there was nothing to be feared.<sup>51</sup> Despite the enormous expenditure to date, Sarah believed that her husband and brother Hanmer and Robert were being extremely cautious in their business dealings.

Sometime in April Hanmer made the final decision to take over the squatting rights of the station of 38,000 acres [15,600 ha] that he had just seen in the Grampians and where he had bought the three hundred head of cattle. It was in the Western District, near the head of Mt Emu Creek, in the Glenelg valley. In his letters he mostly referred to it as Mt William, although he then called it 'Barton', and his slab and bark hut was 'Barton Hall' after his family home Barton Hall, in Suffolk.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps the abundance of flowers and exotic plants reminded him of

<sup>44</sup> Sarah Bunbury [New Town], to R C Sconce, 20 December 1840 - 9 March 1841, series 6, box 2/1 [3].

<sup>45</sup> Sarah Bunbury [New Town], to R C Sconce, 26 April 1841, series 6, box 2/1[5]; R H Bunbury [New Town], to Sir Henry on 27 April 1841, series 2 box 1/4 [3]

<sup>46</sup> R H Bunbury [Port Phillip], to Sir Henry Bunbury, 17 March 1841, series 2, box 1/4 [2].

<sup>47</sup> Robert has invested £1000 on mortgage at 20% with security upwards of £3000. They had two land orders, 640 acres [256 ha] in all, of which 480 acres [192 ha] belonged to Hanmer. R H Bunbury [Port Phillip], to Sir Henry Bunbury, 17 March 1841, series 2, box 1/4 [2].

<sup>48</sup> ?? 3 April 1841, Series 6, Box 2/1[5]. This is the first time 'Stanney' is mentioned in the letters. Georgiana noted that the property at Darebin was named after Stanney in Cheshire, the ancestral home of the Bunburys. *Georgiana's Journal*, p 62.

<sup>49</sup> Sarah Bunbury [Melbourne], to Sir Henry Bunbury, ??, series 7, box 2/5 [2]; and 5 July 1841, series 2, box 1/5 [24]

<sup>50</sup> Sarah Bunbury [New Town], to R C Sconce, 25 March 1841, series 6, box 2/1 [3].

<sup>51</sup> Sarah Bunbury [New Town], to R C Sconce, 25 March 1841, series 6, box 2/1 [3].

<sup>52</sup> T F Bride [ed, *Letters from Victorian Pioneers* (Melbourne 1898), p 275.



the gardens laid out there and cultivated by his mother. Her influence manifested itself in the botanical career of Hanmer's brother Charles, in Hanmer's painting of many unusual flowers, and his sending of roots and seeds of many specimens back to England.<sup>53</sup>



Barton Hall, Suffolk (destroyed by fire in 1914). Peter Reid, *Burke's Country Houses* (2 vols, London 1978), II, p 215.

Sarah often found herself without Hanmer during their time in New Town, even for six weeks at a time, when he would come home for a week before leaving again.<sup>54</sup> Having bought the Barton Run, he left in the middle of May with an eight bullock dray loaded with tools for building huts, and all the dairy equipment.<sup>55</sup> A small tent and straw mattress was to be his home for two

<sup>53</sup> C J F Bunbury, *Notes on the Trees and Shrubs cultivated at Barton* (Mildenhall 1889). Botanical drawings of Richard Hanmer Bunbury at the National Gallery of Victoria: Jennifer Phipps, *Artists' Gardens - Flowers and Gardens in Australian Art 1780s-1980s* (Sydney 1986), pp 34-5.

<sup>54</sup> Sarah Bunbury [Melbourne], to R C Sconce, 8 June 1841, series 6, box 2/1 [6].

<sup>55</sup> Hanmer was granted the licence in February 1843 and had a permit for this run which he held until the late 1840s. In 1845 and 1846 he is listed as having two licences for the Portland Bay district. In 1850 he took out the licence for another run at Merton in the North-Eastern district. Martin Sullivan *Men and Women of Port Phillip* (Marrickville [New South Wales] 1985), p 85.

Claims to the lease of Crown lands published in the *New South Wales Government Gazette* (supplement) 26 August 1848: No 5: Richard Hanmer Bunbury, Name of Run: Barton. Estimated Area: 38,000 acres. Estimated grazing capabilities: 2,000 head of cattle.

'The run is bounded on the west by the foot of Mount William; on the north and north-east by a line marked with plough lines and marked trees, from a high rocky peak of the next mountain north of Mount William, to the nearest point of a range of low green hills; thence by similar marked lines along a well defined dividing ridge with a general south-easterly bearing, to a lofty hill known as Wills Bald Hill; thence in a direct line about south-east to a marked gap in a range of hills known as M'Gill's dividing range. These lines are all settled, and marked lines divide the run from that in the occupation of H. J. Wills, Esq.; the marked boundary line continues along the summit of M'Gill's dividing range to the summit of a hill known as Good Morning Bills Hill. This line separates the run from that in the occupation of Messrs M'Gill and Co.; the marked boundary line then continues from the summit of Good

months at Barton, a far cry from Barton Hall, the spacious and luxurious family home in Suffolk. He had no bedding but his cloak<sup>56</sup> and it was unsurprising that his health continued to be a problem. Sometimes he had to lie down in the middle of the day, not something expected of a twenty-seven year old, and in the evening he had to crawl to bed. He accepted this as his 'old complaint' of poor circulation, which was accompanied by a headache and pain in his left side. The doctor diagnosed an enlargement of the left cavity of the heart and advised the avoidance of worry, and rest, both difficult things for Hanmer to achieve at this time. The doctor also prescribed quinine three times a day and arrowroot brandy before going to bed.<sup>57</sup> Hanmer was happy to have bought cattle, as sheep had too many problems, and a cattle station allowed him to live where he chose. The Grampians was too far from a doctor for the family to live there permanently, but he needed to be there for the building of huts, fences and dairy. They hoped to sell the salt butter for 1s 8d per lb, and this was expected to meet the expenses of the station.<sup>58</sup> He calculated the cost of the men to operate the butter factory at £200 pa, and the dairy was expected to return £250 - £300.<sup>59</sup> It is to his credit that this later became a successful operation.

Hanmer wrote home saying that Superintendent La Trobe was 'universally popular' and 'the great and anxious wish of the whole population is that this should be already a separate government independent of Sydney and that Mr. La Trobe should be the governor'.<sup>60</sup> Sir George Gipps however was considered mean, and a vacillator who did not care about the Port Phillip District. Several stories abounded of corruption within the Legislative Council, and New South Wales residents appeared to be given preference over Port Phillip residents for land. Hanmer's land orders purchased in London 'still cannot be used as good land is not open for selection and his £480 was tied up when it could have been returning 20-40%'. Requests were being made constantly by small land purchasers to Sir George Gipps to no avail; he was more interested in the huge revenue for the Treasury from special surveys.<sup>61</sup>

### Family Life at New Town

Hanmer encouraged Sarah to go to her first ball in the colony, even though he could not be there. It was held in a large store in town capable of taking two quadrilles, and Sarah wore a white dress which she had not expected to need in the settlement. Her wish was also to improve her sketching and she had just made a sketch of the La Trobe's house which she hoped to finish in sepia.<sup>62</sup>

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Morning Bills Hill, to the summit of the next hill in the range to the southward, and thence across the plain by a ploughed track, separating the run from those in the occupation of Mr. J. Ross and Mr. Thomas Churnside, passing along the south side of a large morass to a remarkable Sugar Loaf Hill, south of Mount William, and thence along the foot of that mountain to the first named peak.

<sup>56</sup> Sarah Bunbury [Melbourne], to R C Sconce, 8 June 1841, series 6, box 2/1 [6].

<sup>57</sup> R H Bunbury [New Town], to Sir Henry on 27 April 1841, series 2 box 1/4[3]].

<sup>58</sup> Sarah Bunbury [New Town], to R C Sconce, 26 April 1841, series 6, box 2/1[5].

<sup>59</sup> R H Bunbury [New Town], to Sir Henry on 27 April 1841, series 2 box 1/4[3]].

<sup>60</sup> R H Bunbury [New Town], to Sir Henry on 27 April 1841, series 2 box 1/4[3].

<sup>61</sup> R H Bunbury [New Town], to Sir Henry on 27 April 1841, series 2 box 1/4[3].

<sup>62</sup> Sarah Bunbury [Melbourne], to R C Sconce, 8 June 1841, series 6, box 2/1 [6].



La Trobe's House 'Jolimont', by Sarah Susanna Bunbury. State Library of Victoria: H5531

Although the weather was very cold and frosty in the mornings, occasionally the days were perfect, like summer. Their boys were 'stout, fat and rosy', 'they speak well for the climate of Port Phillip'. Now her concern was not only when the move from New Town to Darebin would take place, as the house should be ready by the end of June, but how difficult it would be to take the household goods with no passable road.<sup>63</sup> Lizzie and Bob's baby Madeleine arrived safely with no problems on 11 June 1841.<sup>64</sup> Bob now declared that he had no interest in the stations and had invested all his money in town prospects, 'a Lonsdale Street cottage and the cottages that are building in New Town'.<sup>65</sup>

Two months after her arrival Sarah once again faced loneliness at New Town without her husband at home, but was looking forward to moving to Darebin and was planning the ground floor of the house.<sup>66</sup> Once again her letters expressed great anxiety about Hanmer's absence: a dray had arrived from him and he was not to return until it arrived back at Mt William, so she did not expect him back at New Town until the end of June. When he did arrive (in the first week of July) he brought wonderful descriptions of the beauty of the scenery and specimens of brightly coloured flowers, some seen only in hot houses in England. He also brought presents of emu ornaments, opossum skins and a kangaroo tail, from which they made a most delicious soup, 'very like hare soup'.<sup>67</sup> Hanmer continued to stock the Barton Run and needed two or three men immediately to help him to brand sixty head of cattle 'purchased today at auction; cows, calves and steer... for £4 head'. The problem was where to put them at New Town: 'they are troublesome things when one has not place to put them, which is my case at present; my cattle station is about 160 miles from this and I cannot go up again for another week'.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Sarah Bunbury [Melbourne], to R C Sconce, 8 June 1841, series 6, box 2/1 [6].

<sup>64</sup> McCrae, *Georgiana's Journal*, p 60.

<sup>65</sup> Sarah Bunbury [Melbourne], to R C Sconce, 8 June 1841, series 6, box 2/1 [6].

<sup>66</sup> Sarah Bunbury [Melbourne], to R C Sconce, 10 May 1841, Series 6 Box 2/1 [4].

<sup>67</sup> Sarah Bunbury [Melbourne], to R C Sconce, 8 June 1841, series 6, box 2/1 [6].

<sup>68</sup> R H Bunbury [Melbourne], to Sir Henry Bunbury, 5 July 1841, Series 2, Box 1/5 [24].

### Barton, the Grampians and the 'Blacks'

His brother Henry had advised him more than once 'never trust a native and never allow them near your house' and La Trobe, a 'most humane and kind-hearted person', tried hard to settle and civilise them but had been 'obliged to give the attempt up in despair for they became so daring and dangerous that for the sake of the inhabitants of the town he was obliged to keep them at a distance'. In his opinion, from experience of natives in many other parts of the world, these here are the only ones irreclaimable, with no feelings of gratitude and little affection. Two or three tribes were camped in the neighbourhood and their numbers had increased alarmingly. There was hint of a possible massacre of settlers, and the police and army were called in, after which few natives had been seen in the town.

Hanmer noted that the men stood about six feet [1-8 m] and are very muscular, but his ignorance of their lifestyle and culture was demonstrated by his remarks that they were cowardly, idle and dishonest, and that kindness automatically brought suffering. He wrote to his father of the theft of a flock of sheep and the ensuing fight between the native tribe and the settlers in which forty-three fighting men regrouped five times against the superior firepower of the settlers to protect the food to which they felt they had a right, the animals that had grazed on their land. At the close of the conflict forty-one of the men had fallen.<sup>69</sup>

Hanmer wrote that the Blacks were very numerous and dangerous in the Grampians area, and that he had lost a few cows and calves. When a neighbour's hutkeeper was murdered and his flock of sheep stolen, Hanmer was asked for his help in retrieving them, and they recovered all but 140 sheep. The settlers were aware that the government would do nothing for their protection and was prepared to prosecute the settlers if they treated the Blacks harshly.

### Hanmer's Reflections on life in New Town and the Colony

The trouble in the Grampians had 'terrified poor Sukey' [Sarah] and her health had suffered. New Town did not agree with her any better than with him, and he wrote that he would be 'right glad' when they moved out to Stanney.<sup>70</sup> He was extremely happy when he was with 'my best of wives & my sweet boys' and forgot that he was not as strong and active as he used to be. Living in a tent at Mt William and coping with constant heavy rain or intense frost, he found he gained strength, but once he got home to New Town he felt unwell again. Even though the move from New Town was soon to take place, he had to return to Mt William and, with the amount of work to be done there, expected to be away for at least three weeks.<sup>71</sup>

Hanmer was adamant that this was a bad country for persons without money and unless Dr Young's sons (for whom his father had requested help) had some profession or could work as labourers or mechanics, it would be difficult for them. Nevertheless he agreed to do what he could for them. He was of the opinion that this was the worst country 'in the world for an indolent man or even for an invalid unable to look after his own affairs, nobody is to be trusted, making money honestly if you can, but at all events make money, such is the maxim of the country'. Newcomers were targeted and often defrauded. The scarcity of money in the colony had led to the reliance on bills which are rarely honoured and cause widespread debt. The recently appointed Judge Willis was said to be dealing with five thousand bill-related suits. This was, as Hanmer remarked 'a fine harvest for lawyers'.<sup>72</sup> The result of widespread debt was that there was a glut of merchandise on the market and there was more unprincipled robbing and gambling on land than in Adelaide. He lamented that he did not have £4000 or £5000 to invest at 40%. Those with cash could name their own price.<sup>73</sup> Now he admitted sadly that they were in too much of a hurry and should have waited longer, but as yet they could not complain.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>69</sup> R H Bunbury [New Town], to Sir Henry on 27 April 1841, series 2 box 1/4[3].

<sup>70</sup> R H Bunbury [Melbourne] to Sir Henry Bunbury, 5 July 1841, series 2, box 1/5 [24].

<sup>71</sup> R H Bunbury [Melbourne] to Sir Henry Bunbury, 5 July 1841, series 2, box 1/5 [24].

<sup>72</sup> R H Bunbury [New Town], to Sir Henry Bunbury, 27 April 1841, series 2 box 1/4[3].

<sup>73</sup> R H Bunbury [New Town], to Lady Bunbury, 19 December 1840 – 26 March 1841, series 3 box 1/8[4].

<sup>74</sup> R H Bunbury [New Town], to Sir Henry Bunbury, 27 April 1841, series 2 box 1/4[3].

He could now, he said, write clearly to his father about conditions in the colony.

The ignorance that prevails in England with regard to this country is perfectly marvellous; you know what pains we took to pick up all the information we could on the subject, yet I assure you we arrived here knowing as much of the real state of affairs in Port Phillip as we did of the centre of the moon'

He had expected that most of the land would have been surveyed and ready for selection but found that this was not the case and even now, eight months after they bought their land orders, they would have no chance to do so for at least another three months. This meant a loss of income on their money tied up in the orders. To make matters worse, special surveys had been made of the best land and this had been already taken.

Another expectation was that the country would be thickly settled for eighty to a hundred miles [145-180 km] from Melbourne. They found the country was occupied by squatting licences for as far as 150-200 miles [270-360 km]. A licence gave the right of the run to its first occupant and was considered so valuable that it was often sold with its livestock. Hanmer had found few stations lucky enough to have grass, water and shelter, and the good cattle runs still available were in 'the most dangerous districts for the Blacks'. His understanding was that no freehold land had been bought by settlers further than fifteen miles [27 k] from the towns of Melbourne, Williamstown, Geelong and Portland.<sup>75</sup>

### Future Expectations

The farm 'Stanney' was ten kilometres from town and they expected to work a dairy for fresh butter, have pigs and poultry and vegetables and perhaps eight hectares of wheat and oats. If there had been land adjoining his farm available Hanmer would have bought it for his father but there was none. He offered to invest money for his father (and aunts and uncles) in substantial brick houses with guaranteed returns, but he advised against land orders and believed that the scarcity of money would last about another two years.<sup>76</sup> He and Robert had now gone their separate ways, with Robert investing in houses which, for an outlay of £1905, he expected to give him a comfortable rent of £570 pa. One of his investments was £455 paid for house and ground in New Town, on which he built two brick cottages of two rooms & kitchen at back, with fencing these cost £230 and are each let at £25 a week.<sup>77</sup>

On 11 July 1841 the Bunburys were invited to lunch by Georgiana McCrae.<sup>78</sup> Two days later Hanmer wrote to his father that the weather was horrible, with incessant rain, and very cold at 40°F. They have not yet moved to Stanney and Sally would have liked to go to Mt William but the weather was too bad for her to live in a slab hut. Hanmer now found himself in dire financial straits. He speculated on some plots of land for which he was paid in bad bills. As he was reluctant to sell his cattle at a loss, he begged his father to advance him some money. His good news was that he was going to be appointed JP.<sup>79</sup>

A week later, with the move from New Town to Stanney imminent, Sarah returned to Georgiana McCrae 'the chairs and other things' they had borrowed for Forest Hill Cottage.<sup>80</sup> Their brief stay in New Town was nearly over and the next letters from Sarah and Hanmer were written from Stanney, Darebin Creek on 14 August 1841.

### Conclusion

The letters, mostly written by Sarah and Hanmer, are a delight to read, despite the many hardships described. They are written in beautiful, grammatical English and the young couple

<sup>75</sup> R H Bunbury [Melbourne] to Sir Henry Bunbury, 5 July 1841, series 2, box 1/5 [24].

<sup>76</sup> R H Bunbury [Melbourne] to Sir Henry Bunbury, 5 July 1841, series 2, box 1/5 [24].

<sup>77</sup> R H Bunbury [Melbourne] to Sir Henry Bunbury, 5 July 1841, series 2, box 1/5 [24].

<sup>78</sup> McCrae. *Georgiana's Journal*, p 61.

<sup>79</sup> R H Bunbury [Melbourne] to Sir Henry Bunbury 13 July 1841, series 2, box 1/4 [4].

<sup>80</sup> *Georgiana's Journal*, p 62.

display an amazing range of vocabulary. The letters also reveal their courage and enterprise: their willingness to tackle many things quite alien to anything they had previously done. Hanmer's naval career had not prepared him for the harsh life of a squatter but, with only one hand and in constant ill health, he put in long hard months of work to establish a new life for his family a long way from family support. Sarah is no less resourceful: from when she stepped onto the *Argyle* already eight months pregnant, knowing that she would give birth at sea, to performing unfamiliar household chores and coping with primitive conditions in the colony. Her determination to support her husband can only be admired. These letters prove that both Sarah and Hanmer were hard-working, resourceful and dedicated to building a new life in this new colony under very difficult conditions.

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